
Epilogue

Scarlet in Black—On the Uses of History

Jomaira Salas Pujols

On behalf of the Committee on Enslaved and Disenfranchised
Populations in Rutgers History

In the fall of 2015, black students at more than seventy-seven colleges and universities in the United States organized to demand a series of institutional transformations aimed at addressing systemic racism on college campuses.¹ Many of their demands overlap with students pushing for greater faculty diversity, curricular changes, and expanded budgets for cultural centers.² Not unlike the black student movement of the late 1960s, students of color today are drawing from theories of liberation to push their universities to extend to them the same sense of belonging that white students have had since the founding of higher education in the North American colonies and later the United States. It is no secret that racial violence was a driving force behind the prosperity of many primarily white colleges and universities and this history continues to cast a long shadow on the lives of students of color today.³ The Committee on Enslaved and Disenfranchised Populations in Rutgers History was born out of this context in an effort to ask difficult but important questions about the role of exploitation and dislocation in the founding of our university. Knowing this history allows us to move forward while creating a welcoming environment for all students. This first step should not be taken lightly, as it reflects a genuine commitment from committee members, graduate researchers, and the university as a whole to grapple with the scarlet stain that so many higher education institutions attempt to ignore. The preceding chapters laid out some of the history of how Rutgers University benefited from the institution of slavery and the

disenfranchisement of indigenous populations. This epilogue suggests some of the ways we can make use of that history.

Though just a preliminary investigation, eight months of arduous archival research have confirmed our suspicions that Rutgers University and its founders and benefactors were prodigiously involved in the slave trade and the slavery economy. Albeit indirectly, we know the college benefited from Native American Removal, breaking ground in a land once occupied by the Lenni Lenape. We know that our namesake, Henry Rutgers, was a slave owner. We know the Livingston campus is named after William Livingston, whose family was involved in the slave trade and were well-known slave owners. We know that the early financial health of our institution was largely a result of monetary and in-kind contributions from individuals who made their wealth off of slaves. And we know that despite a struggling yet striving New Brunswick African American community, Rutgers's founding fathers supported schemes to send blacks back to Africa rather than build an interracial community. And yet the committee's findings demand even more difficult questions: How do we grapple with the fact that some of the people who literally built Rutgers were enslaved? What can the institution do to acknowledge and reconcile with its role in benefiting from slavery? Perhaps most challenging, how can it make this history accessible to students and other community members? It is with this last question that this epilogue asks us to engage: to think critically and creatively about the uses of history as a driver of institutional change.

First and foremost, we ask that plaques be placed around campus to literally mark the presence and work of African Americans. The first of these should be placed at Old Queens, for we have uncovered evidence that the slave named Will helped break ground on the campus building.

In an effort to ensure that our historical research becomes a central part of the Rutgers University experience, the Committee on Enslaved and Disenfranchised Populations in Rutgers History recommends the creation of a walking and digital tour, which we tentatively title the "Back in Black" tour. This initiative will bring to life our findings about the lives of African American and other disenfranchised populations at the university. With a focus on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the tour will highlight the dispossession of lands from the Lenni Lenape and the role of slavery in funding, building, and sustaining Rutgers and the surrounding New Brunswick community. Additionally, the "Back in Black" tour will be an opportunity for Rutgers students, alumni, and faculty members to learn about how the university benefited from the removal of Native Americans, the slave trade, and gradual abolition. An important component of the tour will also be to center the lived experiences of black and Native Americans, as well as other students of color on campus. As such, participants will learn about important moments of dissent, including

the 1960s campus protests and the subsequent push for diversity initiatives at the university.

We suggest that the “Back in Black” tour be offered throughout the academic year and that professors, student groups, and community organizations be invited to request free tours which will serve as an opportunity to connect the history of Rutgers University with legacies of oppression and resistance. We imagine that the tour will have at least three important consequences: first, by centering the experiences of marginalized populations on campus, the tour will lay the groundwork for the university to be honest, critical, and forthright about its slaveholding past. Instead of hiding its connections to slavery, Rutgers will be deliberately transparent about its role in building institutional wealth. We believe this acknowledgment is a necessary precondition for the university to move forward in creating a safe and welcoming academic space where students of color can thrive. Second, the tour will serve as a counter-narrative that contests notions of deficit in favor of a more complex understanding of the experiences and contributions of blacks and other people of color at the university. Because the tour will highlight both the history of oppression *and* resistance, we hope it will be a space where students of color can see their experiences and contributions reflected in institutional programming. Finally, we envision the “Back in Black” tour as a pedagogical innovation. It is a tool we hope professors and teachers in New Brunswick will utilize to bring history to life and connect it to the daily lives of students. This active engagement with scholarly work is a testament that academia and public outreach are not so far apart after all.

Besides a separate tour that highlights Rutgers’s entanglement with slavery and dispossession the committee also recognizes the importance of centering this history in multiple spaces and places at the university. To this end we suggest that the Rutgers Admissions Office introduce elements of the findings on slavery and dispossession to the existing campus tours. By incorporating these findings into the traditional campus tours Rutgers will ensure that all visitors who tour the university have access to the history of slavery on campus. Perhaps most importantly, by talking candidly about the legacies of slavery on campus tours, the university will tell a more truthful story of its founding and prosperity; a story that is imperfect, but intellectually honest and necessary.

Like many other colleges and universities that are also grappling with questions of the legacies of slavery, it is important for Rutgers to think broadly about other institutional changes that are necessary to make the committee’s findings widely available. Some institutions, like Georgetown University, have already undertaken much of this work, creating websites and digital archives aimed at bringing their findings to the public.⁴ We expect Rutgers to do the same, creating a website with digital copies of important archival documents and developing a space for a digital version of the “Back in Black” tour, effectively making

it a pedagogical tool available to educators nationwide. It is through this type of careful and engaging public scholarship that we hope to make use of our history.

Other colleges and universities have instituted new policies and programs to make amends with the residue of their slaveholding and prejudiced past,⁵ and we expect Rutgers to do the same. In response to student-led protests about Woodrow Wilson's views on race, for example, a special committee at Princeton University recommended that the university invest money and resources to create a high-profile pipeline of underrepresented scholars.⁶ Additionally, Princeton has planned an exhibition on the legacy of Woodrow Wilson on campus, with the goal of making information about his role in preventing the enrollment of black students at the university publicly and broadly accessible.⁷ They did this because, while Wilson has been a revered figure on campus, his racist views and the way they impacted black student enrollment were more covert in the institutional memory. The Committee on Enslaved and Disenfranchised Populations in Rutgers History will follow in Princeton's steps to ensure that students, professors, and other community members learn about the uncomfortable facts of Rutgers's founding and prosperity. We expect to utilize public panels, invited speakers, and university professorships to facilitate discussions on critical scholarship and the creation of repositories of institutional memory. We hope to use public scholarship to both revisit the committee's findings and create additional research opportunities for undergraduates, graduate students, and scholars to pursue further research on the experiences of people of color at the university.

For too long now, the pursuit of scholarship in the classroom has followed a singular narrative that negates or ignores the history and lived experiences of underrepresented people in the United States. This can be addressed by including elements of Rutgers's history of enslavement, dislocation, and race-making within the core curriculum. While the extent to which professors will include this history will vary, doing so creates a unique opportunity for professors and students to engage in thoughtful dialogue about a history that took place in their own backyard and its impact on contemporary events. Again, we suggest that using our institution's history is not only a pedagogical tool but an exercise in intellectual honesty, one that extends to all corners of the university. As a result, along with the Task Force on Inclusion and Community Values, we have called for the university to establish a diversity course requirement for all students aimed at broadening their understanding of various issues of identity and belonging. Once inaugurated, we envision these curricular changes as pillars of Rutgers's commitment to acknowledging its role in the institution of slavery.

The committee positions its findings and the initiatives described in this epilogue as part of a long march toward acknowledgment and reconciliation.

We want to emphasize that the research presented in the foregoing pages is only preliminary and that we are committed to researching and writing a more complete story that includes all campuses of Rutgers University and that brings this history into the contemporary era. For now, we encourage students, faculty, and staff members to engage deeply with this difficult history—this scarlet stain—and to push for changes that will ultimately make Rutgers a more inclusive institution.

27. *Ibid.*, 84–85. It would be naïve to suggest that the Morrill Act was enacted because of a pure commitment to a white democratic educational vision. As stated earlier, the act itself served as a branch in a growing war effort.
28. For an example of the way the Morrill Act is often remembered and discussed today, see Christopher P. Loss, “Why the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act Still Matters,” *The Chronicle for Higher Education*, July 16, 2012. <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-the-Morrill-act-Still/132877?cid=at>.
29. Cynthia L. Jackson and Eleanor F. Nunn, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 13–14.
30. “Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Higher Education Desegregation,” U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Regional Civil Rights Offices, Washington D.C., March 1, 1991. <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq9511.html>.
31. Jackson and Nunn, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, 30.
32. *Ibid.*, 15. The tenuous position of black land-grant colleges is evidenced in the case of the private Hampton Agricultural and Normal Institute in Virginia. When the institute was founded in 1872 by the American Missionary Association, it received one-half of the funds from the 1862 act that the state of Virginia had received. By 1920, the state had transferred the funding from Hampton to Virginia Normal and Industrial College (now Virginia State University).
33. Helen W. Ludlow, “Hampton Indian Students at Home,” in *Hampton Institute 1868–1885: Its Work for Two Races*, ed. Mary Frances Armstrong (Hampton, VA: Normal School Press Print, 1885), 10.
34. Donal F. Lindsey, *Indians at Hampton Institute, 1877–1923* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 9–11. As Lindsey continues, “Behind this policy was a commitment to ‘education’ as the vehicle for the complete cultural transformation of the Indian” (12).
35. *Ibid.*, 96.
36. *Ibid.*, 98.

EPILOGUE

1. Robin D. G. Kelley, “Black Study, Black Struggle,” *Boston Review*, March 27, 2016, <http://bostonreview.net/forum/robin-d-g-kelley-black-study-black-struggle>.
2. “Campus Demands,” *The Demands*, <http://www.thedemands.org/>.
3. Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), 33.
4. *The Report of the Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation to the President of Georgetown University* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 2016), http://slavery.georgetown.edu/report/#_ga=1.62721580.1064456366.1473560107.
5. *Slavery and Justice: Report of the Brown University Steering Committee* (Providence, RI: Brown University, 2006), http://brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/documents/SlaveryAndJustice.pdf.
6. *Report of the Trustee Committee on Woodrow Wilson’s Legacy at Princeton* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2016), <https://www.princeton.edu/vpsec/trustees/Wilson-Committee-Report-Final.pdf>.
7. *Ibid.*