

THE GEORGETOWN SLAVE SALE: HOW UNTOLD STORIES SHAPE THE NARRATIVE OF TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Aysha S. Ames*

SUMMARY

On June 19, 1838, the Maryland Jesuits and Georgetown College (now Georgetown University) sold more than 272 enslaved people from Jesuit-owned plantations in southern Maryland to Henry Johnson and Jesse Batey - plantation owners in southern Louisiana.¹ The school sold the slaves in order to cover some of its debts, and the sale was incremental in supporting the school.² Approximately one-third of the sold slaves, 91 in all, were nowhere to be found in any historical record in Louisiana.³ These “lost Jesuit slaves,” had actually never left Maryland. I am a descendant of one of those “lost” slaves.

Drawing on genealogical records, Georgetown’s archives, and my own personal connection to the sale, this scholarly project will explore ways in which the legality of slavery has resulted in many untold and hidden stories. This early-stage project will begin with understanding how slaveholding was commonplace for many prestigious educational institutions.⁴ And, how ties to slavery in a vast variety of ways directly and indirectly contributed to the success of these institutions.⁵ It will also explain how the law gave these

* Director of Legal Writing, Fordham Law School.

¹ Georgetown Slavery Archive, Sale of Maryland Jesuits Enslaved Community to Louisiana in 1838; *Articles of Agreement between Thomas F. Mulledy, of Georgetown, District of Columbia and Henry Johnson and Jesse Batey*; Rachel Swarns, *272 Slaves Were Sold to Save Georgetown. What Does it Owe Their Descendants?*, N.Y. Times, April 16, 2016, at A1.

² *Id.*

³ Terrence McCoy, *They Thought Georgetown’s Missing Slaves were ‘Lost.’ The Truth Was Closer to Home Than Anyone Knew*, Washington Post, April 28, 2018.

⁴ Jennifer Oast, *Institutional Slaveholding Churches, Schools, Colleges and Businesses in Virginia, 1680-1860* (2016).

⁵ Many institutions, like Georgetown, are now acknowledging their ties to slavery: Brown University; Colby College; Columbia University; Emory University, Harvard University;

institutions protection from not only fully disclosing their slaveholding histories, but also prevented former slaves and their descendants from knowing this history. Finally, the article will also offer suggestions for institutions, like Georgetown, to make meaningful amends for the wrong they have done.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Princeton University; Rutgers University; University of Cincinnati; University of Mississippi; University of Pennsylvania; University of South Carolina; University of Texas at Austin; University of Virginia; Washington and Lee, William & Mary; Yale—to name a few.