

E. Carson Eckhard

Penn Slavery Project

Spring 2018 Report

April 15, 2018

Penn Slavery Project Spring 2018 Findings

In 2003, Brown University created a Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice, aiming to examine Brown's ties to the Atlantic slave trade and American slavery. In the years following Brown's announcement, universities across the nation have followed suit. As Penn joins the coalition of historical universities examining their complicated legacies, we must begin to reckon with the implications of our institution's involvement in American slavery. The Penn Slavery Project (PSP) aims to examine the ways in which the University of Pennsylvania was complicit in and benefitted from the Atlantic slave trade and African slavery.

Prior to this semester, research regarding Penn's connections to slavery centered on early trustees and their ownership of enslaved people or connections to the Atlantic slave trade. During the Fall 2017 Semester, the Penn Slavery Project found that, of the 28 trustees closely investigated by PSP, 20 owned enslaved people. Many of these men were prominent leaders in Philadelphia and the nascent United States. Although the extent of ownership and involvement in the slave trade varied heavily among the examined trustees, it is important to consider the ways in which their wealth and resources, supported by the labor or trading of enslaved Africans, benefitted the early university.

Our chief goal for this semester was to widen the scope of our research. In seeking to do so, we asked the following questions: How did the University benefit from enslaved people in

Philadelphia? How proximate were enslaved people to Penn's original campus? Aside from the ownership of enslaved persons by prominent University-associated men, how was Penn, as a major center of scholarship and research, involved in discussions around slavery?

In seeking to understand the nature of Penn's connections to slavery, we reflected on the meaning (and implications) of institutional "complicity" in a slaveholding society. The absence of sustained institution-wide exploitation of the labor of enslaved Africans does not render Penn "non-complicit" in slavery. It must be noted that institutional "complicity" does not necessarily connote the University's active and persistent ownership of enslaved persons¹. Rather, complicity encompasses the many ways in which universities as institutions of higher learning and epicenters of (supposed) intellectual progress relied on and contributed to America's slave society in the years prior to the Civil War. As began planning for the semester, our research group focused on asking research questions that we hoped would delineate Penn's narrative from that of other universities. We were especially interested in the lives of the enslaved people owned by the trustees, and the proximity of enslaved persons to the original campus at 4th and Arch Streets. Lastly, we wanted to examine the ways in which University-produced research contributed to the nationwide rhetoric surrounding slavery in the years preceding the Civil War.

This report aims to examine the nature of The University of Pennsylvania's ties to American slavery, particularly the ways in which the University faculty and curriculum contributed to pro-slavery rhetoric in the century following the American Revolution. The majority of my research centered on the early Medical School, founded in 1765 as a proprietary school by John

¹ Consider the connections of Georgetown or the University of Virginia: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/17/us/georgetown-university-search-for-slave-descendants.html>, or Neale, Catherine. "Slaves, Freedpeople, and the University of Virginia" M.A. honors thesis, University of Virginia, 2006, respectively.

Morgan, a Penn graduate. In conducting this research, I relied heavily on information found in the University Archives and the Library Company of Philadelphia. I also used the Ancestry genealogy database to search through relevant census and tax records. Correspondences between notable 19th century Penn Medical graduates and professors proved especially valuable in addition to their published works and lectures.

In seeking to understand the depth of these connections, I particularly focused on individuals whose research or actions influenced American racial thought. Although the work and opinions of individuals associated with Penn does not necessarily constitute the views of Penn as an institution, the work of these men, when analyzed collectively, points to an academic and medical culture of racial othering. Although our work ultimately aims to address the larger research and discourse trends at Penn in the years preceding the Civil War, the ways in which individuals associated with Penn contributed to America's emerging slave society is nevertheless significant to the history of the University.

Our findings this semester indicate that the depth of Penn's connections to American slavery are much deeper than previously thought. Because "complicity" comprises more than the ownership of enslaved people, Penn's connections to slavery reflect the many ways in which institutions benefitted both directly and indirectly from slavery. The early University campus, built and renovated by the Carpenters' Company of Philadelphia², likely was constructed at least partly by enslaved laborers. The architect and contractor, Robert Smith, owned at least one

² "PENN'S FIRST CAMPUS, 1749-1801:." University of Pennsylvania University Archives. Accessed May 30, 2018. <https://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/campuses/campus1.html>.

enslaved person and the Carpenter Company Bylaws clearly delineate the procedure for the use of enslaved people in construction³:

“Article XIII: If any member takes a slave apprentice, he shall pay to the President for the use of the Company, Twenty Pounds; or hire a slave as a journeyman, shall pay the sum of One Dollar for every month that he employs him, for the use as foresaid.”

Smith served as the contractor on the renovation of the academic “New Building” at Fourth and Arch Streets, as well as the first dormitory and Provost William Smith’s house. The possible construction of university buildings by enslaved people clearly constitutes the University directly benefitting from enslaved people. Furthermore, at least one enslaved person lived on campus, as Ebenezer Kinnersley, professor of English and Oratory, owned a man (likely) named Caesar⁴. The service of at least one enslaved man on campus also connotes a connection similar to those of other antebellum universities.

At this point, the majority of scholarship on slavery and institutions of higher learning have focused on the ways in which universities and their associates directly exploited the labor and bodies of enslaved people. However, Penn’s academic ties to slavery constitute a distinctly different type of connections, as individuals associated with Penn published research that heavily influenced pro-slavery rhetoric during the antebellum period. While the majority of my research focused on the Medical School, I also found that a Penn alumnus and professor, Hugh

³ Articles of the Carpenters’ Company, Philadelphia.

<https://diglib.amphilsoc.org/islandora/object/text:148093#page/21/mode/2up>

⁴ See Dillon Kersh’s Spring 2018 report for more information on Kinnersely

Williamson played an integral role in crafting the 3/5 Compromise at the Constitutional Convention.

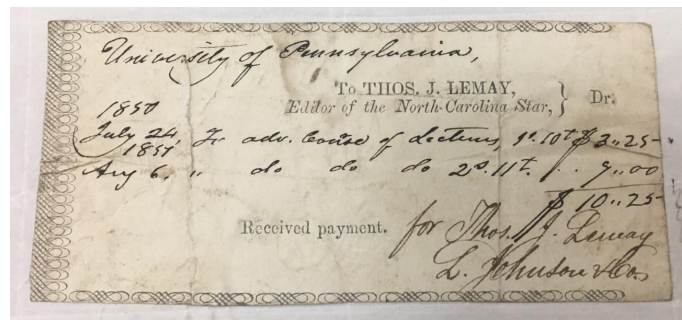
Born in 1735, Williamson was a member of Penn's inaugural class in 1757.⁵ Following his graduation, Williamson studied theology before being appointed to a math professorship at Penn in 1761. He taught until 1763, before leaving to study medicine at the University of Edinburgh⁶. At the Constitutional Convention, Williamson served as a delegate from North Carolina. At the Convention, Williamson was a frequent voice of compromise, recommending "that a free and slave population census be taken in support of the Three-Fifths Compromise." Williamson also "favored the extension of slavery until a future date in order to give all states conditions that they could accept in the Constitution." Williamson's contributions at the Constitutional Convention ultimately helped to shape the course of American democracy, as the 3/5 Compromise enabled the South to maintain a strong grasp on federal policy until the onset of the Civil War.

The Medical School also shaped American racial discourse during the antebellum period, as many Penn Medical graduates hailed from the South. Throughout the first half of the 19th century, Penn made concentrated efforts to recruit wealthy Southerners to its medical school, as exemplified by strong marketing efforts throughout the South. According to records in the Penn archives, of the 26 extant Medical School advertisements from 1851, sixteen are from Southern states. The remaining ten are from non-slaveholding states, with the majority being local or

⁵ "Hugh Williamson (1735-1819)." University of Pennsylvania University Archives. Accessed May 28, 2018. https://www.archives.upenn.edu/people/1700s/williamson_hugh.html.

⁶ Prior to the founding of Penn's Medical School, Edinburgh was the most popular medical school for Americans. The connection between Edinburgh's Medical School and Penn's Medical School remained strong throughout the late 18th and early 19th century, and both universities eventually became deeply involved in the study of racial difference.

proximate to Philadelphia⁷. In 1851, Penn placed advertisements for its Medical Schools in publications in Louisiana (3), Mississippi (1), South Carolina (3), North Carolina (1), Tennessee (2), Alabama (4), and Maryland (2). Publications include the *North Carolina Star* (pictured below) and the *Vicksburg Sentinel* and *The Daily Nashville True Whig*, among others. Of the ten advertisements placed in Northern publications, five were placed in Philadelphia-area papers. Two were placed in Washington DC papers, where slavery did not end until 1862.



It is worth noting that we have also found a receipt for a Penn Med ad in a New Orleans newspaper from 1822, which suggests that Penn's advertising throughout the South was a longstanding practice. In the coming semesters, we plan to examine the entirety of the Archives' receipts and map the geographic spread over the course of the early 19th century.

The geographic distribution of advertisements for the Medical School largely reflects its enrollment. The class of 1851 comprised students from across the US, Cuba, France and Canada. However, the majority of graduates hailed from Southern states.

Several Southern graduates of the Medical School became prominent proponents of racial pseudoscientists and medical leaders in the Antebellum South. Josiah Clark Nott (1804-1873) graduated from Penn's Medical School in 1827. Originally from Columbia, South Carolina, Nott later became a prominent physician and anthropologist in Alabama. Following his

⁷ General Administration Archives General, 1820-1930, UPA 3, Box 29. University of Pennsylvania Archives.

graduation from Penn, Nott worked as an anatomy demonstrator and lecturer until 1829 under Dr. William Edmonds Horner of Virginia, who later became Dean of the Medical School, and Dr. Philip Syng Physick. Nott's earliest extant publication is an "1843 article in the *American Journal of the Medical Sciences* entitled "The Mulatto a Hybrid-Probable Extermination of the Two Races If the Whites and Blacks Are Allowed to Marry."⁸ In the piece, Nott argues that "the Mulattos are intermediate in intelligence (and)... less capable of endurance than whites or blacks"⁹. Nott's argument aims to prove that racial difference constituted two distinct—and therefore incompatible—species. In 1844, Nott published *Two Lectures on the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Races*, which advanced his earlier argument of polygenesis, the "doctrine that human races are distinct and immutable, with separate origins"¹⁰.

In the years preceding the Civil War, Nott wrote *Types of Mankind* (1854) and *Indigenous Races of the Earth*¹¹. In both works, Nott advances the theory of polygenesis. *Types of Mankind* was published in Philadelphia, by Lippincott, Grambo and Co. Throughout the book, Nott attempts to create a scientific basis for white supremacy, often attempting to connect his scientific theories to religion. In this sense, Nott purposefully aligns his (pseudo)scientific claims with obvious political motives:

"The Caucasian races, which have always been the representatives of civilization, are those alone that have extended over and colonized all parts of the globe. The

⁸ Ibid, 109

⁹ Nott, "The Mulatto a Hybrid-Probable Extermination of the Two Races If the Whites and Blacks Are Allowed to Marry" (1843)

¹⁰ Erickson, 103

¹¹ Ibid, 104

Creator has implanted in this group of races an instinct that...drives them through all difficulties to carry out their great mission of civilizing the earth¹².”

Nott would continue to develop these theories through his correspondence with Dr. Samuel George Morton, a Penn alumnus and professor at the Medical School. In 1847, Nott wrote to Morton, “My Niggerology, so far from harming me at home, has made me a greater man than I ever expected to be—I am the big gun of the profession here¹³.” Morton attended Penn, graduating with a B.A from the College in 1820 before studying at Edinburgh. After returning to Philadelphia in 1824, Morton began practicing medicine. In 1839, he was appointed to a professorship at Penn Medical, where he taught until 1843. During his time as a faculty member, Morton taught and ethnology, Morton advanced polygynist theory through his study of phrenology (also known as craniometry), the study of skull size and volume as a measure of racial difference¹⁴.

Morton published “*Crania Americana*” in 1839 while a professor at Penn. The work divides mankind into five distinct races, ranked by supposed intellectual capacity. Morton writes of the “Ethiopian Race:”

“Characterized by a black complexion...the negro is joyous, flexible and indolent: while the many nations which compose this race present a singular diversity of intellectual character of which the far extreme is the lowest grade of humanity¹⁵.”

¹² Nott, *Types of Mankind* page 77

¹³ Nott, Josiah C., regarding Negroes of Mobile and New Orleans, 1847 June 1, 1849 June 27. [7389 F 77]. Box 2, Folder 83. Samuel George Morton papers, 1832-1862, Library Company of Philadelphia.

¹⁴ Erickson, 103

¹⁵ Page 7, Morton, Samuel George, and George Combe. *Crania Americana*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1839.

Crania circulated widely throughout the United States, and it quickly became the leading text on racial difference. Morton collected 867 human skulls during his lifetime, which remain at the Penn Museum. As he conducted his research, Morton meticulously labeled and tattooed each skull according to ethnicity.

In 1840, Morton apparently taught a course on racial difference at Penn Medical School. Five of his lectures on the subject survive at the Library Company of Philadelphia; topics include phrenology, characteristics and temperaments of each race, and various strategies for racial categorization. In his first lecture, Morton states that “it is assumed that the physical characteristics which distinguish the different Races, are independent of external causes,” shortly after citing the mythic Biblical flood as evidence of polygenesis. Morton’s lectures and publications¹⁶ reference Biblical events and Divine creation as support for racial difference.

Other notable doctors who studied at Penn Medicine include Samuel A. Cartwright, who published “Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race” in 1851. Cartwright suggested that enslaved people who attempted to run away suffered from “drapetomania,” the “disease causing negroes to run away¹⁷.” Cartwright claimed that slavery was both scientifically natural and divine-mandated. His works were widely circulated throughout the South and he corresponded with several Confederate leaders, including Jefferson Davis¹⁸. Dr. Charles Caldwell, who graduated with his medical degree in 1796 also rose to prominence in the American School. His

¹⁶ Lectures on the Varieties of the Human Species, circa 1840. Box 5, Folder 1. Samuel George Morton papers, 1832-1862, Library Company of Philadelphia.

¹⁷ Cartwright, Samuel A. "Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race." PBS. Accessed May 30, 2018. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h3106t.html>.

¹⁸ Samuel A. Cartwright and Family Papers, Mss. 2471, 2499, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.

publication *Phrenology vindicated, and Antiphrenology Unmasked* (1838) supported Morton's claims. Caldwell also advanced the belief that slavery was natural.

The physicians of the American School often corresponded with Southern political leaders. In *Types of Mankind*, Nott proudly notes Morton's influence on the prominent South Carolinian Fire Eater John C. Calhoun¹⁹:

"A Correspondence ensued between Mr. Calhoun and Dr. Morton on the subject, and the Doctor presented to him copies of the *Crania Americana*... which Mr. Calhoun studied with no less pleasure than profit²⁰."

The "Correspondence" Nott references began in 1844, when Calhoun was serving as Secretary of State; Morton meanwhile had retired from his professorship at Penn a few months prior. According to Nott, Calhoun began corresponding with Morton because he believed that "England pertinaciously continued to interfere with our inherited Institution of Negro Slavery" and "although he could not foresee what course the negotiation might take, (he) wished to be forearmed for any emergency²¹." Morton's *Crania*, published while he was a professor at Penn, therefore served to influence policy debates on a national level during the Antebellum period.

Nott, Cartwright, Caldwell, Morton and their colleagues provided a scientific rationale for American racism. Their ideas, circulated widely throughout the South, heavily informed pro-slavery rhetoric. In *Types of Mankind*, Nott wrote, "Nations and races, like individuals, have each an especial destiny: some are born to rule, and others to be ruled. No two distinctly-marked

¹⁹ It should be noted that Calhoun, in 1837, delivered an address in which he claimed that slavery was a "positive good."

²⁰ Nott, *Types of Mankind*, page 51

²¹ Ibid, 51

racess can dwell together on equal terms²².” Alexander Stephens, Vice President of the Confederacy, referenced the ideas espoused by Morton and his colleagues in his infamous “Cornerstone Speech,” delivered in 1861:

“Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner- stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.”

As previously stated, the beliefs and publications of individuals cannot be equated to the beliefs of Penn as an institution. Nevertheless, the American School was largely centered at Penn Medical School, and some of its graduates became the most vocal authorities on the supposed science of racial difference. As exemplified by Morton’s extant lectures on the subject, racial science was a component of medical education at Penn by the mid-19th century. The publications of its graduates, considered collectively, represent the most influential and widely-circulated works of ethnographic pseudoscience of the antebellum period. Medical degrees from Penn rendered the “science” of these physicians credible, and their medical education made their practices possible. Their works were circulated widely throughout the South, and their views ultimately formed the basis of many pro-slavery arguments in the years preceding secession.

In the coming semesters, we hope to continue to examine the nature of Penn’s connections—and contributions-- to slavery in antebellum America. There is far more research to be done. Particularly, we plan to look into how and where Penn Medical School obtained

²² Ibid, 77

cadavers and anatomical specimens for dissection. Prior to the late 19th century, body-snatching was a common means of obtaining bodies for anatomy courses, and stealing the corpses of poor or enslaved people was a common practice in America's early medical schools. We plan to examine the possibility that Penn Medical students or faculty engaged in this practice. Furthermore, we plan to continue mapping the ways in which Penn benefitted from slavery financially, and we hope to learn more about Caesear, the enslaved man owned by Ebenezer Kinnersely.

As Penn continues to explore with its connections and contributions to slavery in America, it is imperative that the University acknowledge its ties to slavery, and engage in critical conversations regarding reparative actions. Although Penn did not own enslaved people, the University *was* complicit in slavery. The early college benefitted from the labor and service of enslaved people, while many of Penn's 18th century trustees profited from the exploitation of enslaved people or the Atlantic slave trade itself. The early Medical school became the epicenter of American racial pseudoscience in the 19th century. Penn cannot claim that there are "no traces of slavery in its DNA," as the headline of a Philly Tribune article proclaimed in 2016.²³ Penn must acknowledge that its past claims of innocence in a slaveholding society are false. We also want the University to join Universities Studying Slavery (USS), an international coalition of universities examining and discussing their ties to slavery. We believe that Penn should update the biographies and archive pages of trustees and alums who owned enslaved people. The

²³ Simmons, Sheila. "UPenn Claims No Traces of Slavery in Its DNA." The Philadelphia Tribune. September 09, 2016. Accessed May 30, 2018. http://www.phillytrib.com/commentary/upenn-claims-no-traces-of-slavery-in-its-dna/article_0d8072c4-96ff-5617-82d0-f00b0ab4c910.html.

buildings in the Quadrangle named for slaveholders should be updated with plaques that describe the legacies of these men, including the ways in which they profited from slavery.

Penn's narrative is distinctly different from that of many other universities. Unlike Georgetown (or even UVA and UNC), we have no list or documentation of enslaved people held by the University. However, the actions of the University and its faculty undoubtedly influenced the lives of enslaved people, and the University must reckon with this by committing itself to continued research and discussion. Our goal in conducting this research is to spark conversation among Penn administrators, faculty, students, alums and the Philadelphia community. We hope that our findings instigate a constructive dialogue that will shape the interpretation of Penn's history. Penn must acknowledge its complicity and contributions to American slavery, and facilitate a university-wide conversation on what this means for interpretations of Penn's legacy in the present and future.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Articles of the Carpenters' Company, Philadelphia.

<https://diglib.amphilsoc.org/islandora/object/text:148093#page/21/mode/2up>

Cartwright, Samuel A. "Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race." PBS. Accessed May 30, 2018. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h3106t.html>.

General Administration Archives General, 1820-1930. UPA 3, Box 29. University of Pennsylvania Archives.

Lectures on the Varieties of the Human Species, circa 1840. Box 5, Folder 1. Samuel George Morton papers, 1832-1862, Library Company of Philadelphia.

Morton, Samuel George, and George Combe. *Crania Americana: Or, a Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America, to Which Is Prefixed an Essay on the Varieties of the Human Species, Illustrated by Seventy-eight Plates and a Colored Map*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1839.

Nott, Josiah Clark, George R. Gliddon, Samuel George Morton, Louis Agassiz, William Usher, and Henry S. Patterson. *Types of Mankind: Or, Ethnological Researches, Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races, and upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo &, 1854.

Nott, J. C. "The Mulatto a Hybrid — Probable Extermination of the Two Races If the Whites and Blacks Are Allowed to Intermarry." *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 29, no. 2 (1843): 29-32. doi:10.1056/nejm184308160290201.

Nott, Josiah C., regarding Negroes of Mobile and New Orleans, 1847 June 1, 1849 June 27. [7389 F 77]. Box 2, Folder 83. Samuel George Morton papers, 1832-1862, Library Company of Philadelphia.

Samuel A. Cartwright and Family Papers, Mss. 2471, 2499, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La.

Secondary Sources

Erickson, Paul A. "The Anthropology of Josiah Clark Nott." *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers*, 1986, 103-20. UC Berkeley.
http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/anthpubs/ucb/text/kas065_066-013.pdf

Guillory, James Denny. "The Pro-Slavery Arguments of Dr. Samuel A. Cartwright." Vol. 9, no. 3, 1968, pp. 209–227., www.jstor.org/stable/4231017. Accessed 29 May 2018.

"Hugh Williamson (1735-1819)." University of Pennsylvania University Archives. Accessed May 28, 2018. https://www.archives.upenn.edu/people/1700s/williamson_hugh.html.

Humber, John L. "Williamson, Hugh." Neuse River | NCpedia. Accessed May 19, 2018. <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/williamson-hugh>.

"PENN'S FIRST CAMPUS, 1749-1801:." University of Pennsylvania University Archives. Accessed May 30, 2018. <https://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/campuses/campus1.html>.

Wilder, Craig Steven. *Ebony and Ivy*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011.

