
Statement on Penn's connections to slavery

June 28, 2018

President Amy Gutmann

Important research undertaken by undergraduate students in the Penn Slavery Project independent study supervised by Penn Professor Kathleen M. Brown, the David Boies Professor of History in the School of Arts and Sciences, has given us a clearer understanding of the depth and breadth of Penn's connections to slavery. This was a profoundly painful and odious part of our nation's history. No segment of American society or institution founded during the 18th Century, including the University of Pennsylvania, escaped its scourge. Far from it.

Members of the Penn Slavery Project reported their findings at the end of the fall 2017 semester. As a result of their work and additional research undertaken by the University, I charged Provost Wendell Pritchett, who holds a Ph.D. in History from Penn, with leading a Working Group to help outline the contours of additional research that should be pursued and to recommend next steps. The Working Group included Senior Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer Joann Mitchell; Kathleen Brown, the Boies Professor and Director of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies; Heather A. Williams, Presidential Professor and Professor of Africana Studies; and Dorothy Roberts, Penn Integrates Knowledge Professor and the George A. Weiss University Professor of Law and Sociology, the Raymond Pace and Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander Professor of Civil Rights, and Professor of Africana Studies. This exemplary team received research support from Arielle Brown, a program manager in Penn's Museum of Archeology and Anthropology, and Alexis Neumann, a doctoral candidate in the Department of History. The Working Group has now provided me with its report.

We now know that no fewer than 75 of the University's early trustees owned at least one enslaved person, including Penn's first Provost, William Smith. For 13 years, from 1757 to 1770, the University's trustees reimbursed Ebenezer Kinnersley, Penn's first professor of English and Oratory who also was a dormitory steward, for the work of an enslaved man that he owned. In this and other ways, the labor of enslaved people was used to support and care for Penn faculty and students. We know that the medical school's first faculty member, Dr. John Morgan, owned at least one slave, and that he traveled to Jamaica for fundraising from prominent slaveholding families. We also learned that the medical school's faculty, under the leadership of Dean William Horner, played pivotal roles in the development of racial pseudoscience based on the research of faculty members such as Professor Samuel Morton and Professor Charles Caldwell as well as medical school alumnus Dr. Samuel Cartwright.

Penn faculty and alumni were actively involved in framing the Constitution to support slavery and in administering state slavery laws. Alumnus and Professor of Mathematics Hugh Williamson was instrumental in arguing for the insertion of the three-fifths clause into the US Constitution, which counted enslaved persons as three-fifths of a person for the purposes of Congressional representation. Penn alumnus and Trustee, Judge William Tilghman, was a conservative interpreter of Pennsylvania's gradual manumission laws. Several alumni who owned enslaved people were prominent leaders or supporters of the Confederacy.

As an academic institution dedicated to uncovering and conveying the truth, the University is committed to advancing research that will enable us to more fully understand Penn's linkages to slavery. On behalf of the University, I thank the Working Group, accept its recommendations, and charge Provost Wendell Pritchett and Senior Vice President Joann Mitchell to partner with the Deans of the appropriate Schools to continue to illuminate the University's connections to slavery and its implications for the present and future. Specifically, for the near term, working collaboratively with our relevant Schools, Penn will:

- Support the ongoing research of the Penn Slavery Project under the leadership of Professor Kathleen Brown;
- Support research—under the leadership of Professor Dorothy Roberts and the Penn Program on Race, Science, and Society—on the impact of the medical school's pedagogy, research and medical practices on alumni and its lingering effects on medicine;
- Develop a University website to serve as a portal for and repository of research findings and other information;
- Join the Universities Studying Slavery consortium to collaborate with and learn from peer institutions; and
- Encourage Penn Schools and departments to offer educational and cultural programming that will inform our community about our past and foster opportunities for learning on campus and beyond.

We are grateful to Professor Brown and deeply proud of the work of the students in the Penn Slavery Project for their outstanding scholarship. Their work has advanced our understanding of the ways that Penn's early trustees, faculty, administrators, alumni, and students participated in and benefitted from the exploitation of enslaved people. Penn will continue this effort to learn still more about its past, disseminate our findings, grapple with the implications for our present, and work to secure an ever more inclusive future. The power of knowledge advances our common good; it enables us to be stronger and wiser; and it is essential to our moving forward together.

If there's news at Penn, you'll find it here. We strive to bring you faculty, staff, and student profiles, research updates, and the latest happenings on campus.

Office of University Communications

Suite 200

3901 Walnut Street

Philadelphia, PA (Pennsylvania) 19104-3608

215.898.8721 (tel: +1 215 898 8721)

upnews@pobox.upenn.edu (mailto:upnews@pobox.upenn.edu)

© 2018 Penn Today, Office of University Communications