Shackled Legacy: Universities and the Slave Trade
APM Reports Documentary Transcript

Part 1

> **Melisande Short Colomb:** I'm going to be the oldest not-18 year old…to ever be a part of a freshman class at Georgetown University. [*Laughs*]

Stephen Smith: That's Melisande Short Colomb. She goes by Meli. She's a chef in New Orleans, she's 63-years-old, and she's the mother of grown children. This fall Meli is moving into the dorms and starting classes at Georgetown University in Washington DC. That's the same school whose Jesuit leaders once owned some of her relatives.

> **CBS News report**: Georgetown University is offering an act of contrition for its complicated past. The nation's oldest Catholic and Jesuit college announced yesterday it will give preference in admissions to descendants of 272 slaves it sold nearly two centuries ago.

Last year, Georgetown announced that it would give "legacy status" to people who are descended from the slaves who were sold to get the school out of a financial bind. That gives the descendants a leg up when they apply to the school. Meli didn't

know she was a descendant until the summer of 2016, when she got an email from a genealogist. Here's what it said.

> **Meli:** I need to tell you that your three times great grandparents, Abraham Mahoney and Mary Ellen Queen, were part of the sale of 272 people by the Jesuits to Louisiana, in 1838.

Meli was stunned. She knew those names. Her grandmother had told stories about Abraham Mahoney and Mary Ellen Queen, and about ancestors back in Maryland who had sued for their freedom. She realized her grandmother had been passing down crucial family history, and she wished she'd done more to learn about it.

> **Meli:** I felt a little bit of guilt because I'd stepped away from it. And I hadn't pursued it. And in that way I felt like I'd let my grandmother down.

It was also hard to think about what Georgetown University and its Jesuit leaders had done to her ancestors.

> **Meli:** I was hurt and angry. I think all of those things that you feel when you know the person who sold your family and the reasons why you were sold.

Meli started keeping track of what Georgetown was planning to do about descendants like her. She was watching online when university president Jack

DeGioia announced the plan to offer the descendants the same preference in admission that it offers to the children of its alumni.

> **Jack DeGioia:** We provide care and respect for the members of the Georgetown community – faculty, staff, alumni - those with an enduring relationship with Georgetown. We will provide the same care and respect to the descendants.

Meli remembers telling a friend she might apply. The friend said, "Do it."

> **Meli:** And I started the process, and it wasn't easy... I don't have parents taking care of my finances and keeping my life in order, and I didn't have anybody to sit down at the table with me and fill out all of the online applications. I'm a chef. I deal in boiling oil and sharp knives.

But she got her application in. And then waited to hear. Finally, in June, Meli got a letter from the school.

> **Meli:** So I cracked it open a little bit with one eye closed and saw that "We are happy to..." and then I snatched it out of the envelope and gave it to my best friend and told her, "Read this to me." [*Laughs*] And I was sitting there crying. Really, I was. Because there was no, you know, I'm not 18. So for Georgetown to do this it is special and it does mean something. And I do feel like I have been touched by grace.

Meli is now an official member of the class of 2021. When we last talked she was looking forward to Freshman Convocation.

> **Meli:** And I'm wearing my cap and my robe, without the tassel. And then in four years, we're going to put them all back on. And we're going to graduate as a class. And they are going to influence me for the rest of my life and I am going to influence them.

Meli says can feel her ancestors with her.

> **Meli:** And they are so proud and they are so happy and they're so with me on this. And my one desire today, as it was last month and a year ago and will be on graduation day in 2021, is that I wish I could change places with my grandmother. And she could have this, because this is her glory and her story. [*Crying*] I just happened to be the one here to tell it, and to live it.

Georgetown is covering Meli Colomb's tuition, room and board. Still, she and other descendants wonder if the university should be doing more for them. What about the people who may not want to attend Georgetown, or who can't get in? For the past two years Georgetown has been wrestling with complicated questions about how to publicly acknowledge and make amends for its historic ties to slavery. And the school is not alone.

[*Music*]

From APM Reports, this is "Shackled Legacy, Universities and the Slave Trade." I'm Stephen Smith. Over the coming hour, we'll explore how some of the nation's oldest and most prestigious universities, including Harvard and the University of Virginia, are examining their deep connections to the slave economy and debating how to atone for them. Historian Craig Stephen Wilder has written a book that shows how the rise of higher education in the US is linked directly to the rise of American slavery.

> **Craig Steven Wilder**: There are eight colleges established in the colonial period: Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, the University of Pennsylvania, Brown, Rutgers and Dartmouth. No college survives the colonial period without attaching itself to the slave economy.

And these attachments to the slave economy aren't trivial. For example, it's not that Yale happened to have a couple of trustees who were slave owners or slave traders.

> **Wilder:** It's actually that Yale inherited a small plantation in Rhode Island – a slave plantation - that it used to fund its first graduate programs and its first scholarships, and that it aggressively sought out those opportunities to

benefit from these slave economies of New England and the broader Atlantic world.

Scores of American colleges and universities have historical connections to the slave trade, especially along the eastern seaboard. Brown University in Rhode Island was the first to confront that legacy in a major way. In 2003, Brown president Ruth Simmons appointed a commission to probe Brown's extensive relationship to slavery. To her, the reasons were obvious.

Ruth Simmons: As institutions that are supposed to be seekers of truth, it would be the height of corruption to lie about our backgrounds and to try to hide our histories. Secondly, that since we in the business of research, that we ought to be best in class in unearthing these histories. And third, that we are, of course, teachers. And what better way to teach our students about ethical conduct than to show ourselves to be open to the truth … uh and to essentially tell the full story.

Dozens of schools have been investigating their own stories. We'll begin this hour with Georgetown. Producer Kate Ellis looks at how descendants like Meli Short Colomb learned the truth about their ancestors … and at what Georgetown is doing to make amends.

Kate Ellis: This story starts with a protest.

> **Leader**: It is our duty to fight for our freedom!
> **Crowd**: It is our duty to fight for our freedom!
> **Leader**: It is our duty to win!
> **Crowd**: It is our duty to win!

In 2015, Georgetown students demanded that two buildings on campus be renamed. The buildings were named for Jesuit priests who had orchestrated the sale of 272 slaves. A Georgetown alum read about the protests, and it made him curious.

> **Richard Cellini**: You know 272 men women and children were sold by Georgetown University to Louisiana in 1838. And my question simply was well what happened to them?

> [*Music*]

Richard Cellini runs a company he started in Cambridge, MA. He attended Georgetown as an undergraduate and law student. Cellini is white and didn't think much about race issues until he learned about the Jesuits' slave sale. Cellini knew that Georgetown had formed a working group to investigate this history and he sent

a note to someone in the group to ask, what happened to the slaves once they were sold? The person wrote back that the slaves had all died when they got to Louisiana. This made no sense to Cellini.

> **Cellini**: It just struck me as statistically impossible. I mean even the Titanic had survivors.

We should mention here that the University itself has never officially said that the slaves died; they're quite vehement about that. But that was the belief of at least one member of the working group who emailed Cellini. In any case, Cellini ran a Google search. He typed in words like Jesuit, Plantation, Maryland, Slaves, Louisiana, 1838 … and pretty soon he got a hit. He found a woman living in Spokane, Washington who had researched her ancestry and, with the help of a genealogist in Baton Rouge, discovered that she was the descendant of slaves sold by the Jesuit leaders of Georgetown.

> **Cellini**: Within a couple of hours I'd actually uncovered the truth, which was that hundreds of the Georgetown slaves survived for decades after the Civil War and that *thousands* of their descendants were alive today.

[*Sounds of outdoors*]

Jessica Tilson is one of those descendants, and she has become an expert on where some of the original Georgetown slaves are buried. They include some of her ancestors, members of the Hawkins family.

> Jessica Tilson: This is Jack Hawkins. This is Cornelius Hawkins' baby brother. He was sold with them in 1838. He was about seven. OK. And where you guys are standing, this is Susan Hawkins. [*Sounds of baby girl chattering – "I'm jumping on the bed!"*]

Tilson's three-year-old daughter is hopping around the burial sites barefoot. She's wearing a pink polka-dot dress. Rows of concrete and marble rectangular slabs cover the graves.

> Tilson: Be careful, jump on your family's grave. And now here we have a slogan. "You are only allowed to play on top of your family's grave."

The cemetery is segregated. A road divides the white and black sections. The graveyard belongs to the Immaculate Heart of Mary church in Maringouin, LA, just

west of Baton Rouge. Tilson comes here a lot. Her sister and infant son are buried here, and she grew up in the town. When Tilson visits, she often brings water and flour to gently clean the aging grave markers.

> JT: So you can play on top of all of these graves because everybody in this graveyard on the black side are all related, we are all cousins.

When Tilson says all the black people in the cemetery are cousins, she's being literal. In fact, hundreds of black people still living in Maringouin are cousins.

[*Music*]

The 272 slaves owned by the Jesuits worked on plantations in Maryland before they were sold. They grew tobacco and wheat. They were sent by ship to Louisiana, to plantations that grew cotton and sugarcane. This was much more grueling work. One of those plantations was in Maringouin.

After they were freed, a lot of former slaves stayed in the area. When Jessica Tilson was growing up, she and her friends were always told they shouldn't date each

other because they were related. But no one knew exactly how. Now they do. The enslaved families who came down together from Maryland intermarried.

Tilson learned she was a descendant of the Georgetown slaves in the spring of 2016. A couple of news stories caught her attention because they featured pictures of the Maringouin cemetery.

> **Tilson**: And the news articles say "You might be a descendant, check and see; They're look - Georgetown is looking for you."

Tilson had already been researching her ancestry so it didn't take much for her to confirm she was a descendant. After a little more probing, here's what she found: all of her great, great grandparents were sold by the Jesuits. Tilson can name every one of them.

> **Tilson**: So it would be Nason Beatty Butler, they would be my fifth great, my sixth great grandparents. Their daughter Mary. She was sold also. That was my fifth great grandmother. Her husband, James Scott, he was also sold. His parents were Bennett and Claire Scott. They were sold. Cornelius' wife…

If Tilson sounds happy as she names all her ancestors who were sold, it's because learning about where her family comes from has felt like a gift - from Georgetown.

> **Tilson**: If it wasn't for them I would never known my family are from Maryland they could've easily pushed it away for another 100 years. Or they could have just never said anything and just boxed it up. I can't be mad at them because you gave me something that a lot of African Americans don't have. You gave me my history back.
>
> [*Music*]

African Americans trying to find their ancestors often can't get past 1870. That was the first year the federal census began routinely identifying black people by last name. Many slave-holding records only list black people by first name, if at all. As Richard Cellini explains, that was not the case with the Jesuit plantation owners in Maryland.

> **Cellini**: There's just an enormous amount of information.

It turns out the Jesuit priests kept meticulous records of the people they enslaved.

> **Cellini**: First names, last names, date of birth, parents names, date of baptism, first communion, confirmation, weddings, funerals… And uh, the Roman Catholic Church I think is the only organization in the world

that records its wrongdoing in triplicate and then preserves it for decades.

Georgetown's slavery archive holds a lot of those records. They include the original Articles of Agreement for the sale, which lists all 272 people to be sold by the Jesuits. And the ship manifest of the Katherine Jackson, one of three ships that carried the slaves to Louisiana. These documents have been crucial in identifying the descendants of the Georgetown slaves and mapping the ways they're related to each other.

Karran Harper-Royal: Thank you all for being here. And why are we here? We're here because in 1838 the Jesuit priests of Georgetown University sold two hundred seventy two enslaved people, who are our *relatives*.

This is Karran Harper-Royal. She's executive director of the GU272 Descendants Association, which was founded in early 2017. Harper-Royal is leading a genealogy workshop at a public library in New Orleans for people who may be descendants.

Harper-Royal: They sold them to two men in Louisiana. Former Governor Henry Johnson and Dr. Jesse Batey.

When the slaves were sold to Louisiana, families were broken apart. The goal of the Descendants Association is to reunite them. A couple dozen people have come to learn more about their ancestry and their potential ties to Georgetown. Some from out of state.

> [*Sounds of people going around intro'ing themselves and how they're related to others in the room*.]

This is Louisiana, so there's a ton of food at the workshop: chicken wings, deviled eggs, trays of vegetables and fruit. And cousins are meeting cousins for the first time. Many descendants have taken home DNA tests to learn more about their pasts. Harper-Royal uses a computer to pull up a genealogy website. She compares the DNA results of a few descendants in the room, including her husband, Kenneth.

> **Harper-Royal:** These are all the people you and Kenneth match together. I was not expecting such a long list.

A moment later she spots another DNA tie, this one between two women sitting beside her.

Harper-Royal: That's your cousin.
Woman: Pleasure to meet you.
Woman: Nice meeting you too!]

Harper-Royal says that when descendants find out about the sale of their relatives by the Maryland Jesuits, they feel a mixture of strong emotions.

Harper-Royal: Initially, you kind of hate everybody that enslaved your ancestors. You know, how horrible they must have been. But for me, I know hate, um, gets in the way of progress. And so you have to think about what are you supposed to do now that you know what you know?

Harper-Royal has been working with Georgetown and Jesuit leaders to map a way forward. President Jack DeGioia formed the Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation in the fall of 2015, before the student protests, and before Richard Cellini had tracked down any descendants.

Jack DeGioia: We would not have presumed going into this work that the descendants would want to engage with Georgetown. But once it

emerged that they did. My judgment was it was important to make this personal.

In June 2016, DeGioia traveled to Louisiana to meet with descendants. Soon after, He announced the working group's recommendations. They included building a campus research center to study slavery and its legacy, and collaborating with the descendant community to create a public memorial to the slaves the Jesuits sold. DeGioia says Georgetown has more work to do, and that the school has a special obligation as a Catholic institution.

DeGioia: Our moral and spiritual tradition that has animated our university community since our founding in 1789 makes certain demands on us and it does force us to ask the deepest questions we can about our responsibilities.

But some descendants are skeptical about the ability of Georgetown and the Jesuits to be a model for change. Sandra Green Thomas is the president of the GU272 Descendants Association. Two of her children will be going to Georgetown this fall. But she still says the university's decision to offer legacy status isn't enough.

Sandra Green Thomas: We should have our own status. Our contribution and sacrifice is unique and singular. People that have donated money to that school have done so by choice. Enslavement was not by choice.

[*Music*]

Stephen Smith: That was producer Kate Ellis. In April 2017 Georgetown University held a ceremony to rename the two buildings the students had protested about in 2015. One building now is named after Isaac Hawkins, the first person listed in Articles of Agreement for the Jesuits' slave sale. The other building is named after the pioneering black educator, Anne Marie Becraft. Georgetown also offered a formal apology to the slave descendants. A bit more on that later.

You're listening to "Shackled Legacy, Higher Education and the Slave Trade," from APM Reports. I'm Stephen Smith.

Coming up:

Actor: Dear Master, I am as well satisfied as I can be in this little community. And I must thank you, sir, for the care you had over me when I was young.

You can find out more about universities and slavery at our web site, APM Reports dot org. You can see photos of people featured in this program and find all of our audio documentaries - more than a hundred of them. You can also sign up for our podcast, Educate. Go to APMReports.org.

[*Music*]

Part 2

People in America's northern states often think of slavery as mainly a Southern issue. It's not. All of the original colonies had slavery. In colonial Rhode Island, slave ship owners launched at least a thousand voyages between Africa and America. Massachusetts was the first of the 13 original colonies to legalize slavery in 1641 - five years after the founding of Harvard College.

Sven Beckert: I'm Sven Beckert. I'm a professor of history at Harvard University and I study mostly the economic history of the United States in the 19th century.

In 2007, Sven Beckert offered a new class - a history seminar that would investigate slavery in Harvard's past. Brown University in Rhode Island had just issued a major report on its ties to the slave trade. Harvard being the oldest institution of higher learning in America, Beckert had a hunch there was something to find in his university's past. But he wasn't sure what.

> **Beckert**: and a total of four students registered. But unlike normal seminars, I wouldn't know more than they do. I didn't really know what that history was, or if there was even such a history.

Beckert's students mined the Harvard University archives and other historical sources to uncover a web of connections between Harvard and slavery.

> **Beckert**: They found that that some of the presidents of Harvard University would move onto campus and they would bring their slaves with them. They found that merchants who gave financial support to the university were engaged in the trade with slave grown agricultural commodities with sugar coffee and other such things so it turned out that there was such a history and that we hadn't really looked for it.

By "we" Beckert means Harvard. Many of the school's big donors in 18th and 19th centuries made their fortunes in a flourishing triangular trade between New England, Caribbean sugar plantations and the slave ports of west Africa. Merchants in Massachusetts shipped tons of supplies to the islands.

> **Beckert**: So for example, whale oil was important because it enabled the sugar mills to run 24 hours a day because it would illuminate these sugar mills. And, of course, the whale oil came from the island of Nantucket. Ice would be exported from a place like Cambridge and would be brought to the Caribbean. Cod was used to feed especially enslaved workers in the Caribbean. But then also donkeys and horses would come from North America. So I think it's almost wrong to see the New England economy as separate from the Caribbean economy. It was almost one economy.
>
> **Smith**: How could this have been hiding in plain sight for so long?
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> **Beckert**: No, no that's an excellent question because in a way in some ways we were surprised that what we found but in other ways of course it was ridiculous that we were surprised because clearly the economy of New England was deeply engaged with a slave economy first of the Caribbean and then of the southern parts of the United States. And of course Harvard was a central institution within Massachusetts in the city of Boston and thus that the wealth accumulated in economic activities related to slavery would also somehow filter to Harvard University should not be much of a surprise.

The unpaid labor of many hundreds of thousands of enslaved people in the Caribbean and the American South helped bankroll the school. In the 1800s, cotton production exploded on slave plantations. And in 1812, Harvard graduate Francis Cabot Lowell developed a milling process so efficient, he and his backers made huge profits spinning inexpensive cotton goods in their New England mills. Lowell and his relatives also gave money to Harvard and served on its faculty.

> **Katherine Stevens**: Enslavement and the slave economy was the road for upward mobility for a lot of white Bostonians in the colonial era. And then the antebellum era.

Historian Katherine Stevens was a Harvard graduate student when she helped Sven Beckert teach his seminar. She says any number of Cambridge merchants who got rich from the slave trade sought entrée to respectable society in Boston. The brothers Perkins, for example.

> **Stevens**: James and Thomas Perkins were not part of an elite but got their start in the business of slave trading and to some degree slave smuggling in the Caribbean when there are restrictions on transporting slaves they're finding ways around those restrictions so they get their

start there and then they move into what is seen as more respectable industries. And part of becoming respectable is donating to a place like Harvard.

Harvard's ties to American slavery weren't just financial. Another direct connection the university had to American slavery was made in its research laboratories and its classrooms. In the 19th century, Harvard scientists claimed to have scientific proof that black people were inherently inferior to whites. One of those men was Louis Agassiz, a world-renowned Harvard geologist and zoologist.

Zoe Weinberg: Agassiz was a very strict creationist. He was resolutely opposed to the idea that species could change or evolve through history. He was at times called America's leading opponent of Darwinism

That's Zoe Weinberg. She was one of the student researchers in Sven Beckert's history seminar. Weinberg wrote about Harvard's major contributions to what's become known as scientific racism in the 19th and 20th centuries. Agassiz believed in polygenism.

Weinberg: Essentially the idea that that different races constituted different species.

Agassiz and a number of 19th century Harvard professors propagated scientific theories they said proved the inherent inferiority of black people as compared to whites. Paleontologist and geologist Nathaniel Shaler was an eager apologist for slavery, which he said raised and improved Africans taken from their native conditions. Shaler wrote this in 1870.

Actor: A laxity of morals which, whether it be the result of innate capacity for certain forms of oral culture… or the result of an utter want of training in this direction…is still unquestionably a negro characteristic.

Shaler was a proponent of laws against race mixing. He said science showed that interracial marriage would be destructive to the human species.

Weinberg: And Shaler was a hugely popular teacher. He alone taught nearly 7,000 Harvard students. His lecture halls were always packed. He was totally beloved. One of his students was Theodore Roosevelt who acknowledged later on in his life that Shaler had shaped his views about race. and echoed some of Shaler's ideas in personal letters where he wrote that African-Americans were but a few generations removed from the wildest savagery.

The various strands of scientific racism that some Harvard professors wove together in the 19th century were used first to justify slavery, and after the Civil War to validate Jim Crow segregation laws that spread across the South.

> **Weinberg**: I think it's really important. I think that Harvard's intellectual contributions to discrimination should be subjected to perhaps even a higher level of scrutiny than anything else. Because this issue is at the heart of Harvard's mission, which is to promote teaching and research.

[*Music*]

When Professor Sven Beckert's history students finished their research in 2011, they presented it to Harvard President Drew Gilpin Faust. She is a historian of the Civil War and the American South. Faust provided money for Beckert and his team to publish a short book on Harvard and Slavery. And in March 2017, Faust convened a major conference on universities and slavery, drawing participants from across the country and around the world.

> **Drew Gilpin Faust**: Harvard was directly complicit in slavery from the college's earliest days in the 17th century until the system of bondage ended in Massachusetts in 1783.

President Faust promised that the work of revealing Harvard's bonds to slavery is just beginning.

> **Faust**: Today's conference is intended to help us explore parts of the past that have remained all but invisible. To acknowledge those realities is essential if we are to undermine the legacies of race and slavery that continue to divide our nation.

One of the people who spoke at the conference was author and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates. Coates was the keynote speaker. He reminded the audience that slavery was not merely a societal arrangement, but a massive American industry.

> **Ta-Nehisi Coates**: If you took all of the productive capacity in this country in 1860 if took all the banks if you took all the railroads if you took everything that you might consider industry and you put it in one pile over here and you put the four million bodies of the enslaved African Americans in this country black people in this country they were worth more than the entire productive capacity in this country is by far the greatest asset.

Coates said that places like Harvard, that benefitted so richly from the unpaid work of enslaved people, need to balance their books.

Coates: I think every single one has University needs to make reparations. I mean there's just no way. I don't know how it how it how you get around that. I just don't I don't know how you conduct um research shows that your very existence is rooted in a great crime and you just say, well, shrug, and may be at best say, "I'm sorry." And you walk away.

Coates did not say how, on a practical level, those reparations should be made.

Harvard historian Sven Beckert isn't sure either. Harvard has the largest endowment of any university in the world: 35 and a half billion dollars. Beckert says Harvard could create new scholarships or some other financial commitments that, in his words, should "hurt Harvard a little bit."

Beckert: No one and no institution should run away from its history… Obviously, no one alive today directly was involved in the enslavement of others in the plantation economy. But we inherited this world and I think therefore we have a responsibility to facing our own history.

[*Music*]

You're listening to an APM Reports documentary: "Shackled Legacy: Universities and the Slave Trade." I'm Stephen Smith.

News Report: On the streets of Charlottesville today, the hate boiling over. White supremecists and counter protesters fighting with fists and clubs. Confederate flags on full display…

In August, white nationalists marched through the University of Virginia campus in Charlottesville. They were protesting the city's plan to remove a statue of Robert E. Lee, the Confederacy's top general. One protestor drove a car into a crowd. He's charged with killing one person and injuring many others. Thousands of people later held a candlelight vigil on campus for the victims.

Crowd sings: We are not afraid, we are not afraid today…

It was hardly the first time people in Charlottesville and the University of Virginia have struggled with the legacy of slavery. UVA was built by slaves, brick by brick. Its students and faculty were served by slaves. And like Georgetown, UVA is searching for ways to atone for that time. And the university uses its archives, and its very buildings, to tell that story.

[*Sound of crowd chatter*]

In spring 2017, UVA President Teresa Sullivan dedicated a new building on campus to one of those enslaved workers: a stone mason named Peyton Skipwith.

> Teresa Sullivan: The site on which this building was constructed is believed to be the location of the quarry where a stone was mined for use in the academical village and where Mr. Skipwith would have worked.

Peyton Skipwith was a skilled stone mason. We'll hear more about him later.

Skipwith was owned by John Hartwell Cocke, whose plantation was about 25 miles from Charlottesville. Cocke was a co-founder of UVA, and became a kind of right-hand man to former president Thomas Jefferson in building the place. Paradoxically, both Jefferson and Cocke abhorred the institution of slavery. Jefferson wrote:

> **Actor**: There must doubtless be an unhappy influence on the manners of our people produced by the existence of slavery among us. The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions…the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other.

Jefferson thought slavery the greatest threat to the new, democratic nation. Yet he owned more than 600 slaves in his lifetime, and freed only a handful. Most historians agree that he also had six children by his slave, Sally Hemmings. Jefferson predicted that emancipation would have to be gradual, and that whites and free black people could never live together in peace. In a way, Jefferson's deep ambivalence about slavery can be seen in his design of the UVA campus.

[*Sounds of outdoors*]

Kirt Von Daacke: We are standing on the lawn at the University of Virginia. This is the center of the original academical village.

Kirt Von Daacke is a history professor and an assistant dean at UVA. A construction crew is doing some renovations to the place.

Von Daacke: And behind me we have the pavilions which are the houses which is where the professors would have lived on the second floor, classroom space on the first floor. And so this was is the this was the heart in Jefferson's design of white life and learning at the university.

The buildings are brick, timber and stone. The sleeping and learning quarters are arranged in a long, graceful U-shape, around a rectangular lawn. The rooms are nearly 200-years old, and students today covet the chance to live in them. With its arcaded walkways, the lawn was the public face of Jefferson's academical village, the white face. The working part was out back - in the gardens.

> **Von Daacke**: The enslaved lived and worked in the gardens which were work yards, so they were surrounded by eight foot tall serpentine walls meant to obscure their life and labor, and so students lived in, in these white spaces on the lawn in the pavilions in the dining halls and then in their rooms and the enslaved ostensibly would remain in those gardens. It couldn't function that way because the enslaved had to cook, serve, clean rooms, paint, dig holes whatever needed to be done. So this is entirely a space where the enslaved are coming and going all day.

More than 100 slaves worked at the University of Virginia at a given time, serving more than 600 students and faculty. But students were not allowed to bring their own slaves to UVA. Von Daacke says Jefferson reasoned that slavery corrupts.

> Von Daacke: But they're all the sons of - almost to a person when it opens - the sons of wealthy planters. If they were corrupted by slavery, and they were, it happened well before they got here.

UVA students sometimes mistreated the enslaved servants. Reports of beatings and rape are part of the historical record. And the abuse could continue after death. Slaves at UVA sometimes buried their dead secretly - as medical students were known to dig up cadavers to practice on.

[*Music*]

In 2013, the University of Virginia created a commission to examine its slave-holding past, and what to do about it. In 2015, UVA named a new dormitory for Isabella and William Gibbons - an enslaved couple owned by faculty members. A prominent memorial on campus to enslaved people is planned. The University gathered a consortium of more than two dozen colleges and universities – from north and south -that are tackling their ties to slavery. UVA runs a summer camp for high schoolers on the history of slavery.

And Kirt Von Daacke's college students helped create a slavery walking tour of the campus, complete with a glossy fold-out map and audio narration.

> **Audio tour**: Faculty records document that students resorted to physical violence upon the bodies of free and enslaved laborers for a variety of offenses, include insolence impertinent language or a perceived lack of attention to duties.

UVA is also looking beyond the borders of its campus to research and tell the slavery story. It is trying to identify descendants of enslaved people in the local community.

> [*Sounds of talking at ceremony*]

And when the Skipwith Hall naming ceremony was planned, family members were invited to visit UVA. Some descendants were meeting each other for the first time.

> **Lois Branch**: That's your cousin over there…

The descendants got a chance to see a rare collection of letters between Peyton Skipwith, his niece Lucy Skipwith and their master, John Hartwell Cocke. Letters and

documents in pen and ink are spread out on tables in a conference room. About a dozen people are taking a look.

> **Bill York**: Peyton Skipwith signed a receipt for $25 dollars for work he had done. I'm trying to find a date.

Bill York is one of the family. His mother's last name is Skipwith. York drove down from northern Virginia at UVA's invitation. The receipt is a slip of paper, and there's an X by Peyton Skipwith's name.

> **Stephen Smith**: Why do you think he didn't sign his - this man knew how to write?
>
> **York**: That's an interesting question.

John Hartwell Cocke was a devout Christian and he taught many of his slaves to read and write so they could study the Bible and lead a pious life. Peyton Skipwith was perfectly capable of signing his name. Maybe the X was a ruse to protect the master.

York: One might say that John didn't want him to write because it was against the law for a slave to read, write or even spell his name.

Many of the Skipwith descendants learned about their ancestors, at least in part, from the book "Dear Master, Letters of a Slave Family." The letters in the University of Virginia's archives are exceptional because most first-hand accounts of life under slavery are memoirs, stories told after the fact. The letters from Lucy and Peyton are an unusual opportunity to hear enslaved people describe their lives in real time. Author Randall Miller edited the anthology "Dear Master." He says Peyton Skipwith was one of Cocke's most prized slaves.

Randall Miller: They developed a very close relationship partly because Peyton Skipwith was a very diligent and skilled stonemason who had great value because of his skill. He could be hired out and was hired out for various projects… Cocke also admired him because he was a devout Christian who was a temperance man as well. So in that respect he was a living example of what an enslaved person, a black person could be… Cocke in so much trying to make such a person in his image.

One of the beliefs that John Hartwell Cocke had in common with Thomas Jefferson was the idea that freed blacks and whites could never live peacefully together. Both

men thought emancipated slaves should be sent to colonies in Africa. And not just to return them to their mother continent.

> **Miller**: They could be agents of American civilization, of American Christianity, of American commerce if you will. They, the dark people manumitted here could in effect lift a dark continent if you will.
>
> [*Music*]

So in 1833, Cocke freed Peyton Skipwith, his wife and their six children to carry the Gospel to Africa. At the time there were about 2,000 people in colonial Liberia's capital, Monrovia. Peyton's correspondence described conflict with the local inhabitants.

> **Actor**: Monrovia, April 22nd, 1840. Dear Sir: I took my rifle in hand to go fight a savage king – about three days travel through the forest. Slept one night in the bush and took his town the next day. We set fire to the town and took our line of march for home. It is something strange to think these people of Africa are called our ancestors. In my present thinking, if we have ancestors, they could not have been linked to these hostile tribes in this part of Africa.

With his masonry skills and intrepid character, Skipwith became relatively prosperous in Liberia. And unlike other colonists he never returned to America.

> **Actor**: Dear Master: I am as well satisfied as I can be in this little community. And I must thank you, sir, for the care you had over me while I was young. I am blessed with a trade, for you has sent me to this country where I can speak for myself like man, and show myself to be a man, so fair as my ability allows me.
>
> [*Music*]

While Peyton Skipwith made a home in West Africa, his niece Lucy Skipwith was still enslaved in America. She lived on a plantation that John Hartwell Cocke owned in Alabama called Hopewell. At times, the place was entirely run by his slaves. It was Cocke's social experiment to prepare the people he owned for eventual freedom. Historian Randall Miller.

> **Miller**: if you taught such people to read, write be morally upright learn how to work and work diligently, so they could pay off their cost // you could in time free them because they would be responsible enough so they could succeed as free people and thus they could be sent to what was Liberia and set themselves up there and do well.
>
> [*Music*]

> **Actor**: Hopewell. November the 18th, 1855. My dear master: I am going on very well with the new loom and if it holds out and do as it is doing now, I shall be able to provide a-plenty for the plantation. I am very busy at this time trying to get the winter clothes all done before Christmas.

Cocke relied on Lucy Skipwith to report on conditions at Hopewell - though she wasn't his only source of news. Her letters reflect the intense hardship and danger inherent in being enslaved. She chronicles illnesses, injuries and deaths. And she pleads with Cocke for the future of her daughter Betsey, who was accused of stealing from a white neighbor that she'd been rented to.

> **Actor**: June 9th 1859. My Dear Master: It seems to be almost imposing on you to ask the favor of you to let the child come home. But I would thank you a thousand time if you would do so. I want to give her religious instruction and try to be the means of saving her soul from death. I hope that you will not sell her if you can possibly do anything else with her.

Lucy's letter worked. Cocke sent Betsey home.

> **Miller**: slavery was a constant negotiation. Obviously enslaved people were at a tremendous disadvantage, but they weren't passive and they used the resources that they had. And this is a really good example of

a resource that was used in order to negotiate something for your advantage. Always precarious. Always vulnerable. Nevertheless using the best that you have in order to gain something that you need.

[*Sounds of people chatting*]

At UVA, the Skipwith descendants pored over original letters from Lucy and Peyton.

It was hard to read the 19th century pen-and-ink handwriting.

Carole Malone: Something remove the - said factory. Wow. So someone this person had a slave factory. Wow.

Carol Malone of Cleveland is the great, great granddaughter of Lucy Skipwith. When

Malone read Lucy's letters in the book Dear Master, she was moved.

Malone: Well Lucy Skipwith, she was an extraordinary woman. She was able to write and advocate for her family. Keep her family together. And when I read the book, I made sense to myself because all of us are writers. All of us are advocates and activists in some way; just an incredible person.

Skipwith descendent Bill York was a bit skeptical at first about the University of Virginia's outreach to his family - especially when he found out what kind of building Skipwith Hall is.

> **York**: And when I discovered that it was facilities management I was somewhat underwhelmed at first.

But York changed his mind.

> **York**: I was thinking how appropriate to name it in the very line of work we would have been doing had we still been slaves doing the facilities management and the work… Let's face it, for a 197 years there was nothing that had the name Skipwith on it, so anything would be an improvement. I'm pleased to say I am a Skipwith. And someone remembered there was a man named Peyton.

> [*Music*]

Many people say that slavery is America's original sin. And that as a country, we still haven't come to terms with it. Former Brown University President Ruth Simmons says Brown is a stronger institution for having confronted its participation in slavery.

She says all colleges and universities with a similar past must be held accountable for their role in that history.

> **Simmons**: So a university today that had slave ties - maybe that's uncomfortable. But if you persist in telling a lie about your origins you are culpable. You're culpable today and the public has a right to judge you on that basis.

Simmons says this is more than just a moral argument.

> **Simmons**: The desired outcome is for our children to have a better life. The desired outcome is for our children to understand this history better. The desired outcome is for our children to be able to live together and cooperate and build stronger ties to each other. That's the outcome we're looking for. So not to go back and to punish people but to build on what we know to make sure we have a better a better future.
>
> [***Group sings***: *We Have Sinned*]

In April 2017, Georgetown University held a ceremony to offer a formal apology to the descendants of the 272 men, women and children who were sold in 1838. People sang and prayed. And several of the descendants spoke, including Sandra Green Thomas, the president of the GU272 Descendants Association. She said the pain of slavery may have lessened over the generations, but it is not gone.

Thomas: Our disappointments and the fortitude needed for daily survival are both dwarfed by the experiences and the strength of those stalwart people who were ripped from their home place and sent to Louisiana. There was no comparison to be made between the enslaved of the Americas and any other group today or in history. Their pain was unparalleled. Their pain is still here. It burns in the soul of every person of African descent in the United States.

A Jesuit priest offered an apology on behalf of his Catholic order, and President Jack DeGioia spoke on behalf of Georgetown.

DeGioia: To the members of the descendant community, to the women and men that we have been privileged to meet, to all of you we have not yet met, and to those that we are unable to meet, we offer this apology for the sins against your ancestors, humbly and without expectation.

[**Choir sings**: *Amazing Grace*]

More than 100 descendants attended the ceremony, including Meli Short-Colomb - the 63-year old chef from New Orleans. She's starting as a first-year student at Georgetown.

Meli: We sang Amazing Grace, and it was the most meaningful moment that I have ever been involved with that song because what was lost has been found.

For Meli, what's been found is crucial information about who her ancestors were, why they came to Louisiana, and who owned them. Also found: connections to family members torn from each other when the Jesuit priests sold them off. Meli hasn't just found her roots, but entire branches of her family tree. And now she's found a new purpose. Meli plans to major in African-American studies at Georgetown. She also hopes to work in the university's slavery archive, finding and sorting more documents to help others discover their history.

[*Music*]

You've been listening to "Shackled Legacy, Universities and the Slave Trade," a documentary from APM Reports. It was produced by me, Stephen Smith, and Kate Ellis. It was edited by Catherine Winter. We had help from Josie Fan, Josh Marcus and Jeffrey Bissoy-Mattis. Our web producer is Andy Kruse. The fact-checker is Eva

Dasher. Mixing by Craig Thorson.

The APM Reports documentary team includes Chris Worthington, Emily Hanford, Sasha Aslanian, and Suzanne Pekow. Thanks to our actors: T. Mychael Rambo, Traci Shannon, Eric Ringham, and Hans Buetow.

You can find out more about universities and slavery at our web site, APMReports.org. You can see photos of people featured in this program and our back catalog of more than 100 documentaries. You can also sign up for our podcast, Educate. And please, let us know what's on your mind. Go to APMReports.org.

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