Scarlet and Black


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Introduction

Scarlet and Black—A Reconciliation

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In September 1749 the slave ship Wolf left New York City for Africa where it would troll the west coast, eventually buying and imprisoning 147 Africans, most of whom were children. Before it returned to New York in May 1751, with its human cargo packed like sardines in its hold, it had littered the Atlantic Ocean with eighty-one dead black bodies—again, most of them children. They had succumbed to the vessel’s diseased environment, particularly the conditions that allowed twelve- to thirteen-inch worms to incubate the stomachs and intestines of its youthful captives. On May 21 the surviving sixty-six were auctioned off for sale by Philip Livingston, the Wolf’s principal investor/slave trader merchant. Seventeen years later, Livingston became a founder of Queen’s College, the school that would eventually be named for another son of a slave-owning family, Henry Rutgers.1 The first president of the college, Jacob Hardenbergh, and its first tutor, Frederick Frelinghuysen, were also slave owners.2

The Rutgers connection to slavery was neither casual nor accidental—nor unusual. Like most early American colleges Rutgers depended on slaves to build its campuses and serve its students and faculty; it depended on the sale of black people to fund its very existence. The faculty and curriculum at Rutgers and other early American colleges reinforced the theological and scientific racism that provided the ideological and spiritual justification for the free labor of Africans, the absolute power of slave owners, and the separation of the races.
Through their leadership of the state and regional boards of the American Colonization Society (ACS), men like John Henry Livingston (Rutgers president, 1810–1824), the Reverend Philip Milledoler (Rutgers president, 1824–1840), Henry Rutgers (trustee after whom the college is named), and Theodore Frelinghuysen, Rutgers’s seventh president, were among the most ardent anti-abolitionists in the Mid-Atlantic. Defending the ACS position that free blacks were better off colonizing and Christianizing Africa than becoming full-fledged citizens of the United States, Frelinghuysen, a passionate defender of Native American rights to their southeastern lands, proclaimed African Americans to be “a depressed and separate race” who were “licentious, ignorant, and irritated.”

The history of the long relationship between the American academy and American slavery and racism has only recently gained our attention. Confrontations over the Confederate flag and other Confederate memorials, demands for racial equality that migrated to American campuses from protests against the killing of unarmed blacks by heavily armed police and civilian whites, and the perceived rollback of the academy’s commitment to diversity and inclusion have all sparked renewed interest in the historic connection between the nation’s oldest colleges and the institutional racism that was forged in the holds of slave ships.

The book *Ebony and Ivy*, by MIT historian Craig Steven Wilder, has also drawn our attention to the marriage of American colleges to the slave economy and the cultural subjugation of Native Americans. In his book, subtitled *Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities*, Wilder documents how merchants leveraged the slave economy by investing in early American colleges. He shows how the benefactors, administrators, professors, tutors, and graduates of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Rutgers, among many others, became slave merchants and owners, Southern planters, evangelizing missionaries, scientific racist ideologues, and slavery apologists. Like historian Edmund Morgan, who demonstrated the dependence of American freedom on American slavery, Wilder proves that African slavery “subsidized” American colonies and colleges and was the “precondition for the rise of higher education in the Americas.” The American academy, writes Wilder, “never stood apart from American slavery—in fact it stood beside church and state as the third pillar of a civilization built on bondage.”

The 250th anniversary of the founding of Rutgers University is an appropriate time for the Rutgers community to do what other schools have done and are doing—reconcile with its connection to the enslavement and debasement of African Americans and the disfranchisement and elimination of Native American people and culture. For example, the revelations involving Georgetown University’s sale of 272 slaves in 1838 to save the Jesuit school from bankruptcy has recently garnered headlines. But Georgetown is but one of many
institutions studying their relationship to the heinous institution. There is the 2001 Yale study *Yale, Slavery, and Abolition*, published in tandem with the school’s 300th anniversary celebration, which looks at the way slave-trading money sustained Yale and its students and how Yale officials led the opposition that stopped construction in New Haven of what would have been the nation’s first black college.\(^7\) In 2003 Brown University issued its *Slavery and Justice Report* and in turn inspired Harvard students to dig into their institution’s history with slavery, resulting in the 2011 study *Harvard and Slavery: Seeking a Forgotten History*. The book looks at Harvard’s history with slavery from the colonial through the antebellum periods and the way that slavery is remembered at Harvard.\(^8\) And this year, 2016, has seen the exponential growth of the consortium Universities Studying Slavery (USS). Begun in 2015 when thirteen schools in Virginia established Virginia’s Colleges and Universities Studying Slavery (VCUSS), the USS now has expanded to include the Universities of Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina, as well as Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia.\(^9\)

These research projects have uncovered history that has led to a reckoning at colleges and universities. Georgetown, for example, has sought out the descendants of the slaves who were sold to pay the debts that kept it from closing. It has pledged to actively recruit these descendants and give them preferential status in the admissions process. It has also pledged to offer a formal apology, create an institute for the study of slavery, and erect a public memorial to the slaves whose labor benefited the institution.\(^10\) After heated debates over whether to change the name of Calhoun College (a residential college named after South Carolina’s arch proslaveryite and secessionist), Yale officials decided to keep the name as a way to encourage the campus community to confront and teach the history of slavery. It also, however, decided to name one of its new residential colleges after black rights activist Pauli Murray and to substitute “head of college” for the title “master” in all of the residential colleges.\(^11\) In ridding the school of the moniker “master” for heads of residential colleges, both Yale and Harvard followed Princeton’s lead. Princeton replaced “master” with “head of college,” while Harvard now calls residential college heads “faculty deans.”\(^12\)

Things changed at Virginia’s Washington and Lee University as well. In April 2015, President Richard Ruscio laid a historical marker on his campus to commemorate the lives of black men, women, and children who were bequeathed to the school in the estate of one of its benefactors.\(^13\) In his remarks on that occasion Ruscio noted that the marker was not the politically correct thing to do but that it was *historically* correct and “a step towards justice.” President Ruscio recognized that stories about slavery made people uncomfortable, but, he said, “Acknowledging those times when we failed in the past can serve to strengthen our resolve for the future.”
Scarlet and Black: Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History is presented in the spirit of Ruscio’s directive. Researched and written by Rutgers graduate and undergraduate students and history faculty member Camilla Townsend, it represents a first step in Rutgers’s journey of reconciliation with its history as a school built on the dispossession and dehumanization of Native Americans, Africans, and African Americans. It is by no means a complete history but a work in progress. It initiates the study of a long overdue history of a school that spans three separate New Jersey campuses (Camden, New Brunswick, and Newark) and five learning communities in New Brunswick alone. The 250th anniversary should be, and is, a time of celebration, but the writers of this first volume on African and Native Americans in Rutgers’s history also want it to be a time of reflection—reflection on Rutgers’s past as a way to improve its future.

Scarlet and Black has seven chapters of varying lengths and an epilogue. The chapters begin with the story of the way Native Americans were dispossessed of the land on which Rutgers was built years before ground was broken on the college. It looks at how and why Rutgers failed to enroll Native American converts to Christianity and at the ideological position taken by Rutgers’s leaders on the question of Indian Removal. The last chapter explains how Rutgers benefited from the land-grant Morrill Act of 1862, which allowed New Jersey to sell land taken from western Native Americans for the benefit of Rutgers.

The chapters in between our investigations of Native Americans address slavery in Rutgers’s history and slavery’s impact on African Americans in New Brunswick. First, we look at the way slavery figured in the political economy of New Jersey and the critical connection between the state and the Dutch Reformed Church. We show the wealth that was generated by slavery and the slave trade, and how and to what affect that wealth was transferred to Rutgers by its early benefactors. We then take a close look at a few of the wills researchers have uncovered. These wills reveal the premeditated inhumanity of slavery as leaders associated with Rutgers passed down people like property, separated children from parents, disposed of the aged and infirm, and exposed the illicit interracial sex that took place in the privacy of households. Here we trace the treatment of the parents of Sojourner Truth, the nineteenth-century freedom fighter whose parents were owned and bequeathed by Colonel Johannes Hardenbergh, whose son Jacob Rutsen Hardenbergh was the first president of Rutgers. From here our focus shifts more centrally to African Americans and how they survived, resisted, and negotiated their enslaved existence. We examine New Brunswick runaway ads for what they tell us about the resistance of local blacks and at the narrative of Ukasaw Gronniosaw, who was enslaved to the Frelinghuysen family, for clues about the physical and psychological trials of slavery. We identify Will, a slave who was hired out to help build Old Queen’s, the first building established at Rutgers. Our look at blacks in New Brunswick also
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surveys the landscape of the town as we demonstrate how black life was circumscribed by physical structures of unfreedom, particularly the gaol.\textsuperscript{14} We review the history that posits New Brunswick as an important stop on the Underground Railroad and complicate that history with information about the precarity of free and enslaved black life in New Brunswick. As Chapter 5 demonstrates, black precarity had a lot to do with the gradual emancipation laws in New Jersey, which did not free slaves born before 1804 and set terms of service for those born after 1804 at twenty-one years for females and twenty-five years for males. As ministers, faculty, and presidents of Rutgers justified the separation of blacks and whites and the removal of African Americans back to Africa, New Brunswick African Americans joined the national resistance movement and argued strenuously for their rights as American citizens.

As much of the history that \textit{Scarlet and Black: Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History} unveils, it only scratches the surface. There are still more records to scour, more wills to analyze, more early maps to scrutinize, more speeches to interpret, and more real lives to excavate. There is Rutgers’s relationship with blacks and Native Americans in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and its treatment of these populations as it expanded to Douglass, Busch, Cook, and Livingston Colleges in New Brunswick and Piscataway, and also to Newark and Camden. And, of course, yet to be included in Rutgers’s reconciliation is the important history of Rutgers and the black freedom movement. Still, though just a beginning, we believe that this history of Rutgers and slavery has many uses and we suggest ways to begin utilizing it in the epilogue, which represents the thinking of the Committee on the Enslaved and Disfranchised in Rutgers History, the committee established by Chancellor Richard Edwards and chaired by myself, to begin this reconciliation.

Scarlet and black are the colors Rutgers uses to represent itself to the nation and world. They are the colors our athletes compete in, the colors our graduates and administrators wear on celebratory occasions, and the colors that distinguish Rutgers from every other university in the United States. Here we use these colors to signify something else: the blood that was spilled on the banks of the Raritan River by those dispossessed of their land and the bodies that labored unrecompensed so that Rutgers could be built and sustained. We offer this history as a usable one—not to tear down or weaken this very renowned, robust, and growing institution but rather to strengthen it and help direct its course for the future.