Universities and Slavery: An “Inevitably Inadequate” Movement

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INTRODUCTION

Within the last twenty years, research analyzing the connections between American universities and slavery has exploded into the news, and within academia itself. Now more than ever, universities and the historians they employ are willing to critically engage with the uncomfortable truths of their institutions’ historical entanglements with slavery. The recent wave of scholarship on this subject has been classified as the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement.¹

Spreading across a number of prestigious institutions, this movement has led to localized change on an institutional level – through the renaming of university spaces honoring pro-slavery advocates, or the creation of plaques and monuments dedicated to the enslaved who lived and worked on these college campuses – and a national conversation centering on retrospective justice and slavery reparations. This project asks: Why did this movement emerge now? It is no secret that the rise of American universities coincided with the Atlantic slave trade. Furthermore, the maintenance of readily available institutional archives reveals that the proof of connections between the institution of slavery and American universities has been lying around all this time. So, what sparked this call for the redress of past injustice? And how do those motivations affect the substance of university-led inquiries into their past connections with slavery?

In 2001, Yale University graduate students released the report *Yale, Slavery and Abolition*. Arriving during the university’s tercentennial, the report detailed Yale’s historic connections to slavery and pro-slavery thought. Amid the celebratory pamphlets released by the university which emphasized the institution’s connections to abolitionist activism, these graduate students knew there was another side of the story waiting to be told. A few years later, at Brown

University, President Ruth Simmons – the first African American woman to lead an Ivy League university – established a Steering Committee to analyze Brown’s own connections to slavery. Several years after Brown’s report *Slavery and Justice* was released, a Harvard University professor began his own investigation into Harvard’s institutional ties to slavery, eventually publishing *Harvard and Slavery: Seeking A Forgotten History* in 2011. But what motivations lay behind these reports? Was anything intentionally left out of these reports? Has anything changed on an institutional level as a result of these reports? And how are these academic projects, seemingly based upon truth and redress of racial injustice, related to the current structure of systemic racism at these very same universities? That is what I sought to uncover.

What I found was that, while all three of the Ivy League reports I examined were quite unique – written by different types of actors within different types of campus cultures – they all reflect the same tension. These reports from Yale University, Brown University, and Harvard University, three of the nation’s most prestigious institutions of higher learning, each grapple with the tension between institutional pride and historical truth.

Within this thesis, institutional pride consists of the stories these universities, their administrators, their students and their alumni tell about themselves. Institutional pride refers to the achievements of these Ivy League universities, and the methods by which they commemorate and profit from those long-celebrated achievements. Not to be confused with a university’s reputation – an external judgement placed upon the institution – the pride I am referring to here is *internal*, pride in one’s own institution. In tension with this institutional pride is the telling of historical truth. All histories are amalgamations of past events, and all historians must make choices about what to include in their re-telling of the past. As such, while there is not a single objective “truth” necessarily waiting for historians to uncover, historical truth within this thesis
refers to embracing the messy and often uncomfortable contradictions, grey areas, and injustices of the past. Within a university setting, these two methods of storytelling are not easily reconciled when creating official institutional histories. Institutional pride demands selective memory, as universities highlight only the most flattering elements of their past; historical truth attempts to filter such biases in favor of a more complex vision of an institution’s past.

Ultimately, on an individual level, these three Ivy League inquiries from Yale, Brown, and Harvard University all circle around the same question: How does an academic balance the desire to remain prideful in one’s own institution, with the desire to critique one’s own institution? The answer to this question significantly influenced the motivations of these report authors, the ways in which these reports engaged with systemic racism on college campuses, and the ultimate impact that these three reports have had.

**Research Questions:**

Six historical questions have centered and guided this research project.

1. **Had there been calls for universities to acknowledge their ties to slavery prior to 2001?**

   Scholars have noted that 2001 is a somewhat arbitrary start date when trying to trace the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement’s beginning. As Alfred Brophy, one of the professorial leaders of this movement has explained, these university reports build on “a rich literature about universities, faculty, and southern intellectuals who were products of universities. That literature also included proslavery and antislavery thought at universities.” However, 2001 marked the first instance in which members of the university began looking inward, at their own institution’s links to slavery, with the publication of *Yale, Slavery and Abolition*. I wanted to push back even

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2 Ibid, p.229-230
further, to see if calls for this particular research began long before official reports were ever published.

2. What was it about the historical context of the early 2000’s that leant itself to the explosion of the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement?

A multitude of archives have long been sitting in university libraries, teeming with information about the deep economic, intellectual and social connections American universities share with the institution of slavery. Yet it was only in 2001 that a movement to uncover and make public this forgotten – or erased – history was brought to life. By examining the social context of the early 2000’s, when movements for retrospective justice surrounding affirmative action and reparations were within the academic and popular zeitgeist, we can learn a lot about the impetus of the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement.

3. What are the main categories of inquiry universities have adopted to reckon with their connections to slavery?

Prior to 2001, scholarship connecting American universities and slavery largely focused on pro-slavery thought disseminated or influenced by university faculty and alumni. This type of scholarship examined university professors who advanced scientific explanations for black inferiority, or political theory professors who justified a hierarchical society in which “slavery was the natural state of Africans.” When universities finally took on the challenge of sorting through their relationship with slavery themselves, they did not limit their inquiries to this type of intellectual thought. They conducted more expansive inquiries – examining the financial implications of slavery, and the lives of enslaved individuals on campus – that went beyond the intellectual legacy of slavery. Why? What were the parameters of these new lines of inquiry?

3 Ibid., 230
4. What are historians’ motivations for conducting this research?

Every historian’s job is to justify the historical significance of their work, to justify what meaningful historical goal they are seeking to achieve with their scholarship. Now that contemporary historians have taken on the role of interrogating the connection between universities and slavery, this project attempts to understand how historians justify the importance of this ‘Universities and Slavery’ work from a historiographical perspective.

5. Are the goals of historians and university administrators involved in this movement in conflict? If so, how did the conflicting goals among report authors and university administrators impact the influence of these reports?

Pulling back the curtains on a painful and unjust past is unsurprisingly difficult. For historians, however, this is often part of the job description. The leadership of a university might not immediately share those same inclinations, as the unearthing of institutional injustice often provokes unflattering media coverage, thus jeopardizing endowments and fundraising opportunities for the administration. As such, within this project I sought to understand what brought universities to actively engage in and even sponsor such potentially inflammatory research into their own past, if those motivations align with that of historians, and ultimately what actions universities have taken in response to the unearthing of this history.

6. How does this early 21st century movement relate to and interact with systems of systemic racism on university campuses today?

If this movement is an attempt at retrospective justice, to redress injustice, or to provide a voice to the enslaved individuals who effectively built elite higher education as it exists in America today, does it draw a through-line connecting the history of slavery within university life to the reality of systemic racism within American universities today? Essentially, the
somewhat contentious purpose of this question is to understand whether this ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement has served an attempt by universities to ameliorate the tensions of race without acknowledging and addressing systemic racism within higher education in the here and now.

In this thesis, systemic racism is defined as an “institutional assortment of racial practices encompassing micro-aggressions, racial inequalities, and anti-black ideologies” operating at the level of a singular institution, such as a university. In the university setting, the structure of systemic racism is reflected within predominantly white administrative staff, predominantly white professors, and predominantly white curricula. The university is a space in which white voices and white power structures continue to dominate; despite recent attempts to encourage “diversity” and “inclusion” within administrative staffs and student bodies, the extent that whiteness dictates who has a voice and who wields power on an institutional level is rarely addressed.

**Contribution to the Field**

The reports from universities like Yale, Brown, and Harvard represent the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement in its fledgling form. This thesis is an attempt to historicize this roughly 20-year movement through the lens of America’s Ivy League. By analyzing the backdrop of this movement, the motivations of historians, and the motivations of universities at large, this project will be able examine the history of this movement itself. Ultimately, this work represents a starting point. Its aim is to combine intellectual history and institutional history with

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4 Derron Wallace, Fall 2018 Class Lecture, Sociology of Race and Racism. This definition of systemic racism is in contrast with the definition of systematic racism, which emphasizes inter-institutional arrangements—rather than the makeup of a singular institution.

an eye towards the present, and to conceptualize the discipline of history as a tool for academics to grapple with racial justice and advance anti-racist scholarship.

**Primary Sources**

Four different types of primary sources were utilized for this research project. First, I examined the Yale University, Brown University, and Harvard University reports that establish each institution’s connection to slavery. While many other universities have engaged in similar inquiries, by narrowing my research to Yale, Brown, and Harvard – comparable universities in terms of Ivy League status, longevity, and geographic location – I am able to provide a clear chronology of this movement situated within a similar context over time.

Yale University’s report was released first, in 2001. The 53-page standalone *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* report is widely agreed upon to be controversial, in part because it was the first of its kind, and in part because it was released by a cohort of graduate students who were in adversarial talks with the Yale Administration over unionizing at the time of the report’s publication. Still, as the first report of its kind, it is an essential piece of the puzzle towards understanding why this ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement began in the early 2000’s. The Brown University report was released next, published in 2007. This report, entitled *Slavery and Justice* was commissioned by the university administration itself; more specifically, a Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice was created by the President of the university, Ruth Simmons, to examine the university’s connections to slavery and “provide factual information and critical

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6 In addition to the primary sources detailed below I also reviewed relevant secondary literature on this topic, including Steven Wilder’s book *Ebony and Ivy*, the anthology of essays entitled *Slavery and the University: Histories and Legacies*, which resulted from an Emory University conference of the same name, and a handful of relevant scholarly articles.

7 Including Columbia, Rutgers, Princeton, Emory, Georgetown, the Universities of Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington and Lee University.
perspectives to deepen understanding” on the topical issue of reparations. Lastly, the Harvard University report *Harvard and Slavery: Seeking A Forgotten History*, which was published in 2011 and spearheaded by history professor Sven Beckert, will be utilized to uncover the more recent additions to this ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement.

The second type of primary source I examined were news articles published throughout the time period of this movement. These articles revealed the moments in between the publication of these university reports, and the perspectives of historians, university administrators, and university alumni. I collected articles from student and alumni newspapers at Yale, Brown, and Harvard, and articles reflecting on the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement from magazines such as The Chronicle for Higher Education, which target university administrators and professors.

My third category of primary sources were interviews I conducted with historians entrenched in the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement. I relied most heavily upon the interview I conducted with James Campbell, Chair of the Slavery and Justice Committee at Brown University and co-author of the recently published *Slavery and the University: Histories and Legacies* essay collection.

Lastly, I analyzed archival records at Yale, Brown, and Harvard University. To truly examine the narrative construction of these reports, I needed to examine the archival material that was utilized to create them. By supplementing my analysis of these reports with the archival material that may have been left behind, ignored, or discarded, it became clear how these narratives took shape, and what stories universities and historians have chosen to tell in our modern era. In addition, I was also able to find archival material that had been generated from

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8 James Campbell et al., *Slavery and Justice: Report of the Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice* (2007), 4
these inquiries themselves. I examined institutional records such as emails, memos, and report drafts that highlighted the process of conducting these university led inquiries.

**Yale University Archives**

At Yale University I examined two different archival collections. From the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library I was able to analyze the exact archives that the graduate students who wrote *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* utilized when authoring their report. The rare books I examined included minutes from a New Haven town meeting in which Yale professors put a stop to the creation of a “Negro College” in the 1830’s, a topic of great significance within the *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* report.

I also spent a significant amount of time in the Yale University Manuscripts & Archives department, located in the Sterling Memorial Library. In particular, I examined records from the Provost’s Office “concerning the establishment of the residential college system” in the 1930’s. I examined this collection because an important event described within the *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* report was the creation of the Calhoun residential college in the 1930’s. As such, this collection of speeches, letters, and memos written by the Yale University administrators who designed and named these new residential colleges deeply enriched my understanding of the events alluded to in the *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* report.

**Brown University Archives**

The Brown University *Slavery and Justice* report is unique because it was published by a Committee commissioned by the president of the university. As an entity created by the university administration, the inner workings of this Committee were meticulously archived. I was able to examine emails between the Committee members through their listserv, memos they had written to one another, visual notes members of the Committee had taken, and even multiple
drafts of the final Slavery and Justice report. Essentially, I got an inside look at the entire institutional process, from inception to publication, that made the Slavery and Justice report what it was.

**Harvard University Archives**

While I was unable (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) to visit the Harvard University archives directly, I am fortunate that Harvard’s extensive online archival database had digitized copies of all the materials I was interested in. Furthermore, the two sets of documents I was most interested in – diaries from the first few Harvard University President’s that reference the lives of enslaved individuals living on Harvard’s campus– had been transcribed by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts and the Essex Institute of Salem Massachusetts into publications available within the Brandeis University library. I was able to cross-reference these transcribed diary copies with the digital scans of the original diaries from Harvard’s online archival database.

**Archival Research Methods**

“Why do we not have articles about finding aids? About searching databases? About organizing and utilizing sources? About verifying information? Why do we as a discipline rarely talk about the methods we use to access our information?”⁹ This quote, pulled from an article examining historical research methods in 2009, represents one of the most exciting and frustrating elements within the study of history. There is a lack of standardization within historical archival research methods; this is a blessing and a curse. Having never conducted research within an archival library before this project, I learned how to navigate finding aids on my own, and designed a unique Google Sheets vortex to contain notes on archival documents of interest. Ultimately though, despite the feeling that I was going into archival research a bit blind,

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I was taking significant historical knowledge with me. As a student of this discipline, I have been taught to read between the lines of archival documents, to question the document's audience, and to question what has been left out of any given primary source. I have been taught to find the silences within the archives. As such, I interrogated the silences within each and every one of my primary sources, and allowed those silences to dictate my historical analysis.

Map of Structure

The structure of my argument is broken up into three distinct parts. PART I: INSTITUTIONAL PRIDE centers around the periodization of the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement, examining why these types of inquires only came onto the academic scene in the early 2000’s. This section of the paper draws a connection between the pride Ivy League universities have in their longevity, and the impulse to ignore the injustices that accompany such a longevity.

PART II: HIDDEN HISTORICAL TRUTH traces the methods with which these Ivy League inquiries attempted to reveal slavery’s true legacy. I analyze the reports that actors within the Yale, Brown, and Harvard community published chronologically, revealing how this movement changed and evolved over time. Within this section I also include much of my own archival research, meant to enrich the original archival work these reports relied on.

Lastly, in PART III: DIALOGUE vs. CHANGE I investigate the motivations and goals of the academics conducting this work, who are examining and critiquing their very own institutions. Within this section I also analyze the impact these three reports from Yale, Brown, and Harvard have had on their respective universities, and the relationship of this work to systemic racism at these respective universities.

Conclusion

When conducting my research at Brown University, I came across this quote from a member of the Slavery and Justice Committee: “Our committee’s response must be an inevitably inadequate beginning.”\footnote{Neta Crawford, email to SJR@listserv.brown.edu on October 14, 2006, “Re: draft feedback,” Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 3, Folder 9, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives} I think that is the perfect way to describe the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement, and my own project here. To fully reckon with the injustice of American slavery is an impossible task. Many academics have taken up the call in their own way, and this is my contribution. This thesis represents my own journey, as I grapple with how I can work within academia to engage with racial justice and advance anti-racist scholarship. Herein lies my own “inevitably inadequate” analysis of an “inevitably inadequate,” yet extremely vital, academic movement.
PART I: INSTITUTIONAL PRIDE

1636. 1701. 1764. These are the years Harvard University, Yale University, and Brown University were founded, respectively; years during which the Atlantic slave trade actively influenced almost all elements of the American economy. When these Ivy League universities look back at their histories though, that acknowledgment is often ignored. Official histories of Harvard, Yale, and Brown all brush past any ties these universities’ have to slavery. As Craig Steven Wilder, one of the intellectual leaders of the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement who published *Ebony and Ivy* – the first monograph dedicated to linking American universities and slavery – has explained, “Ivy League colleges had mythologized themselves with carefully pruned histories…This meant, for example, that published works would euphemize slave traders as Atlantic merchants,” rather than slavers, thus hiding away direct institutional ties to slavery.  

These universities instead celebrated their longevity by disseminating prideful and triumphalist narratives of enduring academic achievement. That finally began to change at the dawn of a new millennium. My question: Why?

**Calls for Redress - or Lack Thereof - Before 2001**

While there has been a rich history of student activism related to racial justice in university settings for a number of decades, calls for universities to acknowledge their ties slavery *in particular* used to be few and far between, especially in northern universities. This is largely because in recent historical memory, deep connections to slavery bring forth notions of the “plantation south.”

One of the few examples in which a university was called upon to acknowledge its ties to slavery prior to the 2000’s occurred in 1992, at Yale University. The key point of contention was centered on Calhoun College, one of the 12 residential colleges on the Yale campus. The residential college was named for Yale alumnus John C. Calhoun, American Vice-President from 1825-1832, and staunch advocate of slavery. However, this residential college not only honored Calhoun by name alone. A stained-glass window of Calhoun, with “a black man in shackles, in tatters, kneeling before him” served as an artistic homage to this known advocate of slavery from within the Common Room. Chris Rabb, an undergraduate at the time, approached Calhoun College’s residential Master, explaining “That is literally institutional racism...It’s architecturally baked into Calhoun, and it’s sickening.”13 Later that year a number of undergraduates banded together, protesting in an effort to change the name of Calhoun College. Yale refused to consider their proposition, instead electing to smooth over the controversy by hanging a framed poster inside the building, acknowledging the students’ demands.14 While this is only one example in which a university was forced to begin to reckon with its own connection to the legacy of slavery, it represents the nonchalant or evasive attitude that universities previously took when engaging with this legacy, an attitude which lasted up until the 21st century. 

Why Now? The Historical Context of the 2000’s

Yale University

Interestingly, it was once again at Yale University where students sought to make the university reckon with its past connections to slavery, this time in the early 2000’s. It was specifically during the prideful celebration of Yale’s tercentennial that a dark truth came to light.

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14 Antony Dugdale et al., *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* (2001), 12
A celebratory brochure published by the university to mark the occasion stated, “From James Hillhouse 1773, the leader of the anti-slavery movement in the First Federal Congress, to Josiah Willard Gibbs 1809, who befriended the captives of the Amistad, to John W. Blasingame ‘70 PhD, who edited Frederick Douglass’s speeches, Yale graduates and faculty have had a long history of activism in the face of slavery and a modern history of scholarship about it.”15 Thus, Yale University explicitly centered its three-hundred-year legacy around anti-slavery activism.

However, this was only half of Yale’s legacy, and three graduate students – Antony Dugdale, J.J. Fueser, and J. Celso de Castro Alves – took it upon themselves, in the midst of the tricentennial, to bring forth the entire truth when it came to Yale’s relationship with slavery. These three graduate students worked within multiple disciplines; Dugdale studied within the Religious Studies and Philosophy departments, Fueser studied within the American Studies and Psychology departments, and Celso de Castro Alves studied within the History department. Yet they shared a common sense of purpose. They wrote the Yale, Slavery and Abolition report because “the university was minimizing its ties to the sustenance of slavery while celebrating what it calls its ‘long history of activism in the face of slavery’ in literature marking its tercentennial.”16 Going even further, author Dugdale explained “This was all sparked by Yale’s triumphalism, the ‘Be so proud of Mother Yale because we were always on the side of the abolitionists’...My friends and I were like, ‘There’s more to this story.’”17

The Yale, Slavery and Abolition report was published in 2001 through funding provided by The Amistad Committee Inc – a New Haven organization named for the Amistad Slave

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15 Ibid., 1
Rebellion – which today supports “efforts to remove Confederate flags in the South and combat racial injustice wherever it exists.” That commitment to combatting racial injustice is reflected within the first few pages of the report. The introduction to \textit{Yale, Slavery and Abolition} exemplifies how Dugdale, Fueser and Celso de Castro Alves went about correcting Yale’s triumphalist narrative. They write:

\begin{quote}
Where members of the Yale community have joined in the struggle against slavery, their contributions should be celebrated. At the same time, we must acknowledge the degree to which this same institution and community has been complicit in the institution of slavery. This process of critical inquiry and self-examination is what universities should be all about. In researching and writing this essay, we intend to provide a model of what it means to struggle with our past to build a better future.
\end{quote}

However, despite the authors’ attempt to “provide a model” for their university to genuinely engage with the past, \textit{Yale, Slavery and Abolition} never led to widespread campus dialogue, or a substantive response from the Yale administration. Yale officials responded to the report by defending the university, arguing that “few, if any, institutions or individuals from the period before Emancipation remained untainted by slavery.” Instead, it was Brown University students that took up Yale’s model, albeit in a roundabout way.

\textit{Brown University}

In 2003, two years after \textit{Yale, Slavery and Abolition} was published, controversy around slavery engulfed a fellow Ivy League university. In particular, a controversy over slavery reparations erupted on the Brown University campus. It all began when conservative activist David Horowitz published a paid advertisement in the March 13th, 2001 issue of the \textit{Brown}

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\begin{footnotesize}
18 Dugdale et al., \textit{Yale, Slavery and Abolition}, i
19 Dugdale et al., \textit{Yale, Slavery and Abolition}, 30
\end{footnotesize}
\end{flushright}
Daily Herald, entitled “Ten Reasons Why Reparations for Slavery is a Bad Idea For Blacks – and Racist Too.” Brown students responded by demanding the newspaper print a retraction, or return the ad revenue from this particular ad; when none of those demands were met, a group of undergraduates stole an entire day’s run of the paper, thereby cementing reparations as a very contested issue on Brown’s campus.

Yet this was not Brown’s only brush with reparations in the early 2000’s. In March of 2002, “the Reparations Coordinating Committee, a group headed by Harvard Law Professor Charles Ogletree, publicly identified Brown, Yale, and Harvard as ‘probable targets’ of reparations lawsuits” in the New York Times; Ogletree cited a desire to “generate a public debate on slavery and the role its legacy continues to play in our society.”

This New York Times article, “Litigating the Legacy of Slavery” also references the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission as an example of providing reparations for racial oppression under apartheid. The national attention from this article’s threat of legal action prompted many Brown University alumni to reach out to the university administration, then headed by Ruth Simmons, the first African American President of an Ivy League school. The alumni wanted to know: What was Brown’s relationship to slavery? Did the university have a responsibility to provide reparations?

This publicity issue coincided with the approach of Brown’s 250th anniversary.

Reflecting on these events later, President Simmons explained that:

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23 Campbell et al., Slavery and Justice, 59
26 Simmons, “Slavery and Justice at Brown: A Personal Reflection” Slavery and the University: Histories and Legacies.
The approach of Brown’s 250th anniversary celebration seemed to offer an ideal occasion not only to set the record straight about the role of slavery in the institution’s founding but also to offer a helpful model of how universities might address controversial questions with the most rigorous academic standards. Further, with the approach of the bicentennial of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade by the British Parliament and U.S. Congress and the worldwide observances planned for the occasion, the venture promised to place Brown in a leadership role in interpreting the lessons and obligations of this history.

Thus, controversy over reparations, threats of reparations litigation, and the approach of Brown’s 250th anniversary all culminated in President Simmons’ creation of the Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice in 2003. The Committee, which included one graduate student, three undergraduate students, six professors, five associate professors, and administrators such as the Associate Dean of the College and Associate Provost and Director of Institutional Diversity, was charged with exploring the “comparative and historical contexts that may shed light on the issues of reparations and retrospective justice (for example, the history of the Holocaust, the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII, apartheid in South Africa, etc).”27 Five years and many conferences after this charge had been given, the Steering Committee Published *Slavery and Justice*, a 100-page comprehensive report which established Brown’s connection to the institution of slavery, detailed the recent global movement towards retrospective justice, and analyzed the history of the reparations movement.

*Harvard University*

While initially the *Slavery and Justice* report from Brown was met with silence from its fellow elite universities, a grassroots movement rose up among individual academics, looking to pose similar questions at their own universities. One such professor was Sven Beckert, whose work centers around the history of capitalism, and in particular the concept of “racial

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27 Ruth Simmons, Invitation to Serve on Slavery and Justice Committee, Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 3, Folder 2, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives, [http://brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/about/charge.html](http://brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/about/charge.html)
capitalism.” Beckert created an undergraduate history seminar at Harvard University focused on uncovering any link Harvard had to slavery. Eventually, along with two graduate students and 32 undergraduates from the seminar, Beckert released the 37-page report *Harvard and Slavery: Seeking A Forgotten History* in 2007. At the opening of the report, Beckert explains that, “Inspired by Ruth Simons’ path-breaking work at Brown University, the seminar’s goal was to gain a better understanding of the history of the institution in which we were learning and teaching, and to bring closer to home one of the greatest issues of American history: slavery.”^28

What that history was remained very unclear at the start of Professor Beckert’s experiment. Because most of the literature on Harvard’s history never even mentioned slavery, when he first set out to create the Harvard and Slavery Research Seminar, Beckert had to tell his students “Look, this might be a total failure, we might not find anything, there might not be a story; we just have to risk it and see if there is something.”^29 Beckert and his fellow authors echo this sentiment in the introduction of *Harvard and Slavery: Seeking A Forgotten History*. Yet when the time came to publish their findings, a wealth of new information emerged. They write: “A quest that began with fears of finding nothing ended with a new question—how was it that the university had failed for so long to engage with this elephantine aspect of its history?”^30

**Conclusion**

For centuries, the reality of Ivy League connections to slavery had remained buried in the archives. Documents detailing the links between American universities and the institution of slavery were ignored within the official histories of these academies. Only until the new

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^28 Sven Beckert et al., *Harvard and Slavery: Seeking A Forgotten History* (Boston, MA: Harvard University, 2011), 3
^30 Beckert, et al., *Harvard and Slavery*, 3
millennium, when social conversations surrounding reparations became mainstream, did these
deeper inquiries about universities and slavery emerge. While the initial conception of slave
reparations in America can be traced all the way to the Civil War, the late 20th and early 21st
centuries saw the emergence of a global movement towards retrospective justice, tied to the 1996
post-apartheid court hearings within the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
Drawing on these types of examples, the American reparations movement began to utilize court
proceedings as a method to gain monetary reparations from both private American corporations
and the American government itself. Fundamentally, the American reparations movement
attempted to utilize our country’s legal framework to redress the inequalities resulting from the
institution of slavery, such as wealth inequality, educational inequality, and racial health
disparities – a mission that would have much larger implications outside of the courtroom.

As the Introduction to the Slavery and the University anthology acknowledges, “the most
important factor in forcing slavery onto campus dockets was the emergence in the late 1990s and
early 2000s of a vocal slavery reparations movement. No other historical redress claim posed
such profound questions about the structure and essential character of American society; none
spawned such bitter controversy or racially polarized opinion.” Only when movements towards
racial justice didn’t match up with the prideful narrative Ivy League universities had been touting
for years, only when universities were forced to reckon with a more complicated historical truth,
did in-depth inquiry occur.

Part II explores the intellectual methods utilized to conduct these types of in-depth
inquiries at Yale, Brown, and Harvard University.

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31 This growing conversation around slavery and reparations on a societal level was also reflected within the growth
of study centers on slavery and race within elite universities, such as the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of
Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale University, founded in 1998.
32 Campbell et al., “Introduction.” Universities and Slavery: Histories and Legacies
PART II: HIDDEN HISTORICAL TRUTH

Alfred Brophy is one of the key leaders of the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement. Brophy is an American legal scholar whose work centers around slavery, Jim Crow, and the movements by which we as a society have attempted to address these injustices today. He became involved with the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement while working as a professor at the University of Alabama; in 2004 he pushed the University to issue an apology directed at decedents of enslaved peoples who were owned by faculty, or who worked on the college campus. Two years later, Brophy published Reparations Pro and Con, and fought to connect the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement with the issue of reparations.

As a leader of this movement, Brophy has a considerable role in examining and analyzing how this scholarship has progressed over time. As such, Brophy categorizes the academic methods by which the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement has conducted research through three subjects of inquiry: intellectual connections to slavery, financial connections to slavery, and uncovering the nature and lives of enslaved people on campus. Interestingly, these three categories correspond to the chronological growth of the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement as seen through the reports of Yale University, Brown University, and Harvard University respectively.

Yale, Slavery and Abolition: Yale’s Intellectual Connections to Slavery

The Yale, Slavery and Abolition report’s primary goal was to trace the prevalent history of pro-slavery intellectual thought emanating from Yale, in contrast to the narrative of abolitionist activism the university emphasized during its tricentennial anniversary. The authors conveyed this history of pro-slavery thought in two key ways: first, by emphasizing the legacy of

33 Brophy “Forum on Slavery and Universities: Introduction,” 230
Yale graduate John C. Calhoun’s pro-slavery ideology, and second, by revealing how Yale graduates and professors actively resisted the opportunity for original black thought to develop in New Haven when they halted the creation of a “Negro College” in Connecticut. Thus, both of these goals fit under Alfred Brophy’s conception of inquiry directly related to the intellectual connections a university has with slavery.

While the report begins by examining Yale’s first scholarships and endowments that came from individuals with active ties to the slave trade, one of the most important facets of this report is Yale’s relationship with pro-slavery advocate John C. Calhoun, a Yale graduate who “won acclaim as one of the best students in the class of 1804.”34 The prestige and success that came with this very acclaim allowed Calhoun to become a renowned statesman in the U.S. Senate and eventually Vice-President of the United States. Calhoun described himself as a “Southern man and a slaveholder—a kind and a merciful one, I trust—and none the worse for being a slaveholder.” Authors of the report Antony Dugdale, J.J. Fueser, and J. Celso de Castro Alves utilized quotes such as this within *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* to draw out the implications of Calhoun’s beliefs. The report explains that Calhoun “persuaded the U.S. Senate to ensure that slaves on foreign soil would be returned to their owners. Years later, he successfully lobbied Congress to limit black people’s participation in the military. He argued that ‘it was wrong to bring those who have to sustain the honor and glory of the country down to a footing of the Negro race—to be degraded by being mingled and mixed up with that inferior race.’” Calhoun didn’t simply justify slavery through argumentation relying on the inferiority of blacks though; Calhoun claimed that slavery was “a great blessing to both of the races.”35

34 Dugdale et al., *Yale, Slavery and Abolition*, 10
35 Dugdale et al., *Yale, Slavery and Abolition*, 11
In the 1930’s, Yale University decided to honor John C. Calhoun by naming one of its residential colleges after him. Records concerning the establishment of the residential college system – through which Calhoun College was built – that I accessed from the Manuscripts & Archives department at Yale University reveal the thought process, or lack thereof, when it came to naming such a significant piece of the campus after this man. In the 1930’s a Subcommittee on Nomenclature, tasked with devising who these new dormitories would be named after, felt that “the problem” of naming these new buildings was “really very simple and will not cause any difficulty.”

They were wrong. There was one building whose proposed name did provoke serious controversy….but it was not Calhoun College. The prospective Sheffield College became the one residential college name with significant push back, largely because administrators knew that they would “never be able to get it out of the minds of our alumni and other students” that the Sheffield name referred to the Sheffield Scientific School, Yale’s science division. Letters and memos were sent back and forth among administrators about how to tackle this problem, before they ultimately decided that this issue would “disappear when the present generation of Sheffield graduates has passed from the scene,” explaining that at the end of the day “it is the longtime view and not the immediate present which should concern us.”

Ironically, the longtime view would see Calhoun College becoming the most controversial decision these administrators would make.

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36 February 26, 1930 Memo to Samuel Fisher, Box 4, Folder 61, Provost’s office, Yale University, records concerning the establishment of the residential college system, RU 38, Yale University Archives and Manuscripts.
37 October 21, 1931 letter from Charles H. Warren to Yale University President James Rowland Angell, Box 7, Folder 103, Yale University, records concerning the establishment of the residential college system, RU 38, Yale University Archives and Manuscripts.
38 Ibid.
Yet in the 1930’s, during the era of Jim Crow, none of this controversy or intense consideration surrounded the naming of Calhoun College. When the names of the first eight new residential colleges were announced, it was written that Calhoun College would be named in honor of “John Caldwell Calhoun, Yale 1804, statesman.” That was all the explanation anyone needed at the time: statesman. No acknowledgment of the causes Calhoun fought for as a statesman, or the system of white supremacy that he propped up. Nothing of the sort was talked about.

This lack of administrative controversy over naming a residential college after John C. Calhoun might have been mirrored within the Yale student body. The Yale News published individual articles providing a detailed history on a majority of the individuals that the eight new residential colleges were named after. In the archives where these newspaper articles were found, there exists biographies on six of these eight individuals. However, Calhoun was not included in those six articles. There are two reasons for this. Either 1) an article was written about John Calhoun but was never archived, or 2) Calhoun was so well known at this time that an article introducing him and his background was simply deemed unnecessary.

Regardless of Calhoun’s popularity at the time of the residential college’s creation, once Calhoun College was up and running, he became an important figure for the dormitory. The Master of Calhoun College collected several of Calhoun’s speeches to display within the living quarters. As such, Calhoun was not simply a namesake for Yale to honor. Rather, his own words represented something inspirational for the faculty and students of Yale.

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39 “Yale Names Three College Quadrangles and Assigns Masters” Yale University News Statement, From the Secretary's Office, October 16, 1931, Box 7, Folder 102, Yale University, records concerning the establishment of the residential college system, RU 38, Yale University Archives and Manuscripts.
40 Yale News Articles, October-December 1932, Box 10, Folder 152, Yale University, records concerning the establishment of the residential college system, RU 38, Yale University Archives and Manuscripts.
41 Arnold Whitridge, letter to Charles Seymour, May 25, 1934, Box 3, Folder 30, Yale University, records concerning the establishment of the residential college system, RU 38, Yale University Archives and Manuscripts.
The *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* report clarifies that the university administration’s desire to honor a man like Calhoun with an entire residential college was not an isolated incident; the naming of a residential college after a pro-slavery advocate was reflective of a larger Yale University trend. In fact, the report notes that “nine of the ten men after whom colleges are named either owned slaves or published pro-slavery views,” including Samuel Morse – inventor of the telegraph – who wrote that slavery was a positive good and abolitionists should be excommunicated, and both Ezra Stiles and Timothy Dwight, two Yale Presidents who owned slaves.\(^42\) Furthermore, “of the six colonial leaders honored with the name of a residential college, five are known to have owned slaves.”\(^43\) While these statements leave out that some of these honored men went on to become staunch anti-slavery advocates, the sentiment remains clear.

However, Yale’s legacy is not only one of endorsing pro-slavery advocates. Many of New Haven’s political leaders in the 1830’s – professors and graduates of Yale – actively resisted the creation of a school for black freedmen in New Haven, aghast at the potential for free black Americans to express their own intellectual thought. The idea for this school came from Simeon Jocelyn, who attended Yale in 1823. This “Manual Labour School for the education of Coloured Youth” was one of the primary causes taken up by the First Annual Convention of the People of Color in Philadelphia. The convention picked New Haven as the site for this new venture because “its inhabitants are friendly, pious, generous, and humane” and “its laws are salutary and protecting to all, without regard to complexion.” In conjunction with the “literary and scientific character of New-Haven,”\(^44\) it seemed like a perfect fit. The white leaders of New Haven would feel differently.

\(^42\) Dugdale et al., *Yale, Slavery and Abolition*, 32
\(^43\) Dugdale et al., *Yale, Slavery and Abolition*, 29
\(^44\) Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Color p.6., #2 Slavery Pamphlets 68, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University
A committee convened by the New Haven mayor examined a legal resolution to establish this school. Out of this thirteen-person committee, ten had degrees from Yale University. The *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* report specifies that “The group included Yale’s only Professor of Law, David Daggett...and Samuel Hitchcock, with Daggett, one of the founders of Yale’s law school.” These men held the power to expand black access to education in New Haven. They chose to deny free blacks that access to education.

On September 10, 1830 this committee passed a resolution that “the establishment of a *College* in the same place [as Yale University] to educate the colored population is incompatible with the prosperity, if not the existence of the present institutions of learning, and will be destructive of the best interests of the city.” After this decision, Simeon Jocelyn wrote that:

> While contemplating it as a school, no man, acquainted with the fact, met us with open opposition ; but when, from peculiar circumstances, it was determined to establish a college for the education of colored persons, the heart, the voice, the city rose against us. And why? Simply because that, by this one word, we declared more than could have been written in a hundred pages, our assurance of the equal right of the colored man to literature, in common with other citizens. We have unwittingly touched the hidden springs of prejudice and oppression by a word.

The *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* report directly connected the actions David Daggett and Samuel Hitchcock took on the committee that squashed this venture to their place of honor within the Yale administration, as they had done with Calhoun. Dagget and Hitchcock, who helped draft this resolution to explicitly stall the potential for free black education in New Haven in the 1830’s, are currently represented on the Yale Law School shield. A shield that Dugdale,  

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45 Dugdale et al., *Yale, Slavery and Abolition*, 16-17
46 Ibid., 17 [emphasis added]
47 John Warner Barber. *College for Colored Youth: An Account of the New-Haven City Meeting and Resolutions: With Recommendations of the College, and Strictures Upon the Doings of New-Haven.* Published by the Committee, 1831, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University, 11
Fueser, and Celso de Castro Alves note is reproduced today on business cards, letters and publications.48

Ultimately, the *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* report brought together the impacts of encouraging the creation of Calhoun College and discouraging the creation of a “Negro College,” two histories that were either hidden or ignored for a very long time. The report emphasized these intellectual connections that Yale has to slavery in order to counteract the triumphalist and prideful pro-abolitionist narrative that was being touted for the 300th anniversary of Yale University.

**Slavery and Justice: Brown University’s Financial Connection to Slavery**

The Brown University inquiry, conducted by a Steering Committee made up of both faculty and students, took five years to consider not only the economic foundations of Brown that are steeped in slavery; Brown’s *Slavery and Justice* report sought to bring these economic considerations into the present, with in-depth analysis of the case for reparations. Both of these goals reflect one element of Professor Brophy’s breakdown of the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement, as Brown delved into the financial connections it has, and continues to have, with the institution of slavery.

The *Slavery and Justice* report from Brown University is packed with detail linking the economic growth of the university to slavery; this breadth of evidence stems from the fact that Rhode Island was a hub for businessmen invested in the slave trade, and many kept meticulous records. The beginning of the *Slavery and Justice* report draws multiple connections between Brown University’s governing corporations, endowments, and physical buildings to the institution of slavery.

48 Dugdale et al., *Yale, Slavery and Abolition*, 18
In regard to the initial creation of the university’s governing body, the report notes that while there was conflict among Brown’s board members over religious representation, “the presence of slave traders among the group occasioned no discussion. While no precise accounting is possible...approximately thirty members of the Brown Corporation owned or captained slave ships, many of whom were involved in the trade during their years of service to the University.”

Similarly, the institution of slavery was intimately connected to the university’s first ever financial endowments. Brown’s first endowment campaign in the late 1760’s garnered what is today equivalent to $50,000 from South Carolina plantation owners who owned thousands of acres of land, and hundreds of slaves.

However, the economic connection between Brown and slavery goes beyond the exchange of money. There are physical remnants of this financial connection Brown had to slavery that can be found in University Hall, the oldest building on Brown’s campus. The *Slavery and Justice* report notes that:

> With hard money in short supply, many donors paid their pledge in kind. Wood for the building, for example, appears to have been donated by Lopez and Rivera, one of the largest slave trading firms in Newport. A few donors honored pledges by providing the labor of their slaves for a set number of days... including “Pero,” the bondsman of Henry Paget, “Mary Young’s Negro Man,” “Earle’s Negro,” and “Abraham,”…A facsimile print of the construction records, including references to enslaved workers, has hung for years on the first floor of University Hall, more or less unnoticed. It is an apt metaphor for a history that has long hidden in plain sight.

The Steering Committee writing this report didn’t stop there. In particular, the Committee uncovered records detailing the political ideologies and economic ventures of the four Brown brothers, Nicholas, John, Joseph, and Moses, who provided enormous funds for the growth of the university. It is into this history that the *Slavery and Justice* report takes a deep dive. Their

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49 Campbell et al., *Slavery and Justice*, 12  
50 Ibid., 13-14  
51 Ibid., 12
company, Nicholas Brown and Company, invested in slave ships and purchased Africans to be sold within the triangular Atlantic slave trade; it was through these economic ventures with slavery that Brown began to form.

Fascinatingly, while all four brothers were raised in a slave-holding family that owned at least fourteen slaves in the early 1770’s, one brother broke from the pack. Moses Brown publicly rebuked his family’s profession and became a staunch abolitionist. Before 1773, Moses owned the largest number of slaves among his brothers – six. After 1773, everything changed. Moses’ wife Anna had died due to illness, provoking a spiritual crisis within him that led to his adoption of Quaker values, and the adoption of the abolitionist cause. He fought for anti-slave trade legislation in the Rhode Island legislative chamber, yet all too often “[T]he influence of the Mercantile interest in the House was greatly Exerted...and the Justice of the Subject thereby Overbourn.” Moses was forced to face this reality again and again. Yet he did not face opposition solely from the legislative assembly. He faced it from his own brothers. Especially John Brown.

The disagreement that Moses and his brother John had around the morality of slavery was fraught with tension, and it became an extremely public affair. Conflict emerged on a public scale in 1784, after Moses brought his anti-slave trade legislation to the state legislature. John and Moses would go back and forth “anonymously” within the local newspaper. In one article John wrote that “[I]n my opinion there is no more crime in bringing off a cargo of slaves than in bringing off a cargo of jackasses.” The Steering Committee found even deeper evidence of this conflict due to a series of private letters Moses and John wrote to each other. The Slavery and Justice report summarizes John’s own arguments that “black people were an inferior race,

52 Ibid., 19-20
53 Ibid., 21
incapable of surviving as free people” and “that slaves were ‘positively better off’ in America, where they were exposed to Christianity and civilization, than they had previously been in Africa.”54 These disagreements between Moses and his brothers exemplify the ostracization that often came with advocating for abolition in late 1700’s Rhode Island. True defenders of freedom like Moses Brown represented the exception among those who helped build Brown University, rather than the rule.

In addition to examining these monetary links between Brown’s founding and the institution of slavery, the Steering Committee was tasked with understanding the present-day case for reparations. It started by examining the recent global trend of “retrospective justice” which “rests on the belief that some crimes are so atrocious that the damage they do extends beyond immediate victims and perpetrators to encompass entire societies.”55 To examine the case of reparations through this lens, the Steering Committee went all the way back to when discussion about the potential for reparations began: post-emancipation. The authors of Slavery and Justice acknowledged that though the language of “‘reparations’ was rarely, if ever, used, emancipation triggered a wide-ranging debate over how and whether to provide for the newly free, a debate that began while the war was still going on and continued even after the collapse of Reconstruction.”56 The authors then drew a through-line between post-emancipation debates about what was or was not owed to former slaves, and the American welfare state. In particular, the Committee emphasized how the creation of an American welfare state – through for example, the Federal Housing Administration, and the Home Owner’s Loan Corporation loans given to white individuals – acted as “a crucial element in perpetuating the tradition of white

54 Ibid., 20
55 Ibid., 33
56 Ibid., 65
entitlement and black exclusion inherited from slavery and Jim Crow” and perpetuated the racial imbalance of intergenerational wealth in America.\textsuperscript{57}

After drawing out this intertwined history of systemic inequality, the report traces the results of these discriminatory practices all the way to the 2000’s. After the era of civil rights legislation, with “federal courts increasingly unreceptive to racial discrimination claims, and affirmative action under political and legal assault” the modern argumentation for reparations became “the only means left to address the persistent racial inequalities plaguing American society.”\textsuperscript{58} Thus, with all other avenues of redress blocked, reparations appeared to be the most likely avenue to achieve retrospective justice.

The \textit{Slavery and Justice} report draws a direct link between the institution of slavery and modern racial oppression perpetuated against Black Americans. The report’s authors go even further, however, and begin to implicate Brown University in this process as well, writing that:

The system of racial discrimination that prevailed after slavery...was national in scope and underwritten by a host of public and private institutions, from federal agencies like the Social Security Administration and the Home Owners Loan Corporation, which denied black Americans access to programs and assets available to whites, to elite universities like Brown, which between the 1870s and 1950s enrolled fewer than one African American student per year.\textsuperscript{59}

However, research I conducted at the John Hay Special Collections Library at Brown University revealed that in prior unpublished drafts of the \textit{Slavery and Justice} report, connections between the legacy of slavery and racial discrimination at Brown in the present were drawn much more explicitly than this brief, one sentence acknowledgment (more explanation of this phenomenon can be found in Part III).

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 72. The connections between Jim Crow, the American welfare state, and wealth inequality emphasized within this section of the \textit{Slavery and Justice} report are substantiated by a significant body of literature, from J.D. Hall’s “The Long Civil Rights Movement” to Ira Katznelson’s \textit{When Affirmative Action Was White}.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 74

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 81
Despite a limited attempt to connect the legacy of slavery to race relations on the Brown University campus today, this report’s examination of the historical debate around reparations does attempt to link the financial connections Brown University had to slavery with the continued history of racial oppression in America as a whole, which helped generate the conversation around redress of injustice and reparations we are having today.

*Harvard and Slavery: Seeking A Forgotten History and Enslaved Individuals*

When Professor Beckert and his students published their report *Harvard and Slavery: Seeking A Forgotten History* in 2011, they took inspiration from similar reports that had come before; the authors linked the patrons of the university to the slave trade, and traced Harvard’s intellectual connection to slavery through the race science taught by Harvard professors. However, the most novel contribution to the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement that the Harvard report offered was its emphasis on the everyday lives of the enslaved in and around Harvard University.

The Harvard report was the first of all Ivy League university reports to carve out space dedicated to the everyday lives of enslaved individuals on college campuses. From the very beginning, this report centers enslaved individuals as *individuals*. The introduction states that:

> It should be no surprise that slaves followed the children of that elite onto campus, working in Harvard buildings, passing through Harvard’s yard, laboring in the houses of Harvard’s alumni, serving its faculty. Off campus, their toil contributed to many of the fortunes that funded the university. Still, few imaginings of colonial Harvard, in prose or paint, include slaves among the scholars and students who paced its yards.60

Furthermore, the very first subsection of the Harvard report is entitled “Slaves at Harvard,” which situates the discussion around the lives of enslaved individuals on campus, and who they are as people. Within this section, one of the first stories told is that of “The Moor.” The first

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60 Beckert et al., *Harvard and Slavery*, 7
mention of a slave on the Harvard University campus, “The Moor” – a common term for African slaves – had apparently slept in a student’s “sheet and pillow-bier.” Many students were also upset about having to eat the same food as “The Moor.” This all occurred in 1639, and was reported by the wife of Harvard’s first school master, Nathaniel Eaton. While his wife never revealed the name of what is assumed to be this enslaved man, this example itself reveals the degree to which slaves were integrated into the everyday culture of Harvard at its outset, as they shared foods and even beds with the university students.

Records of enslaved people on Harvard’s campus became fuller during Benjamin Wadsworth’s tenure as the eighth president of Harvard. Serving between 1725-1737, Wadsworth owned multiple slaves during this time period. Interestingly, it was baptismal records that revealed the names of Wadsworth’s slave Venus, indicating her status as more than dehumanized property. Within my own exploration of Wadsworth’s diary, I found when Venus – referred to as a “Negro Wench” – was bought on October 25th, 1726. Wadsworth wrote that he “bought a Negro Wench (thot to be under 20 years old) of mr Bulfinch of Boston, Sail-maker; was to give 85 pounds for her; she came to our house at Cambridge this day...'twas mrs Bulfinch I discours'd wth about ys matter, tho he had been discours'd wth before.” The fact Mr. Bulfinch’s wife took an equal part as her husband within this commercial affair suggests the active role the wives of merchants took during this time period.

In addition to Venus, another slave named Titus was also mentioned multiple times within the archival records. When detailing payroll records, Wadsworth wrote of “Titus my

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61 Ibid., 9
servnt” who was sent on an errand to receive credit from the university treasurer. It is interesting to note that while Venus, a female slave, was referred to as a “Negro Wench,” Titus, a similarly enslaved man, was referenced as a servant.

*Harvard and Slavery: Seeking A Forgotten History* notes that the history of Harvard Presidents as slave owners continued after 1737 with Edward Holyoke, Harvard’s ninth president. Diaries from Edward’s family members reveal the names of enslaved individuals they owned: Juba, Bilhah, and Cato, who were often sent to run errands, cook meals, or tend to animals.

In particular, my own archival examination of the Holyoke diaries revealed that Bilhah and Cato were significantly integrated into the Holyoke family. Bilhah was included in the yearly family weigh-ins conducted by Edward, and on October 31st, 1761 Edward wrote that “Bilhah was deld of a son about 4 o’Clock A.M.” Four years later, when Bilhah died, Edward recorded that in his personal diary as well. While Edward Holyoke included Bilhah somewhat frequently within his own diary entries, his sister-in-law Mary Vial Holyoke wrote frequently of Cato, such as when he was sick with the mumps, or when he ultimately left the Holyoke family around the time of Massachusetts Emancipation in 1781, to go live in Boston. Fascinatingly, after Cato left to go live in Boston, Mary wrote two further entries into her diary – one in 1783 and one in 1784 – explaining that she saw Cato again, leading one to believe a familiar relationship between the two remained intact. Thus, both Bilhah and Cato were written about in a familial context.

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63 Ibid., 470
64 Holyoke family. Holyoke family diaries. HUM 46, Harvard University Archives. https://id.lib.harvard.edu/ead/hua26010/catalog; The Essex Institute, The Holyoke Diaries 1709-1856, Newcomb & Gauss Printers, Salem, Massachusetts, (1911), 25
65 Ibid., 28
66 Ibid., 60
67 Beckert et al., *Harvard and Slavery*, 30
While the Holyoke diaries themselves mention Juba less frequently, The *Harvard and Slavery* report notes that Juba, another of the Holyoke’s enslaved individuals, married Ciceely, a slave owned by Judah Monis, Harvard’s professor of Hebrew.\(^{68}\)

Ultimately, by depicting the everyday tasks and interpersonal relationships that enslaved people such as Cato or Juba took part in, this report attempts provide a name and a voice to those that have been forgotten within the Harvard archive; however, this report walks the balance between giving voice to those who have been silenced and acknowledging the inhumanity of their circumstance. The authors write:

Though visible and allowed to sustain relationships (as in the case of Juba), slaves were at a fundamental level set apart from both the families that owned them and the free community of Cambridge. Venus, Titus and Cato, for example, were all given Roman instead of Christian names. Bilhah’s was biblical, but referenced Jacob’s concubine from the Book of Genesis. Not one of the slaves had a recorded surname.\(^{69}\)

While the reports that Yale and Brown conducted pushed the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement forward in significant ways, engaging with the intellectual and financial connections their universities had with slavery, the *Harvard and Slavery: Seeking A Forgotten History* report was able to center enslaved individuals themselves, using this movement to tell the stories of those who have been forgotten, and even hidden, from Ivy League history.

**Conclusion**

As the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement came to the Ivy Leagues, it changed, developed, and grew. All the way back in 2001, Yale graduate students traced their university’s intellectual connections to slavery. A few years later Ruth Simmons would designate a Slavery and Justice Committee to examine Brown University’s financial connections to slavery and provide an academic evaluation of the reparations movement. Eventually in 2011, Harvard

\(^{68}\) Beckert et al., *Harvard and Slavery*, 9-10  
\(^{69}\) Ibid., 10
University would join the conversation as well, centering the history of enslaved individuals whose lives were intimately tied to the Harvard campus and its faculty.

Part III of this project goes beyond the published inquiries from these three universities. It explores the motivations behind each of these intellectual choices, the actors behind these reports, and the impact of these reports themselves.
PART III: DIALOGUE vs. CHANGE

Stated Goals: What’s on the Page

The three reports from Yale, Brown, and Harvard all echoed similar language when it came to their stated goal for conducting this research – to expand dialogue. On the first page of *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* the authors claim, “Together, we can play an important role in the emerging national conversation about the continuing legacy of slavery inherited from a history that includes today’s most prestigious institutions.” The report goes on to provide a more nuanced explanation of this goal, acknowledging both sides of the story the authors were trying to tell. Authors Antony Dugdale, J.J. Fueser, and J. Celso de Castro Alves explain:

Where members of the Yale community have joined in the struggle against slavery, their contributions should be celebrated. At the same time, we must acknowledge the degree to which this same institution and community has been complicit in the institution of slavery. This process of critical inquiry and self-examination is what universities should be all about. In researching and writing this essay, we intend to provide a model of what it means to struggle with our past to build a better future.

Brown University’s Slavery and Justice Committee outlined a similar goal for its own work: encourage fellow universities to begin a rigorous dialogue about the legacy of slavery. Within their report, the authors argued, “If this nation is ever to have a serious dialogue about slavery, Jim Crow, and the bitter legacies they have bequeathed to us, then universities must provide the leadership. For all their manifold flaws and failings, universities... are institutions that value historical continuity, that recognize and cherish the bonds that link the present to the past and the future.” Unsurprisingly, the Harvard report, *Harvard and Slavery: Seeking A Forgotten History*, reflects a similar sentiment, stating that “If this review recommends one

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70 Dugdale et al., *Yale, Slavery and Abolition*, 1
71 Ibid., 30
72 Campbell et al., *Slavery and Justice*, 82
action, it is university support for further research and an effort to make these findings part of a public conversation.”\textsuperscript{73}

Yet as Lindsey K. Walters, who has analyzed the Brown and Harvard reports, points out in \textit{Slavery and the American University: Discourses of Retrospective Justice at Harvard and Brown}, “What can be lost in Harvard and Brown’s investigations is a clear sense of why and for whom this research and the accompanying calls for retrospective justice are being undertaken.”\textsuperscript{74} This exact criticism applies to the Yale University report as well. While the notion of “encouraging dialogue” is indeed important within an academic context, there is a lack of specificity within this type of goal that allows the authors to hide behind vague intentions.

\textbf{Beyond What’s on the Page}

Going beyond the published statements within these inquiries, it is clear that the authors of the Yale, Brown, and Harvard reports on slavery all had much more complicated and nuanced goals for this research. In the case of Yale, the authors wanted to provoke their own institution; in the case of Brown, multiple authors had to juggle the tensions between their own agendas, and the agendas of the university administration; in the case of Harvard, a singular professor wanted to create the space to examine the connections between Harvard and slavery, which the university was initially not interested in pursuing. These authors’ goals often conflicted with the interests of their university administration, leading to varying levels of change at the institutional level.

\textit{Yale University}

In addition to aiming to provide a fuller picture of Yale’s connection with slavery during the tercentennial celebrations, it must be noted that authors Dugdale, Fueser, and Celso de Castro

\textsuperscript{73} Beckert, \textit{Harvard and Slavery}, 26
\textsuperscript{74} Walters, “Slavery and the American University,” 728
Alves had what could be viewed as an antagonistic relationship with the Yale University administration. These three authors were financed by Local 34, the labor organization which represents Yale’s unions. In fact, the *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* report was released during the time leading up to renewed union negotiations for graduate students. As a result, it is possible that the ultimate goal of the *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* report was to bring to light a greater historic truth, while also provoking unflattering media coverage against the university during a critical political moment.

The Yale community responded to this report’s inopportune release by attacking the entirety of the report and its credibility. The *Yale Daily News* utilized the union-financed angle to claim the report was “at worst…the co-opting of the darkest chapters of American history for present-day political gain.” The administration’s goal was similar: shut it down. Soon after the report was released, Yale officials attempted to discredit the factual accuracy of the report itself claiming it was “riddled with inaccuracies and misrepresentation.” The administration largely succeeded, as “the Yale report prompted neither sustained campus dialogue nor any substantive response from the school’s administration.”

The dialogue Dugdale, Fueser, and Celso de Castro Alves wanted to start only began to occur on the Yale campus in 2015, fourteen full years after *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* was published, when students began to again protest the name of Calhoun College. In April of 2016, President of Yale Peter Salovey announced that Calhoun’s name would remain in place, citing concerns of erasing history rather than confronting it. Facing further backlash from this decision,

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77 Bartlett, “After Brown U.’s Report on Slavery, Silence (So Far).”
a Committee to Establish Principles on Renaming was created, which ultimately recommended that Calhoun College be renamed. As a result, Calhoun College was renamed in 2017 for Grace Murray Hopper, a female Yale graduate who helped create computer software technology during WWII.

It cannot be overstated the degree to which the Yale University administration, Yale University alumni, and the Yale University campus community were unwilling to engage with the complexities of Calhoun’s legacy in 2001. Many alumni felt that “the politically correct practice of attempting to impose today’s social and ethical mores upon persons long dead” had “reached new lows.” 79 By attempting to discredit the *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* report in its entirety, the Yale University community was able to hide from the reality of Calhoun’s legacy. Only years later, after the ‘Slavery and Universities’ movement finally picked up momentum, only after an entire movement of students demanded change, would Calhoun’s legacy be truly confronted.

**Brown University**

Similar to the multi-faceted motivations the Yale University graduate students had for conducting research on their university’s legacy of slavery, the professors and students who made up the Slavery and Justice Committee at Brown were also motivated by a complex set of factors. As members of the Brown institution itself, the conflict of interest issues over unionization that existed in the Yale case, noted above, would not have applied. However, the authors of *Slavery and Justice* had the complicated task of reconciling 17 differing individual perspectives within their commission with the views from the President of Brown University,

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Ruth Simmons. This internal process of the Slavery and Justice Committee is documented with immense precision at the John Hay Special Collections Library at Brown University. Emails, memos, outlines, and even drafts of the eventual report reveal how the Slavery and Justice Committee’s motivations and goals took shape.

One of my primary research questions set out to understand the inner motivations and goals of historians and academics who decided to conduct research on universities and slavery. By a stroke of incredible luck, within the Slavery and Justice Committee archives, there lie 15 memos from members of the Committee that explicitly state the members’ motivations for engaging in this work. As part of an assignment prior to a Committee retreat on February 5, 2005, Jim Campbell – professor of African American History and Chair of the Slavery and Justice Committee – assigned all Committee members to write a personal statement that outlined their motivations for being on the Committee, including what they believed the scope of Committee’s final report should be, and what their desired outcome or ultimate recommendations for the report would be.

One member of the Committee, English professor Paul Armstrong, stated that their motivations for engaging with Brown’s connections to slavery stemmed from “The fact that this history is so poorly known, however, it is something that Brown’s educational mission cries out for us to address. Efforts of this kind would be a recognition of our history and an attempt to engage in productive dialogue about it.”80 On a similar note, Brown history professor and current Director of the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America, Evelyn Hu-DeHart wrote that this Committee was an opportunity to “Restore the missing history to our collective

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80 Paul Armstrong, Personal Statement, Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 1 SJC-RETREAT folder, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives
memory, and to assume collective responsibility for the legacies of the past that persist into the present and future.”81 One more Committee member, politics professor Marion Orr, took a similar tract, explaining that:

The slave system and the racism that under girded it, bestowed (and continue to bestow) a particular advantage to whites, while systematically disadvantaging African Americans. I see our work as a process to engage and inform the community about this lingering legacy and to connect it with the national discussion about reparations for slavery.82

While Orr utilizes more explicit language initially, referencing white privilege and structural racism as the legacy of slavery, Orr eventually calls for national discussion rather than action to address the structural issues alluded to.

Interestingly, student members of this Committee detailed more pointed motivations with reference to systematic racism in their memos. One undergraduate member of this Committee, Vanessa Huang, explained that her motivation “lies in the need to publicly acknowledge and transform the legacy of slavery in RI and in the US. The history of slavery is entangled with the historical construction of race; its legacy has thus persisted through the evolution of other racist institutions and practices which continue to maintain white supremacy, profoundly influencing the lives of all people today.” Huang went on to cite mass incarceration, the 13th amendment and incarcerated labor, and the fact that “criminality has continued to be mapped onto black bodies” as the legacies of slavery that must be addressed by this Committee.83 In a similar vein, another student member of the Committee, Will Tucker, wrote that “understanding Brown University’s

81 Evelyn Hu-DeHart, Personal Statement, Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 1 SJC-RETREAT folder, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives
82 Marion Orr, Personal Statement, Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 1 SJC-RETREAT folder, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives
83 Vanessa Huang, Personal Statement, Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 1 SJC-RETREAT folder, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives
connection to slavery and its legacy requires us to examine the experience of Black students and students of color on Brown’s campus.”

This type of divergence in motivations – the desire to start a free flowing national dialogue, or the desire to explicitly grapple with systemic racism, both nationally and at Brown University in particular – can be seen not only in the differing motivations of the Committee members, but through their internal debates over the Recommendations section of the Slavery and Justice report.

Before the Recommendations section was ever drafted, the memos quoted above included ideal outcomes and individual recommendations floated by Committee members. Omar Bartov, who specializes in European history, argued that the Committee “should make recommendations only as regards the case of Brown University though with an eye to the impact such recommendations may have on the rest of the academic community and beyond.” Other Committee members were more specific, recommending the creation of programs at Brown that would address the difficulties students of color face on Brown’s campus, more transparent and socially responsible investing of current endowments, or the creation of a living-wage policy for the university’s employees, which “would present a cross-racial resolution to a problem entrenched in US racial hierarchies.” On the other hand, another set of recommendations from

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85 Omer Bartov, Personal Statement, Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 1 SJC-RETREAT folder, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives
86 B. Anthony Bogues, Personal Statement, Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 1 SJC-RETREAT folder, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives
87 Farid Azfar, Personal Statement, Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 1 SJC-RETREAT folder, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives
88 Arlene R. Keizer, Personal Statement, Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 1 SJC-RETREAT folder, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives
Committee members dealt with structures specifically outside of the university, such as investing in the public education system in Rhode Island.

One member of the Committee, Ross Cheit, a professor of political science and public policy, reflected on the tension between these two types of recommendations when he sent an email to the entire group:

A major unresolved issue for our committee is the actual scope of the report…. I think that our committee needs to come to some agreement about our overall jurisdiction, if you will, over a range of current issues at Brown. Some of our discussions have suggested that the report might well address a panoply of issues from curriculum and student life to admissions and development. There has also been the suggestion of an even broader focus that includes, say, Hope High School, or the African-American community in Providence. In short, there seem to be both highly constrained and fairly unbounded visions of our possible scope for recommendations.89

The issues of scope Cheit acknowledges here reflect the difficult task of the Slavery and Justice Committee. To bring together multiple differing agendas and points of view into one cohesive report took a significant amount of compromise. However, a result of this compromise was the blunting of more radical recommendations by the time the final report was published.

For example, one early draft of the recommendations section states that “The legacy of slavery is...wealth. It is also in the deformed and traumatized institutions of the United States; slavery’s legacy persists in racism” and “unequal life chances for African Americans.” To address these issues, this draft of the report recommended that Brown University “Inventory and Improve Race Relations...Brown should create a committee of inquiry to study race relations and racism on campus and to evaluate the effectiveness of its existing programs in diversity and race

89 Ross Cheit email to SRJ@listserv.brown.edu, “Thoughts About the Retreat” January 6, 2005, Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 4, Folder 2, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives
relations.”90 No such explicit acknowledgement connecting the legacy of slavery to problems of race in the present on Brown’s campus made it into the final report.

In similar fashion, in February of 2005, the minutes from a Committee meeting revealed that Professor Campbell asked if the group “should pursue questions like the living wage for campus workers and Brown’s investment strategy/policy.” In response, Committee member Mike Vorenberg – a legal historian who has published works on the 13th Amendment and the Emancipation proclamation – suggested that “all issues not to do with the key role of the committee as educators should be dropped” while Committee member B. Anthony Bouges – current Director of the Center of the Study of Slavery and Justice at Brown – disagreed, responding that “education has consequences and that examining investments is particularly important.”91

The published version of the Slavery and Justice report, in both the body of the report and in the enumerated recommendations, was heavily influenced by these types of conflicts. The compromises made by the authors of the report become even clearer when rough drafts of the body of the report are compared to the final product. In multiple drafts of the report, it was written that:

African American students began to enter Brown in substantial numbers only in the late 1960’s, when the university, faced with a walkout by black students, avowed “a new moral commitment and commitment of resources” to increase black representation on campus. Today there are a wide variety of programs at Brown to increase the number of black applicants and matriculants. Yet despite these efforts, the percentage of African Americans in Brown's entering freshman class in 2005 was 6.8%, a figure representing roughly half the proportion of African Americans in the U.S. population. This is a fact worth pondering.

90 “Draft of Possible Recommendations Brown University Steering Committee, Submitted by FA, TB, NC, VH, and AK” Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 1 SJC-RETREAT folder, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives
91 “Minutes of a meeting of the University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice held 12:00pm, February 15, 2005, Room 218, University Hall” Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 1, Folder 31, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives
The substance of the paragraph above never made it into the final published version of the

Slavery and Justice report. Neither did this important paragraph:

What impact did practices of racial exclusion in the wider society have on Brown? While many people today criticize affirmative action and other programs for providing unfair benefits to black people, the plain fact is that African American students are and have always been dramatically underrepresented at our university. Brown produced its first two black graduates in 1877, one hundred and thirteen years after its founding. Over the next seventy years, from the end of Reconstruction through the end of World War II, it produced about sixty more – a little less than one black graduate per year.92

As referenced in Part II, by the final publication of this report, the only element from this paragraph remaining was the sentiment of this final sentence and the acknowledgement that “between the 1870s and 1950s” Brown “enrolled fewer than one African American student per year.”93

Even more aggressive editing was utilized against research questions that were to guide an important element of the Committee’s inquiry. In a draft of the report from September of 2005, multiple questions were enumerated, with findings to come in the future:

As a committee charged with investigating the history and legacy of slavery at Brown, we wanted to explore thoroughly the following questions: In general, what have been the lingering effects of racial slavery at Brown and in the surrounding community? How have black students been incorporated into the life of this historically white university? Was there a point at which black students (or other students of color) were segregated in university housing? How has affirmative action been implemented at Brown?”94

These questions were never asked, or answered, in the final publication of the Slavery and Justice report from Brown University. Ultimately, Committee Member Neta Crawford – professor of international relations at Brown – put it best when she acknowledged that “Our

92 Draft of Slavery and Justice Report from April 23, 2005, Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 1 SJC-RETREAT folder, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives
93 Campbell et al., Slavery and Justice, 81
94 Draft of Slavery and Justice Report from September 2005, Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 3, Folder 14, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives
committee’s response must be an inevitably inadequate beginning.”95 While the report itself was a step in an important direction, grappling with the effects of slavery on American universities today necessitates that a university explicitly face its own relationship with systemic racism, an exceedingly difficult task for one to do within an administrative Committee that represents – and is overseen by – the highest levels of university administration.

However, while the Slavery and Justice Committee shied away from its initial inclinations to fundamentally audit and critique issues of racism at Brown University in the present, it was successful in recommending and implementing a slavery memorial on the Brown University campus, right outside of University Hall. The monument, dedicated in September of 2017, features a broken iron chain rising up from the ground.96 Outside of this physical monument though, the Committee’s published report only received “de-facto institutional acknowledgement” of its recommendations.97

The official administrative response to the Committee’s report ended up conflating a productive inquiry into the university’s past with a positive inquiry into the university’s past. The Brown University official response to the Slavery and Justice Committee report opens by stating that “Given the emotions that the troubling history of slavery and discrimination is bound to elicit, one can well imagine the challenge that the Committee had in framing its report in such a positive light. The Committee is to be commended for bringing this work to a successful conclusion.”98 Immediately, the administrative team at Brown University alludes to their preference that this report should have been framed in a “positive light.”

95 Neta Crawford, email to SJR@listserv.brown.edu on October 14, 2006, “Re: draft feedback,” Slavery and Justice Committee Records, Box 3, Folder 9, John Hay Library, Brown University Archives
97 James Campbell, interview by author, February 18, 2020
98 Response of Brown University to the Report of the Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice Providence (RI: Brown University, 2007), 2
goes on to explain that the University accepts “the summons of the Report of the Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice not to treat the small or limited scale of our involvement with the slave trade as a reason to deny any relationship to this part of our heritage. A number of Brown’s leaders and trustees were important figures in the abolitionist and civil rights struggles and that, too, must find its way into our history.” Here the University implicitly minimizes the scale of Brown’s involvement with the slave trade, before switching gears to highlight the university’s abolitionist tendencies – a tactic utilized frequently within university press responses when forced to reckon with their connections to slavery.

Fundamentally, the university administration at Brown attempted to spin the findings of the Committee as a positive reflection of the institution, rather than digging into the complexities and nuance of slavery’s legacy. To this day, more substantive change has not been implemented as a result of the Committee's report. Instead, much of the Committee’s policy initiatives recommended within the report were met with silence from the administration.

The silence this report received from within the Brown community is reflective of the silence this report received from the larger academic community. As Professor Campbell, chair of the Slavery and Justice Committee explained to me over the phone, this report “needed to have one or more peer institutions say it was courageous.” Not one institution did.

Harvard University

While on an institutional level the Slavery and Justice report was met with deafening silence, a grassroots movement of individual academics keen on investigating their own institutions began to grow soon after the report was released. One such academic was Sven Beckert, who was genuinely inspired by the initiative of Ruth Simmons and the work of the

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99 Ibid., 11
100 James Campbell, interview by author, February 18, 2020
Slavery and Justice Committee. Beckert approached Harvard University hoping to conduct a similar inquiry; he was rebuffed.101 Instead, Beckert designed an undergraduate seminar entitled Harvard and Slavery, where students would be able to examine Harvard’s institutional archives themselves. Eventually, the findings of Beckert and his students were published in the 2011 Pamphlet Harvard and Slavery: Seeking A Forgotten History, around the time of Harvard’s 375th anniversary.

Once again though, the pride that accompanies anniversaries such as this shut out the truth of Harvard’s institutional legacy. Ivy League anniversaries represent immense sources of potential revenue for the university, often functioning as alumni fundraising events for institutional endowments. Thus, maintaining Harvard’s institutional pride – heavily correlated with monetary gain – meant that the unflattering truth of Harvard’s past injustices was not to be mentioned during the 375th anniversary. That is why, as Beckert explained himself, the findings from the Harvard and Slavery report “were never part of the story that was commemorated then. The University needs to recognize that slavery is as much a part of its history as many of its great accomplishments, and make the project not just a project of a small number of professors and students, but one for the University as a whole.”102

It would take another five years – during which many other American universities would take up the call to examine their history with slavery, and the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement began to pick up momentum – until the University, as an entity, would engage with the historic truth they had previously been ignoring. In 2016, President of Harvard Drew Gilpin Faust, herself a major Civil War historian, convened an advisory committee on Harvard and slavery. The Committee decided to commission a plaque commemorating four enslaved Harvard

101 Ibid.
102 Walters, “Slavery and the American University,” 734
workers — Titus, Venus, Bilhah, and Juba — highlighted within the *Harvard and Slavery: Seeking A Forgotten History* report.\(^{103}\) The following year the advisory committee sponsored an international conference at the Radcliffe Institute on the question of “Universities and Slavery.” Professor Campbell, who spoke at this conference, praised the university for finally engaging in this essential work in 2016. Yet he took pains to point out that this type of engagement with the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement would’ve been helpful when Ruth Simmons and the Slavery and Justice Committee were met with silence from the academic community when their own report was released back in 2007.\(^{104}\)

*Why Look Beyond the Page?*

Ultimately, going beyond the pages of these three institutional reports reveals the complexities of the ‘University and Slavery’ movement. Graduate students, professors, and university administrators had to balance the desire to call for more palatable remedies – academic dialogue – with more actionable recommendations calling for acknowledgement of white supremacy and systemic racism on college campuses today. These actors all had to grapple with the tension between institutional pride and historical truth, and the tension between the pride one feels in their own institution, and the injustices their institution has perpetuated.

*The ‘Universities and Slavery’ Movement: Impact on Systemic Racism*

All of these reports urge their readers to examine how a university’s complicity in slavery allows us to reflect upon present day injustice. Yet drawing this sentiment all the way to its logical conclusion would end with the acknowledgment of white supremacy and systemic racism’s existence today, both nationally and within the institutional structure of universities.

\(^{103}\) Sven Bekert et al., “Harvard and Slavery: A Short History” *Slavery and the University: Histories and Legacies* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2019)

\(^{104}\) James Campbell, interview by author, February 18, 2020
However, systemic or structural racism is never explicitly mentioned *once* in any of these reports.

Alfred Brophy, one of the intellectual leaders of this ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement, has written about how this movement has been “deradicalized.” This deradicalization may “explain why the movement has gained such popularity among administrators. In some ways, the movement has become almost a sign of pride among schools, since the institutions conducting these studies are the ones that are venerable enough to have been around in the era of slavery.”

As a result of the deradicalized nature of this movement, the impact of these three Ivy League reports has been seen primarily through academic conferences, plaques, and campus monuments: largely symbolic gestures of change. Instead, it has been students, rather than faculty and administrators, who have taken up the mantle to connect universities’ legacy of slavery with the current reality of systemic racism.

To provide just one illustrative example, in 2015 a group of Harvard Law students formed Royall Must Fall, named in solidarity with the student movement Rhodes Must Fall, which called for the removal of a statue of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town. Royall Must Fall’s mission was to change the Harvard Law School Shield, which they argued “honored a family complicit in the brutal torture and murder of 88 enslaved persons.” The student group explained that “Replacing the seal would not erase the brutal history of the slave trade. Instead, it would appropriately acknowledge the dark legacy of racism that is presently hidden in plain sight. Many people see no clear connection between the slave trade and the present. That is how

105 Brophy “Forum on Slavery and Universities: Introduction.” 231
structural racism becomes entrenched; forgetfulness and indifference are tools of oppression.”

The Shield was eventually retired in 2016 as a result of this student protest.

The example above mirrors similar intellectual ideas that the reports of Yale, Harvard, and Brown disseminated. However, while there is a significant similarity between the intellectual ideas the Harvard Law students share with the authors of these three reports, there are two important differences to note. First, the language both sets of actors use is fundamentally different. While the authors of these three Ivy League reports often spoke of “building a better future,” which implicitly acknowledges the imperfect racial reality of our own era, the law school students spoke of “structural racism” in stark terms never seen within the published slavery reports. The second fundamental difference between the three Ivy League reports and student movements, such as the Harvard Law example cited above, is impact. While these internal reports on a university’s history with slavery have sparked plaques, monuments, and conferences, student movements examining the connection between universities and slavery have sparked direct change.

Conclusion

While all three of the Ivy League slavery reports examined so far are quite unique from one another, they all reflect the same tension. These Yale, Brown, and Harvard reports on the institutional legacies of slavery all grapple with their call to action. As academics, do these authors call for an increased national dialogue and greater reflection? Or do they utilize their voices to name white supremacy, name systemic racism within the university system, and call for direct change at the campus level? All of these inquiries are circling around the same question:

107 Walters, “Slavery and the American University,” 735
How does an academic balance feelings of pride for one’s own institution with the desire to critique one’s own institution?
CONCLUSION

There is an inherent duality within the structure of the American university. Universities are sites of intellectual freedom, monuments to personal growth, and catalysts for societal change. Universities are beacons of hope and potential. Yet American universities simultaneously reflect the greatest inequalities and injustices within this country. Throughout this thesis, I have used the lens of the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement to interrogate this duality.

Within PART I: INSTITUTIONAL PRIDE, I examined the prideful historical narrative within official Ivy League histories that kept the links between universities and slavery hidden for so many years. Ultimately, the tension between this triumphalist narrative and the emergence of racial justice movements surrounding affirmative action and slavery reparations spurred the graduate students of Yale to uncover their university’s true history in *Yale, Slavery and Abolition*. Silence followed this publication, until Brown University and Harvard University were compelled to interrogate their own institutional ties with slavery. Over the ten years in which these three reports were published, the institutional pride that previously dictated the stories Ivy League universities told about themselves was problematized by students and faculty that were seeking historical truth, and a more nuanced acknowledgement of their institutions ties to slavery.

In Part II: HIDDEN HISTORICAL TRUTH, I continued my investigation into the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement, utilizing historian Alfred Brophy’s analysis of slavery inquires as a map. The *Yale, Slavery and Abolition* report reflected the intellectual influence of pro-slavery thought at Yale University, through both the suppression of the proposed New Haven “Negro College” in the 1830’s and the naming of Calhoun College in the 1930’s. While the Yale
The report was largely met with silence, after multiple controversies over the issue of slavery reparations on the Brown University campus, President Ruth Simmons created the Slavery and Justice Committee, commissioned to analyze Brown’s financial connections to slavery and the reparations movement itself. Published in 2007, the Committee’s report entitled *Slavery and Justice* shed light on the university’s first endowment funded by slave owners, the use of enslaved workers to build university edifices, and the public controversy John and Moses Brown engaged in over the morality of slavery itself. Inspired by Ruth Simmons and the *Slavery and Justice* report, Professor Sven Beckert attempted to institute a similar inquiry at Harvard University. When that request was denied, Beckert established a Harvard and Slavery undergraduate seminar and eventually published *Harvard and Slavery: Seeking A Forgotten History*, which centered the lives of enslaved individuals like Venus, Juba, Cato, and Bilhah.

Chronologically, all three of these reports reveal the growth of the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement over time; inquiries within this movement began by examining universities and their intellectual connections to slavery, then investigated the financial context in which universities benefitted from slavery, and eventually centered enslaved individuals who lived on these college campuses, examining their inner lives and relationships.

Finally, in PART III: DIALOGUE vs. CHANGE, I examined the university actors behind these reports. I found that all three of these Ivy League reports claimed they wanted to start a national dialogue, yet behind the scenes these actors had more complex and nuanced goals. The Yale University graduate students were likely gaining leverage for union negotiations. Many members of the Slavery and Justice Committee, especially its student members, desired a more radical set of recommendations that never came to be, and rough drafts of the *Slavery and Justice* report were significantly more critical of race relations on Brown’s campus than the final draft.
ever was. At Harvard University, the administration only began to endorse and engage with the findings of *Harvard and Slavery: Seeking A Forgotten History* five years after its release, when the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement had gained mainstream acceptance. Unfortunately, due to the lack of university buy-in after each and every one of these reports were released, coupled with the deradicalized nature of the movement itself, very limited change occurred at Yale, Brown, or Harvard University as a result of these inquiries.

When taking a step back, all three of the Ivy League reports examined within this paper reveal the tension between institutional pride and historical truth that many universities face when crafting their institutional histories. These reports further reflect an important question that all historians conducting deeply personal institutional histories must ask themselves: Should an academic leverage their institutional power to push for systemic change? To create a truly impactful ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement within academia, the answer the appears to be yes.

Craig Steven Wilder, one of the intellectual leaders of the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement who published *Ebony and Ivy* – the first monograph dedicated to linking American universities and slavery – agrees with the sentiment that universities engaging in this work have not gone far enough. Wilder acknowledges that:

> Many slavery-history projects exist, yes. But you can count on one or two hands the number of slavery-linked universities that have taken institutional responsibility for researching and publishing those connections…Most have not. Elite universities…are comfortable dealing with minorities when those institutions get to appear benevolent. They resist any narrative that puts minorities in the position of making demands…often patting themselves on the back for making decisions that others forced upon them.108

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Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement must go beyond the mere presence of “slavery-history” projects, as Wilder refers to them above. If universities are going to do the work to trace the legacy of slavery at their own institutions, they need to trace the ways in which the legacy of slavery impacts their community today. There is a difference between looking back at history to acknowledge prior injustice, and looking back at history to understand how the legacy of that injustice continues to this day. I urge university administrators, academics, and historians to do both.

As this ‘Universities and Slavery’ movement continues to evolve, the historiography of this movement must evolve as well. This thesis is my attempt to create an initial, critical historiography of this movement. Just as these university actors knew that their work would be an “inevitably inadequate beginning,” so too is this paper. Yet despite all the missing links that still need to be discovered, this work represents a starting point; a way to conceptualize intellectual history and institutional history with an eye towards the present, and to conceptualize history itself as a tool for academics to grapple with racial justice and advance anti-racist scholarship.
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