

AN OVERVIEW

HARVARD & THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY INITIATIVE

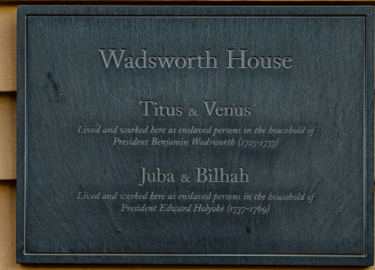
Why did Harvard choose to explore its entanglements with slavery?

Reckoning with Harvard University's entanglement with slavery began more than 15 years ago, as faculty members asked important questions and raised critical issues, leading to a series of undergraduate research seminars taught by Laird Bell Professor of History Sven Beckert. Harvard's 28th president, Drew Faust, advanced this research by establishing a committee on the University and slavery. In 2019, Larry Bacow, Harvard's 29th president, established the Presidential Initiative on Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery and appointed a committee representative of all of the University's Schools. Led by dean Tomiko Brown-Nagin at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute, this committee was charged with diving deep into Harvard's history of slavery. Their work culminated in The Report of the Presidential Committee on Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery. Released in April 2022, The Report details the University's historic ties to the enslavement of people of African descent and Native Americans in North America and the Caribbean. The Report also put forward a set of broad recommendations that seek to remedy the harms caused by Harvard's legacy of slavery.



To learn more about our path forward, please visit our website: www.harvard.edu/vice-provost-for-special-projects.

Scan the code to read The Report.



A plaque memorializing Titus, Venus, Bilhah, and Juba, four enslaved people who lived and worked in Wadsworth House in the 1700's, Harvard University, December 2023. Photo by Thunder Road Projects, Cambridge, MA.

Through The Report, the University acknowledged three difficult truths:

- 1 | Direct ties to slavery: Harvard leaders, faculty, and staff enslaved at least 70 people during the 17th and 18th centuries.
- 2 | Financial ties to slavery: Five men who made their fortunes from slavery and slave-produced goods accounted for more than one-third of all private donations and financial pledges during the first half of the 19th century.
- 3 | Intellectual ties to slavery: In the 19th and 20th centuries, several Harvard faculty and leaders promoted now debunked theories of race science and eugenics, ideas that underpinned Jim Crow segregation and continue to support white supremacy.

The Report also shines a light on the resistance, resilience, and excellence of individuals – starting with the first Black students at the University – who struggled against racial oppression, helping to transform Harvard and the world.



Attendees listen to a speaker at the Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery Initiative's Inaugural 2024 Symposium in the Richard A. and Susan F. Smith Campus Center. Photo by Thunder Road Projects, Cambridge, MA.

The Work Ahead

In 2022, the Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery Initiative was established to demonstrate the University's steadfast commitment to active pursuit of long-lasting repair. Led by Sara Bleich, vice provost for special projects, the mission of the H&LS Initiative is to tell the truth about the University's legacy of slavery and work to mend enduring harms through purposeful change grounded in Harvard's educational mission and The Report's recommendations. The Initiative believes that if the University enables collaborations, partnerships, and other strategic initiatives to address systemic inequities, direct descendants (those whose ancestors were enslaved by Harvard leaders, faculty, and staff) and descendant communities (those who are directly or indirectly impacted by chattel slavery) will be meaningfully impacted. As the Initiative advances over the coming year, it will continue to engage people in and outside of the University and focus its efforts on three core areas to propel this critical work forward — memorialization and education, advancing partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and supporting descendant communities.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED



Read The Report and explore resources by visiting legacyofslavery.harvard.edu/report and legacyofslavery.harvard.edu/resources.



Join the H&LS mailing list to receive our newsletter which includes updates related to the H&LS Initiative. Sign up at <https://mailchi.mp/harvard/sign-up-for-our-newsletter>.



Participate in the Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery: Tour Experience

which explores the University's entanglements with the institution of slavery through 10 stops in Cambridge, MA. Visit legacyofslavery.harvard.edu/tour-experience.



Join the H&LS Initiatives Listening and Learning Tour

to share your thoughts, questions, and ideas. Email legacyofslavery@harvard.edu to learn more.
