

ADDRESSING THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY IN THE FOUNDING OF AMERICAN COLLEGES

Forgetting is a crucial factor in the creating of a nation—Ernest Renan, 1882

There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism—
Walter Benjamin, 1940

What are Americans always so insistently innocent of?—Toni Morrison, 1992

WHEREAS, recent scholarship, such as Craig Steven Wilder's *Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery and the Troubled History of American Universities* (2013), has uncovered the extent to which the earliest and most prominent American colleges established in the colonial period were founded on the structural racism of slavery and the theft of indigenous land; and

WHEREAS, in spite of the official amnesia at the heart of U.S. nation-building, and in spite of persistent anti-racist efforts, the effects of this foundational racism, this "document of barbarism," persist in the university to this day; and

WHEREAS, in 2003 Brown University, under the leadership of president Ruth Simmons, acknowledged its historical involvement with slavery and in 2006 issued a report documenting the role of early college benefactors in the slave trade, and the history of Brown's being named for a slave-trading family and being located in Rhode Island, a state that had been important in the Atlantic slave trade; and

WHEREAS, the College of William and Mary has acknowledged that it owned and exploited slave labor from its founding to the Civil War and that Atlanta's Emory University, the University of South Carolina, the University of Virginia and institutions of higher education in the North as well as the South were built, brick by brick, by slaves; and

WHEREAS, *Ebony and Ivy* documents the relationship between higher education and the Atlantic slave trade, demonstrating that "the academy was the third pillar, along with religion and the state, of a civilization built on bondage" and that slavery contributed significantly to the rise of American colleges; and

WHEREAS, Harvard, founded in 1638, faced a financial crisis in the 1640s and sought to resolve it by raising funds from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England to create an "Indian College," which never enrolled any Native American students; and whereas Dartmouth was founded in 1769 with a special mission of educating Native Americans but graduated only twenty Native Americans in two centuries, and, at one point had more slaves on the campus than faculty and students; and

WHEREAS, Princeton (1746), Columbia (1754) and Rutgers (1766) were among the eight colleges founded during the peak of the slave trade and were subsidized by merchants,

slave-traders, and planters, who frequently willed their plantations to endow Northern schools that recruited to campus the sons of Southern and West Indian planters as a means of securing funds; and

WHEREAS, as some colleges have focused on their later role in the anti-slavery movement, others have also begun to reject what Toni Morrison calls "American innocence" and acknowledge past injustices, by the creation of symposia, lectures and other memorials; and

WHEREAS, a stronger response to the past involvement in slavery and structural racism would be to go beyond a rejection of what Renan calls "forgetting," and address its consequences in the present—including a continuing pattern of under-funding of colleges that serve predominately the working class and people of color, and an emerging pattern of re-segregation of colleges based on race and ethnicity:

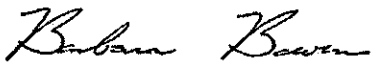
RESOLVED, that AFT urge colleges and universities with which it has relationships to find appropriate ways of memorializing and addressing American higher education's historic involvement in slavery and structural racism; and

RESOLVED, that AFT build on its important current work on diversity in higher education, and reaffirm its commitment to end structural and institutional racism in U.S. colleges and universities, by, for example:

- **opposing legislation against affirmative action in college admissions and faculty/staff hiring;**
- **opposing cuts to programs in ethnic studies;**
- **supporting research on race and racism in higher education;**
- **supporting opportunities for faculty research and curriculum development that will wrestle with the academy's history of involvement in slavery and structural racism; and**
- **facilitating members' access to relevant scholarship through its publications and its resources, such as its Tools for Teacher on the webpage; and**

RESOLVED, that AFT work to expose and end policies and practices, intended or not – such as the use of a single high-stakes test to determine admission to four-year colleges - that facilitate or advance the re-segregation of American higher education on the basis of race, ethnicity and class; and

RESOLVED, that AFT use its publications to inform members of the ways that the interests of benefactors can still distort or undermine the academic goals of institutions today.



President



Secretary