

*“A disgrace to all slave-holders”: The University of Chicago’s  
Founding Ties to Slavery and the Path to Reparations*

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Mr. Douglas’ slaves in the South were the subjects of inhuman and disgraceful treatment . . . they were spoken of in the neighborhood where they are held as a disgrace to all slave-holders and the system they support.<sup>1</sup>

The origin narrative of the University of Chicago does not begin with John D. Rockefeller in 1890. It does not even begin in the city of Chicago. It actually begins on a 3,000-acre cotton plantation in Lawrence County, Mississippi. Hundreds of enslaved African American men, women, and children lived and died on that plantation to make the University of Chicago, and its \$7 billion endowment, possible. The University of Chicago refuses to acknowledge this part of its heritage.

The plantation in question was originally owned by a Mr. Robert Martin. Located on the banks of the Pearl River just five miles south of Monticello, Mississippi (named as an homage to one of America’s founding slaveholders, Thomas Jefferson), the plantation offered ready access to New Orleans, a cen-

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1. *Chicago Press and Tribune*, 24 December 1858. This report on the conditions of the Douglas plantation was relayed to the *Tribune* by Daniel Brainard, professor of surgery at Rush Medical College.

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ter of the world cotton trade.<sup>2</sup> With approximately 150 enslaved workers, an industrial cotton gin, a textile plant, a modern sugar mill, and a private shipping dock, the entire plantation in 1847 was worth well over 5 million in today's dollars.<sup>3</sup> Martin and the enslaved African American workers who enriched him might otherwise have remained lost to the annals of history—simply another obscenely wealthy cotton planter who became rich off the backs of enslaved black workers. But as it turned out, Martin's daughter, Martha, had fallen in love with a dashing young Congressman from Illinois. That man was none other than Stephen A. Douglas, born in Brandon, Vermont, but who moved west and while still a young lawyer in Springfield, Illinois, received several high state appointments before being elected to the US House of Representatives in 1843 and reelected in 1844.<sup>4</sup>

Douglas was on the rise politically prior to the couple's wedding on 6 April 1847, but his financial prospects had been entirely unremarkable. Like George Washington before him, Douglas's solution was to marry a daughter of the Old South and, more importantly, marry into her enormous fortune. Her father dutifully arrived at the wedding ceremony with the deed to the Martin plantation in hand. The future of 150 enslaved men, women, and children hung in the balance. Martin offered his entire estate—filled with black families, their hopes, and dreams, to Stephen A. Douglas—as a wedding gift. Already a deft politician, Douglas knew that such a sizable fortune would be a powerful instrument to further catapult his political career. At the same time, he knew that

2. For more on the centrality of New Orleans to the world cotton trade, see Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York, 2014); and for its role in the domestic slave trade, see Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).

3. This figure is derived from a \$100,000 initial valuation in 1847 that was provided by Douglas's son Robert M. Douglas to his father's biographer in Frank E. Stevens, "Life of Stephen Arnold Douglas," *Journal of Illinois State Historical Society* 16 (October 1923–January 1924): 641. For more on the valuation and content of the estate, see Anita Watkins Clinton, "Stephen Arnold Douglas—His Mississippi Experience," *Journal of Mississippi History* 50 (May 1988): 3–4; and George Fort Milton, *The Eve of Conflict: Stephen A. Douglas and the Needless War* (New York, 1969), 34. The average price of a slave in 1847 was approximately \$600 according to "New Orleans Slave Sale Sample, 1804–1862," compiled by Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, University of Rochester, ICPSR07423-v2 (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2008), <http://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR07423.v2>. With 150 slaves, this would place the value of Martin's slaves alone at \$90,000. As such, we believe that the \$100,000 valuation that Douglas's son referred to was only for the value of the land and its improvements and did not include the value of the enslaved workers. Thus a more accurate estimate of the total inheritance is \$190,000. Throughout this essay we have used the widely accepted antebellum inflation estimate of a thirtyfold increase to convert 1847 dollars into today's dollars even as this method tends to underestimate the inflation of real estate prices, which, in most cases, appreciated at a much higher rate.

4. Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York, 1973); Martin H. Quitt, *Stephen A. Douglas and Democracy* (New York, 2012).

the political climate in Illinois would not allow him to openly own such a massive slave plantation. He and his father-in-law quickly devised a way for Douglas to have his proverbial wedding cake and eat it too.<sup>5</sup> The slave plantation would be put in Douglas’s wife’s name after her father passed away, giving Douglas plausible deniability if he was ever questioned about his ownership of enslaved people (and questioned about it he was).<sup>6</sup>

Douglas’s plan came to fruition sooner than expected. Robert Martin died just a few months after the wedding. In his will, Martin named Douglas the general manager of the entire 3,000-acre plantation and gave him a third of the operation’s profits with the balance going to Martin’s daughter—who was now Douglas’s new bride.<sup>7</sup> With this newfound fortune, Douglas and his family were set financially for life. The net income stream from such a large plantation financed his political ambitions, and if it were operating today would likely have amounted to nearly \$500,000 dollars per year adjusted for inflation.<sup>8</sup>

5. The notion that this arrangement was Douglas’s idea also came directly from Douglas’s son (Stevens, “Life of Stephen Arnold Douglas,” 641). See also Robert Martin to David S. Reid, 17 December 1844, in David S. Reed Papers, Duke University Library, as cited in Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 209; Robert W. Johannsen, “Stephan A. Douglas and the South,” *Journal of Southern History* 33 (February 1967): 30; and Clinton, “Stephen Arnold Douglas—His Mississippi Experience,” 4.

6. See, e.g., *Chicago Press and Tribune*, 30 November 1858, 29 December 1858; and James W. Sheahan, *The Life of Stephen A. Douglas* (New York, 1860), 435–43, which describe, among other things, how Senator Benjamin Franklin Wade of Ohio shamed Douglas on the Senate floor for Douglas’s ownership of slaves.

7. “Transcript of Will and Probate of Col. Robert Martin,” folder 11, box 55, Stephen A. Douglas Papers, Special Collections, University of Chicago. See also Clinton, “Stephen Arnold Douglas—His Mississippi Experience,” 5; and Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 211. For more on the legal status of women’s property rights (or the lack thereof) during this period, see Lawrence M. Friedman, *A History of American Law*, 3rd ed. (New York, 2005), 140–66, 367–89.

8. The average return on investment for a typical cotton plantation during this period was usually upward of 10 percent. Even in an earlier and less productive period for slavery between 1770–1810 (well before the mass implementation of the cotton gin), slaves (exclusive of land) delivered a 7–8 percent return on investment; see Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, 2014), 163. Returns on farmland were significantly higher especially when worked by slave labor. Additionally, slave productivity rose dramatically after this period, doubling between 1800 and 1820 and then doubling again from 1820 to 1840; see Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York, 2014), 127. While some of this productivity translated into higher valuations for slaves, much of it also found its way into higher net profits and capitalization rates for slave owners and their land. For more on slavery’s productivity, profitability, and how owners used torture and violence to drive it further upward, see Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*; and Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 244–79.

Life for the enslaved workers on the plantation, however, was far from enriching. Douglas received monthly updates from his semi-literate white plantation manager detailing the conditions of his plantation and the lives of the enslaved people who worked there. As a neophyte to the slaveholding business, Douglas was dependent on James Strickland, the plantation manager, who soon informed him that on his plantation, “[s]ome of the [workers] has [been] [troublesome].”<sup>9</sup> Old Bill wanted his freedom.<sup>10</sup> Nezer “drew his ax on the [overseer] & driver & has run away.”<sup>11</sup> Douglas left the whippings and the bloodhounds to his hired help. Simultaneously, his banker in New Orleans, Bander Williams, along with the cotton brokerage firm Ward, Hunt, and Company soon became his best friends. They covertly funneled the proceeds from his unfree laborers back to Douglas in the North to fuel his political rise and his personal fortune.<sup>12</sup>

With the enslaved workers and the land in Mississippi serving as collateral, Douglas leveraged this ghastly inheritance for all it was worth. He bought every piece of real estate he could get his hands on. His market timing, as it turns out, was perfect. So was his choice of location. The newlyweds had just moved to one of the nation’s most dynamic antebellum boomtowns—Chicago. The year after his inheritance, Douglas used the profits he had extracted from his holdings (and the financial security that commodified human beings offered) to buy a sprawling hundred acre lakefront estate on the South Side of Chicago.<sup>13</sup> Today, the neighborhood still officially bears his name but, since the Great Migration, local residents began referring to their community as Bronzeville.<sup>14</sup>

By 1856, after nearly a decade of income from slave labor that lined his pockets and enabled his entrance into the booming Chicago real estate market, Douglas had become a very rich man. In an effort to become an even richer man, he decided to expand his business activities into another booming industry—philanthropy. Hoping to further bolster the value of his land in the city of Chicago and develop the lots around it, Douglas sought a church part-

9. James S. Strickland to Stephen A. Douglas, 25 June 1853, Illinois Historical State Library, Springfield, Illinois, cited in Clinton, “Stephen Arnold Douglas—His Mississippi Experience,” 16.

10. James S. Strickland to Stephen A. Douglas, 25 January 1850 (*ibid.*, 12–13).

11. James S. Strickland to Stephen A. Douglas, 25 June 1853 (*ibid.*, 16).

12. James S. Strickland to Stephen A. Douglas, 15 December 1850 (*ibid.*, 8).

13. For more on Douglas’s real estate empire, see Helen Louise Busch, “The Fortune of Stephen A. Douglas” (MA thesis, University of Chicago, 1936). Busch, however, clearly following the historiography of her moment, willfully dismisses the profitability of Douglas’s plantation and the essential role it played in bankrolling his real estate speculation in Chicago.

14. For more on the history of black Chicago, see Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940–1955* (Chicago, IL, 2007); and Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago’s New Negroes Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2007).

ner to develop an institution of higher learning in his new headquarters. He settled on an upstart Baptist organization, donating ten acres of his Bronzeville homestead on the northwest corner of 35th Street and Cottage Grove Avenue. The land was valued at over \$60,000 (or \$1.2 million in today’s dollars). The recipient of this land, tainted with the blood of the enslaved, was a newly viable South Side institution—the University of Chicago.<sup>15</sup> Douglas himself laid the cornerstone to officially establish the university, served as the first president of the board of trustees, and had a building named after him at this original Bronzeville campus.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile in Mississippi, enslaved workers kept working. Soon, Douglas would work a third of them to death.<sup>17</sup> Not content with the profits he was earning in Lawrence County, Douglas decided to organize a forced migration of all 142 of his enslaved workers just one year after he donated the land they enabled him to underwrite the University of Chicago. Many of the enslaved had developed vibrant social networks in Lawrence County with family members both on the Douglas plantation and on others nearby.<sup>18</sup> Douglas could not have cared less.

When surviving members of the Martin clan offered to reunite an extended slave family on the Douglas plantation through the common practice of “swapping slaves,” Douglas didn’t even bother to answer his overseer’s letter. The fact that “[y]ou owns the Mother, brothers & sister of the 2 [women] that has 13 children,” and that “[y]our [N]egroes also begs for you to b[u]y them” meant nothing to him. Instead, Joe and Julia saw their sisters, their nieces, and their

15. Agreement between Stephen A. Douglas and John C. Burroughs, 2 April 1856, folder 2, box 3, Special Collections, University of Chicago. Douglas amended this land grant on 10 November 1856, giving the University of Chicago until 1 May 1857 to lay the foundation of the university and until October 1, 1857 to spend the first twenty-five thousand dollars on the university.

16. W. W. Everts, *History of the University of Chicago*, 3, folder 4, box 9, Old University of Chicago Records, Special Collections, University of Chicago.

17. J. J. Ligon to Mary Martin, 1 May 1859, Illinois Historical Library, Springfield, cited in Clinton, “Stephen Arnold Douglas—His Mississippi Experience,” 29–31. Ligon was a Louisiana-born merchant living in nearby Hinds County, Mississippi, who relayed to Douglas’s mother-in-law (who may have known many of these slaves personally) that fifty-three out of the 142 slaves who made the trip from Lawrence County to Washington County were dead within the first sixteen months and another ten or fifteen were ill and at risk of dying as a direct result of the exceptionally harsh labor regime put in place by Douglas’s plantation manager, Arnold Lashley. For more on these conditions, see below.

18. For more on the formation of slave families and households, see Brenda E. Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York, 1997); Wilma A. Dunaway, *The African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation* (New York, 2003); Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia, PA, 2004); Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge, MA, 2008).

nephews sold away to a man named “Irwin Scarborough” never to be seen again.<sup>19</sup> As painful as this was for Joe and Julia, the looming forced migration they were about to undertake would turn their situation from one that was heartbreaking to life taking.

Perhaps seeing the writing on the wall, Douglas appeared determined to extract as much labor as possible from his enslaved workforce in what turned out to be the final decade of the US version of the peculiar institution. Uprooting all 142 of his slaves from Lawrence County, Mississippi, to the less environmentally exhausted and more logistically advantageous Washington County, Mississippi, was a central part of this design.<sup>20</sup> At this new location, the workers encountered a new overseer who specialized in using violence to maximize output. His name was Arnold Lashley, and according to a Louisiana-born merchant who visited the plantation, the appropriately named “Lashley” drove Douglas’s workers relentlessly with absolutely no regard for their long-term well-being. They were, after all, not really his “property.” His contractual incentives with Douglas meant that he only made money on the profits extracted from slave labor—not from the capital value stored in the enslaved themselves. Therefore, working enslaved people to death was Douglas’s loss but Lashley’s (and to some extent Douglas’s) gain.<sup>21</sup> Lashley forced the enslaved to do “all his wet muddy bad [work],” while tightly managing the expenses needed for their survival. “Cost reductions” were a euphemism that insured “the [N]egroes was not half fed and clothed.” Lashley gleefully boasted to anyone who would listen that he would “let them die and they may die before I pay out [any] more money for them.” He was not bluffing. In one report to Douglas sent through the Martin

19. James S. Strickland to Stephen A. Douglas, 25 June 1853, cited in Clinton, “Stephen Arnold Douglas—His Mississippi Experience,” 17.

20. For more on the environmental destruction that resulted from slavery’s monocrop cotton production chain, including damage to the soil, rivers, and the atmosphere, see Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 73–96 and 176–208.

21. For slaveholders who were bearish on the future of slavery, ratcheting up the intensity of work, punishment, and productivity and using fierce austerity measures to cut food, clothing, and healthcare expenses to an absolute minimum were often an attractive alternative to selling slaves outright. Fears of panic selling constantly threatened to drive the prices for slaves sharply lower. For more on these wild swings in slave prices (often driven not by global cotton demand but by slave productivity), see Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, 174. Under normal circumstances, the purchase price expended on a slave would break even compared to the cost of a wage laborer after about ten years (Piketty, *Capital*, 163). However, if the value of slaves dropped (or owners feared they might because of threats to the existence of slavery), owners had a perverse incentive to work slaves to death before slavery was abolished at which time they would lose both the labor value and the capital value of enslaved people. As the prices approached zero, the rate of return on slave capital approached infinity. In such an environment (either of imminent abolition and/or of very cheap prices), a slave death meant almost nothing to an owner financially.

family, Douglas was informed that “you have lost 53 [N]egroes in 16 months” and “there is some 10 or 15 more that will die if there is not a change in management in a short time.”<sup>22</sup> Again, Douglas looked brutality in the face—a brutality that made him rich—and he did nothing.

Meanwhile, the University of Chicago was rapidly expanding. Using its slavery-funded endowment as collateral, the university began taking out a series of bank loans against the Douglas land to fund its operations. The magnificent gothic style buildings erected at the Bronzeville campus (that would later be reproduced at the university’s current location in Hyde Park) gave the new institution instant legitimacy and allowed it to develop a vast northern fundraising network.<sup>23</sup> Many of the cash donations secured by the early trustees were funneled into what is now the University of Chicago Divinity School. Antebellum northern Baptist donors viewed that department’s seminary program as being of central importance. The debt, however, was channeled in an Enron-like arrangement to Douglas’s land. Part of the reason for this was that during the run-up to the Civil War, Douglas’s slaveholding background and friendliness with slavery more generally made many northern philanthropists and church goers reluctant to donate to what was by then being called “Douglas University” by its critics.<sup>24</sup>

The Divinity School went so far as to physically distance itself from the Bronzeville land by relocating to Morgan Park in 1877 before rejoining the university community at its current location in Hyde Park in 1890. By 1881 the university had racked up a \$320,000 debt against the Douglas land (\$6 million in today’s dollars), while amassing a \$250,000 endowment for the Divinity School. All told, by 1881 the University of Chicago had secured well over \$10 million in today’s terms (not including interest) as a direct result of the Douglas land and the wealth produced by unfree laborers.<sup>25</sup>

Where some might see a problem, Chicago’s prosperous capitalists/philanthropists saw an opportunity. Rather than raise money to pay off the university’s bank loan (on a property now thoroughly tinged with the legacy of slavery), the university’s trustees and donors conspired in an effort to invalidate

22. J. J. Ligon to Mary Martin, 1 May 1859, Illinois Historical Library, Springfield, cited in Clinton, “Stephen Arnold Douglas—His Mississippi Experience,” 30. A number of Douglas’s slaves also ran away from the plantation as reported in the *Chicago Tribune*, 13 September 1858.

23. On the gothic buildings, see John Boyer, *The University of Chicago: A History* (Chicago, IL, 2015), 11, and, on the early fundraising efforts and the lasting effect of this donor network on the fundraising efforts to establish the current Hyde Park campus, 21 and 58–59.

24. Thomas Wakefield Goodspeed, *The University of Chicago Biographical Sketches*, vol. 2 (Chicago, IL, 1925), 17–18.

25. Boyer, *University of Chicago* 27, 32. This figure does not represent a complete accounting of the value of the university at this time nor does it consider the auxiliary financial benefits that it derived from its alumni, donor, faculty, and trustee networks.

the debt, then to renegotiate with the lender, and then finally to let the bank foreclose on the property with the intention of buying it back under a newly organized legal entity at a discount. According to one of the trustees close to the transition, “the creditors were indignant and declared that the board sought . . . to rob them of their money.”<sup>26</sup> It was a difficult accusation to refute (especially because it was true).

In completing the transaction, the trustees of the University of Chicago had one final asset it needed to preserve—its name. The board voted to change the name of the University of Chicago to “The Old University of Chicago” so that it could immediately create a new legal entity that would (once again) be called “The University of Chicago.” Through this scheme, the trustees could maintain the institution’s name recognition and many of its movable assets while leaving the old shell corporation holding the bag for its massive debt (that remains unpaid). The bank responded by setting an astronomical price to “recover the lost institution.” The trustees, in turn, simply decided to “reorganize a board and faculty” and find a new site for the “restored University.”<sup>27</sup> They ultimately landed in Hyde Park. It was a creative approach to financing that the trustees applied to the management of a nominally not-for-profit organization—a tactic that the University of Chicago continues to promote and exemplify today.

During the transition from the Bronzeville to the Hyde Park campus, nearly everyone involved with the University of Chicago believed that “the new university, as the outgrowth of the old one” would “rise Phoenix-like from the ruins of the past” (likely the origin of the university’s current phoenix mascot).<sup>28</sup> The Divinity School and its healthy endowment were already safely in exile and ready to rejoin the larger campus at a new site. Former faculty member William Rainey Harper was also ready to return but now with a promotion to university president. As university historian and current dean of the college John Boyer has noted, the majority of the funds raised for the Hyde Park campus, including the largest of all contributions from John D. Rockefeller, came from the existing network of donors to the Bronzeville campus and/or its Divinity School.<sup>29</sup> Thus, despite the university’s current denials, Douglas’s slave plantation was a necessary condition for the institutional structures, donor networks, faculty base, alumni community, and rigorous intellectual reputation that the University of Chicago rests upon today.

26. W. W. Everts, *History of the University of Chicago*, page 7, folder 4, box 9, Old University of Chicago Records, Special Collections, University of Chicago.

27. *Ibid.*, 8.

28. *Ibid.*, 19.

29. Boyer, *University of Chicago*, 26–32.



Nearly half of the new board members had a direct connection to the pre-1890 campus, and the loss of the Bronzeville location only served to inspire alumni, students, faculty, donors, and everyone else involved to “reclaim their reputations and their honor.”<sup>30</sup> All told, John Boyer laments the idea that the current Hyde Park campus could have “appeared out of the ethereal air of Harper’s genius.”<sup>31</sup> Instead, Boyer argued that “there was indeed no break, if one saw the University through a Burkean spectrum of transgenerational partnerships.” Consequently, the University of Chicago, in the words of its current dean, has “a plausible genealogy as a pre-Civil War institution.”<sup>32</sup> If taken before a contemporary court of law, the so-called Old University of Chicago would almost certainly be deemed an inseparable alter ego of the University of Chicago that exists today.

For current members of the campus community, the legacy of the University of Chicago’s slaveholding past is everywhere. The first 7,000 books brought to the Harper library in Hyde Park came from Bronzeville.<sup>33</sup> The misplaced brick woven into the wall of the Classics Building was ceremoniously brought from the rubble of the old Douglas Hall in Bronzeville. The university’s first endowed professorship, held today by James Redfield, is named for Edward Olson, who taught exclusively at the University of Chicago’s campus in Bronzeville. The university’s notoriously nerdy and quirky culture (“where fun goes to die” and the “life of the mind” reigns supreme) also comes directly from Bronzeville. In a fascinating detail that will certainly ring true for current students and alumni, “competitive oratorical contests [in Bronzeville] between Chicago and neighboring colleges served the roll of football games as occasions for student entertainment and sociability.”<sup>34</sup> And lest there be any doubt, a shining bust of Stephen A. Douglas himself, in all his slaveholding glory, is, to this day, cast into a bronze plaque in the Hutchinson Commons for all to see (fig. 1).

This legacy of slavery places the University of Chicago in a somewhat unique position relative to its peer group of elite institutions grappling with reparations.<sup>35</sup> While Harvard University benefited from several slaveholding

30. Ibid., 63.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., 59.

33. Willard J. Pugh III, “The Beginnings of Research at the University of Chicago” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1990), 158.

34. Boyer, *University of Chicago*, 16.

35. For the most in depth study of the relationship between American universities and slavery, see Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities* (London, 2014).

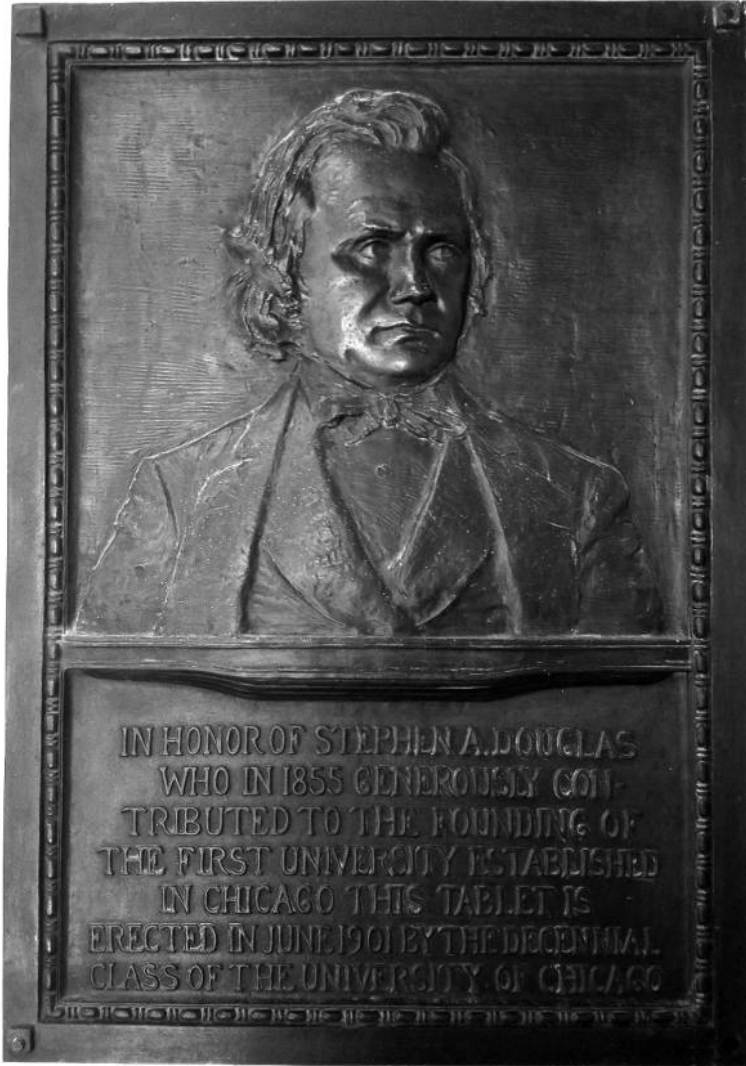


Figure 1. Plaque honoring Senator Stephen A. Douglas, founder of the University of Chicago, in Hutchinson Commons at the University of Chicago. Photo courtesy of the Reparations at UChicago Working Group. Color version available as an online enhancement.

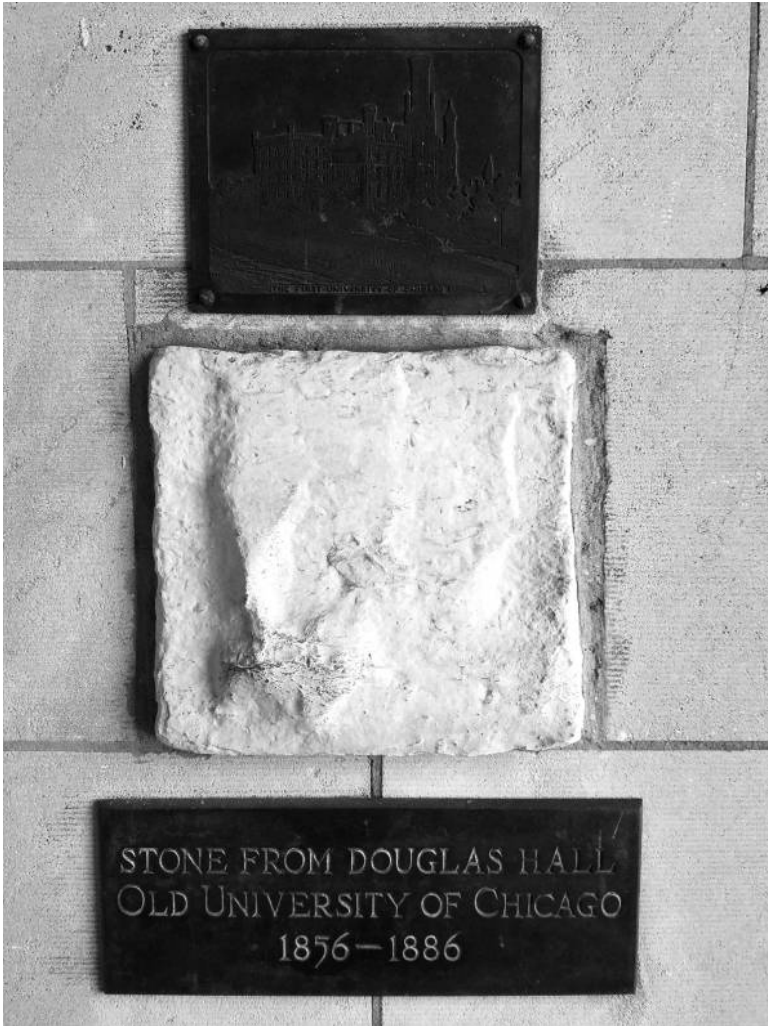


Figure 2. Memorial to the University of Chicago’s Bronzeville Campus Classics Building, University of Chicago. Photo courtesy of the Reparations at UChicago Working Group. Color version available as an online enhancement.

donors along the way, the University of Chicago was established, founded, and originally endowed by a slaveholder (see fig. 2).<sup>36</sup> While several buildings at Yale University are named after slaveholders, the land they rest upon was never donated by a slaveholder who broke ground on a building named after

36. For more on Harvard’s grappling with its legacy of slavery, see Sven Beckert, Katherine Stevens, and the students of the Harvard and Slavery Research Seminar, “Harvard and Slavery,”

himself, as Douglas did at the University of Chicago.<sup>37</sup> Even Georgetown University, where Jesuit priests sold enslaved African American workers explicitly to raise money to continue the university's operations, at least had a prior institutional history without such direct entanglements with slavery.<sup>38</sup> From this perspective, slavery didn't merely benefit the University of Chicago—slavery created it.

While these other universities certainly owe reparations and a large portion of their endowments to the descendants of enslaved people in Mississippi, the University of Chicago owes its entire existence to slavery. While other institutions might have chosen to avoid their entanglements with slavery at any given point (and simply carried on a bit poorer and bit smaller), the University of Chicago would simply be a historical nonentity without slavery. In this respect, its path forward toward reparations and a reckoning with its history must go infinitely beyond the anemic token gestures being voluntarily offered thus far by elite universities under the guise of reconciliation.<sup>39</sup>

#### BUILDING A MOVEMENT FOR REPARATORY AND TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

To effect reparations at the University of Chicago, the Reparations at University of Chicago (RAUC) Working Group began reaching out to organizations in 2016 and launching an awareness campaign on the university's slaveholding origins. The Bronzeville Historical Society (BHS), Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO), and coalitions such as Resist Reimage Rebuild (R3) and the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA), among others, have become principal collaborators in this effort (see fig. 3). The RAUC will continue to build coalitions and find connection points between other organizations moving forward. Central to the process of repara-

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Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, "University and Slavery: Bound by History" conference, 3 March 2017, <https://www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/event/2017-universities-and-slavery-conference>; Drew G. Faust, "Recognizing Slavery at Harvard," *The Harvard Crimson*, 30 March 2016; and Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy*.

37. Noah Remnick, "Yale Grapples with Ties to Slavery in Debate over a College's Name," *New York Times*, 11 September 2015.

38. "Report of the Working Group on Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation to the President of Georgetown University" (Washington, DC, Summer 2016), <http://slavery.georgetown.edu/report/>.

39. For more on why the current programs being perused at Georgetown and other universities are not (yet) a form of reparations, see Tressie McMillan Cottom, "Georgetown's Slavery Announcement Is Remarkable: But It's Not Reparations," *Vox*, 2 September 2016, <https://www.vox.com/2016/9/2/12773110/georgetown-slavery-admission-reparations>.



Figure 3. Sylvia Thomas (left), Oyekunle Oyegbemi (center), and Sherry Williams (right) of the Bronzeville Historical Society performing a libations ceremony at the Stephen A. Douglas Tomb in honor of the enslaved peoples of the Douglas Plantation. Photo courtesy of the Reparations at UChicago Working Group. Color version available as an online enhancement.

tory justice is community involvement, community repair, and transforming the institution itself to prevent future harm.

Throughout the summer of 2016 the RAUC met frequently with the Bronzeville Historical Society. Sherry Williams, president of the society and longtime community activist, is dedicated to preserving and protecting African American history in Chicago. The RAUC’s conversations with Williams have been both informative and enriching. From details of the Douglas plantation to insights on the history of Bronzeville and the Great Migration, the BHS has provided a useful grounding in the wider community. Of utmost importance, the BHS and the RAUC completed a trip to Mississippi to locate the descendants of the enslaved peoples of the Douglas plantation. Together, they will incorporate the descendants of the enslaved into the process of reparatory justice.

As part of its campaign to build coalitions and spread awareness, the RAUC participated in a Week of Action centering on racial justice and the University of Chicago. Held on the last week of September 2017, this series of events spotlighted the work and missions of community and campus organizations. On Tuesday of that week, the RAUC joined organizations such as UChicago

Socialists, the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (N'COBRA), Faculty Forward (the nontenured faculty union), and the newly recognized Graduate Students United as part of a campus-wide activist fair. At this interactive event organizations brought awareness to their campaigns, recruited membership, and shared their upcoming events. Representatives of the RAUC, Black Youth Project 100 (BYP 100), Students Working against Prisons, UChicago United, and UChicago for a Community Benefits Agreement sat on a panel on racial justice, each speaking to their own intersections of justice and the university.<sup>40</sup> Also that week, members of the RAUC discussed their research at the U.S. History Workshop. During the workshop, many noted scholars discussed the approach and the research of the RAUC, including Chicago faculty members Adam Green, Amy Dru Stanley, Amy Lippert, Destin Jenkins, Eric Slauter, Jane Dailey, Kenneth Warren, and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates. The national co-chair of N'COBRA, Kamm Howard, was also in attendance after previously offering considerable direction and guidance to the RAUC in its community efforts.

Later that week, the RAUC, N'COBRA, Graduate Students United, South Side Together Organizing for Power, and the American Association of University Professors at the University of Chicago, among others, came together and declared solidarity with one another's missions at a campus-wide march and rally.<sup>41</sup> Worthy of note was the march to the plaque of Stephen A. Douglas in Hutchinson Commons. Many of these organizations, with their intersections at racial justice, have already become valuable allies in the process of transformative justice at the University of Chicago (see fig. 4). In between those events, the RAUC had meetings with the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO). Founded in the 1960s, KOCO has become a staple of South Side organizing and activism. At the meeting with KOCO, the RAUC gained perspective on many of the issues faced by South Side residents and on how individuals are empowering themselves to change their material conditions. Principal among these struggles is a coalition formed by KOCO to secure a community benefits agreement (CBA) with the planned Barack Obama Presidential Center on the South Side of Chicago.

Another critical community group that the RAUC recently joined, at the invitation of University of Illinois at Chicago Professor Barbara Ransby, is the Resist Reimage Rebuild (R3) coalition. A coalition of over thirty organizations,

40. An archive of this discussion can be found at <https://www.pscptv.com/GuyEmersonMount/1MYGNXnmbBZxw> (pt. 1) and <https://twitter.com/GuyEmersonMount/status/913186681938886656> (pt. 2).

41. For coverage of this march, see Alex Ward, "Students Protest at Racial Justice Rally," *Chicago Maroon*, 2 October 2017, <https://www.chicagomaroon.com/article/2017/10/3/student-activists-speak-racial-justice-rally/>.



Figure 4. Maya Manour, Guy Emerson Mount, Caine Jordan, Kai Perry Parker, and Kamm Howard at the Week of Action March, Chicago. Photo courtesy of Guy Mount. Color version available as an online enhancement.

R3 includes groups such as Assata’s Daughters, Black Lives Matter Chicago, Fight for 15, Chicago Teacher’s Union, Organized Communities Against Deportations, Jewish Voice for Peace, Moms United Against Violence and Incarceration and many more. In R3 meetings, all coalition partners are deliberate and intentional about effecting change in their respective communities and through their projects. Of great significance is the recent addition of the RAUC’s transformative justice reparations model to R3’s recently adopted “Freedom Cities” platform. The aim is to expand the idea of a sanctuary city into an even broader anti-racist coalition where cities like Chicago can build alternatives to the current federal regime while decriminalizing and de-policing communities of color.

In the near future, the RAUC plans to extend both its scholarly and its community efforts to secure reparations. Off-campus partnerships will remain a central focus. By deepening connections with grass-roots organizations on the South Side of Chicago, the RAUC is anticipating that reparations remedies and transformative justice procedures will emerge directly from community-based discussions, rather than being dictated by scholars or administrators from the University of Chicago. Those harmed by the legacies of slavery, Jim Crow, and aggressive policing must control the process of reparatory justice and dictate its terms.<sup>42</sup> Institutions responsible for harm should be asked

42. For more on the University of Chicago’s postemancipation acts of discrimination, see *Chicago Defender*, 2 October 1937, which reported that the University of Chicago’s support for restric-

to listen first—and act second. A more direct engagement with The University of Chicago’s administration is scheduled for Spring 2018, but only after community organizations have consulted further among themselves regarding possible remedies. The hope is to then engage the university in a “truth and reconciliation” process that has been already under way. The university’s involvement at present should first involve listening, hearing, and gathering historical evidence both from scholars and from community members. After coming to terms with the facts, a reparatory reconciliation process aimed at institutional transformation and genuine community repair should proceed swiftly.

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Ultimately, the RAUC hopes that the discovery of the University of Chicago’s ties to slavery will offer an opportunity to reimagine reparatory and transformative justice on a national scale. The hope is that these experimentations at the University of Chicago will eventually offer an entirely new model for other institutions to follow. Many of the suggestions above have already emerged from discussions with survivors of the university’s actions. Many more will likely emerge in the coming months and years. While undoing the harm of slavery, Jim Crow, and ongoing acts of racial discrimination may feel like an overwhelming or even impossible task, wealthy universities offer a unique laboratory where people of good will can come together to think creatively and holistically about ways to repair (however partially) the monumental damage that these anti-black racist practices have done. If the survivors of crimes against humanity can mobilize collectively and provide a shining example of what is tangibly possible in terms of reparations, other collectives around the nation (and indeed around the world) will no doubt follow. If the nation-state in miniature that is the University of Chicago can find the strength to transform itself, perhaps the nation as a whole can find the strength to do so as well.

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tive covenants was well known by residents as “the motive power behind the Restrictive Covenants.” On the South Side, restrictive covenants were in fact often colloquially referred to as the “University of Chicago Agreement to Get Rid of Negroes.” For more on this, including the university’s financial contributions to support restrictive covenants, see Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940–1960* (New York, 1983), 135–70; and Lee Harris, “The University and the South Side,” *Chicago Maroon*, 15 September 2017.