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Founded by Abolitionists, Funded by Slavery:
Past and Present Manifestations of Bates College's Founding Paradox

An Honors Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the American Studies Program
Bates College
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By
Emma Soler
Lewiston, Maine
April 1, 2020

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“Truth is power and it prevails.”
—Sojourner Truth

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Abstract

Bates College marketing posits that the school was founded by abolitionists and has been open to all from our start, and that these historic facts make our campus particularly inclusive and committed to social justice. This framing of our college is limited at best and damaging at worst. As a leading progressive institution with a stated mission to educate a diverse student body, we face a moral imperative as well as a practical benefit to more accurately tell our complex origin story. Bates College was founded by Oren Cheney, an abolitionist. It was also funded in part by enslaved people's labor through a large donation from cotton textile tycoon Benjamin Bates. This thesis outlines this paradox and provides historical context regarding capitalism, abolitionism, and higher education in antebellum America. In doing so, I argue that Bates College did not and has not escaped the ubiquity of American slavery. Cheney's acceptance of the Bates donation exemplifies the compromises that often occur when individuals that benefit from a system attempt to work against it. That this inconsistency was common and likely unavoidable does not diminish the paradox's impact; rather, Bates College needs to acknowledge and address this impact as it continues to benefit the institution. I describe the rising awareness on campus of this complicated history and reflect on my own journey to understand this material. It is my hope that this thesis provides historical information, contemporary analysis, and practical tools for those that carry this work forward.

Introduction

I started my last year of college in the same way I began my first one: in the woods for four days with a group of first-years. Orientation week at my school, Bates College, includes an outdoor trip led by upperclassmen meant to ease adjustment pains and introduce students to their new home. Annual Entering Students Outdoors Program (AESOP) uniquely requires all new students (with a few exceptions) to participate in the student-led program. Thus, for four days at the end of the summer, almost all entering students share the experience of becoming acquainted with Bates through AESOP trips and AESOP leaders.

The AESOP program kicks off with a scavenger hunt. My participation as an AESOP leader in this icebreaker activity made me surprisingly and acutely aware of what doe-eyed first-year students know—and don't know—about their new school's history. During the hunt, groups of first-years walk around campus, stopping where various upperclassman leaders sit to answer leaders' questions, perform skits or sing songs for small tokens. After a quick winning round of rock-paper-scissors with my coleader, I set up shop next to Ladd Library, where I perched on a brick wall and waited for AESOP groups to visit me. As an archetypal history nerd, I chose to ask the groups trivia about the College's founding. I posed three questions: Who founded Bates College? Who was Benjamin Bates? And how did Benjamin Bates make his money?

I was surprised both by what the first-years knew and what they did not know. Almost every group responded immediately to my first question (Who founded Bates College?) with either "Freewill Baptists," "abolitionists," or "Freewill Baptist abolitionists." This was usually followed by silence and awkward glances regarding the second and third questions (Who was Benjamin Bates? And how did Benjamin Bates make his money?). With some prompting, someone might offer that Benjamin Bates donated money to the colleges, perhaps, or that he was

an industrialist. Only a few students knew that he was a textile manufacturer whose wealth was made in part from slave-picked cotton.

While my experience was anecdotal and not scientific by any means, the opportunity to speak with the majority of the first-year class upon their arrival to the college gave me a unique change to gauge the prevailing understanding of institutional history held by the youngest members of campus. The first-years' common knee-jerk reaction—"abolitionism"—suggested that language about our abolitionist founder is heavily deployed throughout the recruitment process. It was equally interesting to me that almost no one knew how Benjamin Bates was linked to the college or how he got rich. Why did these students know what they knew? I began to ruminate on this question.

This was not the first time I had thought about my college's history. As a prospective student, I was drawn to Bates College in part because it was advertised as oriented towards social justice from its founding. As a sophomore, I was introduced for the first time to the paradoxes that this overly optimistic story concealed. Bates *was* founded by Oren Cheney, an abolitionist. Yet the school was also funded at its start in large part by Benjamin Bates, a cotton textile manufacturer whose wealth relied on slave-picked cotton. During the AESOP scavenger hunt, I asked the first-year students about their knowledge of Bates history to gauge both what they understood about the community they were entering as well as what they had not yet had the chance to understand yet.

My interest in the connection between Bates and slavery arose in part from Craig Steven Wilder's 2013 book *Ebony & Ivy*.¹ In *Ebony & Ivy*, Wilder argues that higher education enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with slavery from its start and that this relationship still

¹ Craig Steven Wilder, *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*, First U.S. ed. (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

impacts colleges and universities today. I remember watching a class presentation on the text as a high school senior in 2015, and even in 2020 it is still the seminal text on universities and slavery. *Ebony & Ivy* surveys histories of the first schools founded in what is now the United States. Thus, the text focuses primarily on the most extreme examples of racism within the history of higher education.² Additionally, most of the schools examined in *Ebony & Ivy* were founded before the abolitionist movement came into full force. As a college founded by abolitionists, Bates (and similar schools) fall outside of the scope of Wilder's work and outside of his focus on particularly abrasive histories. Seven years after Wilder's text was published, the landscape of historical consciousness in higher education has changed significantly. Due to Wilder's and others' work, schools have started to acknowledge and respond to their pasts. It is time to consider cases like Bates which have particularly complex relationships to nineteenth-century enslavement. As a school that seems outside of Wilder's critique, but even now is impacted by the compromises made by its abolitionist founder, Bates College has an opportunity to expand the scope of higher education's reckoning with its history and to encourage other schools to participate in honest self-evaluation. By showing how even abolitionists could not escape the evils of enslavement, Bates College can demonstrate that no part of the United States is free of slavery's legacy.

I write this thesis to my scavenging first-year AESOP students—namely, I write this thesis to myself four years ago. As I graduate, I fear that much of the work myself and others in my class have done will be repeated from square one. My hope is that this thesis will disrupt this inevitable four-year cycle of circular activism by transmitting much of my own knowledge and research to the next students, faculty, and staff that pick up this topic. The organization of this

² I will expand more on schools that Wilder discusses in Chapter 4.

thesis aligns with this goal—I have organized chapters in the order that I built my understanding of Bates’ history. This will guide the reader through complicated ideas in an intuitive way. I hope that this thesis serves as a resource for anyone that wants to complicate their understanding of Bates’ history or to simply learn more about higher education’s connections to slavery. In laying out what I consider most relevant and critically examining my own challenges and shortcomings as a researcher, I hope others will be able to push more effectively for change in the future.

This thesis is centered around four questions:

1. Why did the first-years I encountered have a selective understanding of Bates history?
2. What parts of the story were they missing?
3. How does divergence between the marketed Bates origin story and a fuller history shape our campus?
4. How has the campus responded to this conflict and what are potential steps the school could take?

Chapter 1 begins where I started this year: with first-years and their limited historical knowledge. “Founded by Abolitionists” asks where their shared understanding came from. I turn to online marketing material and programming from the Office of Admission to argue that recruitment texts utilize an overly positive view of Bates’ history in order to claim that Bates has a uniquely inclusive environment.

Chapters 2 through 4 turn back the clock to the nineteenth century. Chapter 2, “Gaps in the Archives,” asks if we can add specificity to Bates’ history. Upon encountering gaps in sourcing, I use archival theory to understand how silences are products of power relations which are not separate from the archives themselves. In order to understand these underlying power relations, Chapter 3, “Lords of the Library,” looks at nineteenth-century capitalism, slavery, and the North, as well as the ways other colleges were financed by slavery in this time period. Through this, we see how ubiquitous slavery was and how this resulted in its omnipresence in colleges and universities. Yet Bates’ abolitionist founding sets it apart from other schools.

Presumably, abolitionists would not have wanted to accept money linked to slavery even in a slave-dependent economy. So, Chapter 4, “Clean Hands,” looks into abolitionist ideology—how did abolitionists understand the economy and how did they attempt to use it to their advantage or to construct an alternative system? I conclude that Bates founder Oren Cheney would likely have been aware of a variety of responses to the paradoxes he faced and that he eventually chose pragmatism over purity.

Once I have looked at the economic and political context that Benjamin Bates and Oren Cheney operated within, I jump back to the present, asking how these historical trends and the disjunction between our advertised origin and actual founding story impact campus today. In Chapter 5, “It’s in the Air in Maine,” I argue that without a more accurate representation of our history, even good faith efforts to improve racial equity on campus will not be successful. Only honest acknowledgement of our history will make space for honest evaluation of our present. Through conversations with faculty and staff in offices and departments across Bates, I saw how individuals have already begun this work. Yet we still need a coordinated effort to change the predominant narrative of our institution’s uncomplicated moral purity. My last chapter, “Reparations,” offers ideas about next steps. In this chapter, I outline the recent national and higher-education-level resurgence of the reparations movement and consider how this work might translate at Bates.

In full, this thesis suggests that Bates College must change the way it talks about its institutional history by encompassing and embracing its own paradoxical founding while also acknowledging the structures and context that Oren Cheney and Benjamin Bates responded to. I argue that efforts to address racial inequity on campus will not be successful without this shift.

Last, I suggest that a coordinated institutional effort in this area would open up new space for other schools, and the country as a whole, to recognize the ubiquity of slavery's legacy.

Methods and Ethics

American Studies is an inherently interdisciplinary field and my methods are reflective of this approach. The thesis uses a range of sources: among them are archival documents, institutional texts, interviews, casual conversations, personal experiences, books, articles, and websites. Archival research took place in the Lewiston Public Library Lewiston Collection and the Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library at Bates College. I began this thesis intending to work primarily in the archives but widened my focus when I encountered gaps in sourcing. Secondary research helped me understand these gaps and see contemporary connections to this history. Interviews were conducted with Bates faculty, staff, and student. These interviews further explored contemporary implications and made this thesis more of a community conversation than just an individual exercise. In order to place minimal pressure on interviewees, some interviews were not recorded. Others deemed most important to quote were recorded. Interviews took place where participants were most comfortable—usually in their offices, and sometimes in neutral spaces like the Bates Bobcat Den.

My whiteness has deeply impacted my work, and as a result I have sought out best practices from Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), a national organization of white people organizing for racial justice. The SURJ value “accountability through collective action” is particularly useful. It means that organizers “are in relationship with and take direction from

people of color.”³ This idea is fundamentally important to research about Bates and slavery, and in particular reparative efforts. If these efforts are driven solely by a white woman like myself, they will not encompass the variety of experiences of Bates and needs of harmed communities.

I began thesis research guided by this value. I reached out to the leadership teams of two race-based affinity clubs at Bates, Women of Color and Amandla! Black Student Union, to ask if my research could be of any use to club initiatives.⁴ My interest in working in conjunction with these clubs was motivated by two thoughts. First, that my research would be limited if it was overseen mostly by myself and my advisor, who are both white. Second, that the topic of my research might be of interest to clubs engaged in activism about the marginalization of black and brown students at Bates. I hoped that my research questions could shift to make them more of use to these clubs. I was disappointed when both groups indicated that they did not want to be involved. However, over the course of the year, I have come to an understanding of this interaction. I regret my assumption that the leaders of these clubs might be interested in my research just because they were black and brown. In particular, Women of Color is made up of Bates women from a wide variety of racial backgrounds. Some club members may have no interest in histories of blackness at Bates simply because they are not black. It was a fundamental error on my part to turn to these groups solely because some of their identities aligned with my research. I can understand why these folks were not interested in engaging with me on something so deeply personal given that I had little prior relationship with them. I wish that I had reached out in a more thoughtful way, potentially only to students of color that I already knew well or that were already interested in disrupting the narrative around Bates’ founding.

³ Showing Up for Racial Justice, "SURJ Values," <http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/surj-values.html>.

⁴ I reached out to the leadership teams of these clubs via email. In retrospect, I wish I had first contacted friends I knew in the clubs and asked them to connect me with club leadership.

In place of more formal partnership, I have worked informally with students and faculty (both white and of color) throughout this thesis process. Initial conversations with fellow seniors Nell Pearson, Ke'ala Brosseau, Annabel Mahon, and Ursula Rall as well as junior Perla Figuereo—all of whom did their own original research on Bates history—helped me understand the lay of the land as I started the year. In particular, Rall expressed a personal interest in the research and as a result I asked her to work with me on a presentation and conference proposal about Cheney and Bates. I was lucky that she said yes. We worked on these project together throughout the year. This thesis would not be the same without Rall's willingness to share her own experiences as a black woman at Bates and her desire to engage thoughtfully with historic material. I regret that at times my research needs made our relationship transactional and forced Rall to be a spokesperson for her race. I am also extremely grateful for our professional and personal relationship.

Ethical questions about white activism are crucial to this thesis and thus they will be expanded on throughout the thesis. Much of my work considers the limits of altruism when performed by the privileged few, both historically (by Oren Cheney) and today (by me). My interest in Bates' history comes in part from my desire to understand how my own activism is limited by my white privilege. It is clear that this thesis lacks depth in its evaluation of Bates' racial climate, in part due to my whiteness. While I attempt to mitigate this issue by referencing *Bates Student* article and interviews, I am under no illusion that I do more than graze the surface of varying and complex lived experiences of Bates students of color. This thesis is also limited insofar as there is no one defining "racial climate" at Bates—rather that racial climate is experienced differently by each individual. However, in the interest of motivating change, I have acknowledge that inequity exists on campus, discuss a few examples of that inequity that I have

seen and heard about, and consider how a lacking origin story has misrepresented campus climate and hidden these inequities.

Throughout my research process, I have debated how much to center personal reflections on whiteness in my final product. I intended to provide a lengthier reflection on my identity within my introduction but was not able to do so due to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Bates College transitioned to remote learning two weeks before my final thesis deadline and I had to finish writing and research from home. This meant two things: first, I was not able to add all intended final touches due to lack of resources and time. Second, and most important, my argument may need to be reframed based on when the thesis is being read. Much of my argument rests on the premise that the higher education community is experiencing a massive shift in understanding of institutional histories and that this should be a top priority at Bates due to its unique history. It seems unlikely that as I finish this thesis the issue of slavery at Bates will be on Bates administrators' minds, given the much more pressing global health crisis. So, while I wrote much of the thesis prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and while I have preserved my language of urgency, a 2020 reader should keep in mind that the timeline for changes may need to shift due to circumstance.

Yet even a 2020 reader who will read this work in the midst of global and local crises should consider its immediate relevance. This thesis considers equity at Bates, and at this very moment, Bates students have varying access to resources and support as they are scattered across the globe. While my work focuses mostly on the on-campus manifestations of privilege and power, the same inequities have come into play even as students depart campus. Additionally, once the pandemic is over, Bates' paradoxical history and the impact of how we talk about it will remain. It is my hope that even in a year (or five), this thesis will still be a valuable resource.

This issue and the power dynamics underlying it have existed for 165 years, they are operating now, and they will continue to manifest themselves on campus in the future.

Chapter 1: Founded by Abolitionists

“[Benjamin Bates] will always be remembered, not associated with cotton mills and railroads, grand enterprises they may be, but with this College.”

—Oren Cheney, Bates College Presidential Address, 1876

When I began this thesis, it seemed that first-year Bates students had a very limited, and often idealized, understanding of Bates history. How did this hegemonic narrative come to be? How is it produced and reproduced on the Bates campus and throughout the Bates community? In this section of the thesis, I examine texts from various corners of campus in order to answer these questions. Content from the Bates website, recruitment materials, conversations with administrators, faculty, staff, and students, as well as general observations from my past four years at Bates all contribute to my understanding of the discourse around Bates’ early history. These texts utilize an overly flattering historical narrative that lacks the complexity and nuance that is necessary to understand Bates’ early history. As I investigate the roots of the first-years’ answers, I argue that Bates marking uses a selectively positive version of the College’s origin story in order to present our campus as uniquely inclusive.

Pat Thompson’s article, “A Foucauldian Approach to Discourse Analysis,” provides a framework for analyzing campus texts.⁵ According to Thompson, discourse is a way to understand what is generally taken as truth and what is left out of that narrative. She says that discourse is culturally constructed and constructs knowledge, therefore producing and reproducing power. She also writes that power is not simply a top-down phenomenon; rather, it is a negotiation between the communicator and the receiver. The communicator does not need to be in power to influence this discourse. Most importantly to this work, Thompson writes that

⁵ Pat Thomson, "A Foucauldian Approach to Discourse Analysis," <https://patthomson.net/2011/07/10/a-foucauldian-approach-to-discourse-analysis/>.

discourse is a way to think about what has been and is taken generally as “truth.” In the case of the AESOP scavenger hunt, it was “truth” that Bates was founded by Freewill Baptist abolitionists. Yet any truth is incomplete and constructed, thus this is not the full story of our founding. Knowing more about the founding itself—and the relationship between founder Oren Cheney and early financier Benjamin Bates—allows us to look into today’s Bates marketing with a keener critical eye towards what we see as truth.

Oren Cheney’s abolitionism was both zealous and longstanding. When Cheney was young, he witnessed his father aide fugitive slaves as a part of the Underground Railroad.⁶ Later, as a student at Brown University, Cheney took part in an antislavery rally that fueled his ardent abolitionism and persuaded him to dedicate his life to the cause. He quickly transferred to Dartmouth College, which was known to be more accepting of antislavery sentiment than Brown. Cheney’s political beliefs were supported by his religion. He was part of the Freewill Baptists, an egalitarian religious sect characterized in part by their radical antislavery advocacy. By 1853, Cheney had become an assistant editor at *The Morning Star*, a Freewill Baptist newspaper. During the following ten years, he published weekly antislavery columns and speeches. Thus, Cheney’s life up until the founding of Bates College was characterized by his devotion to undoing the wrongs of enslavement.

In 1847, as Cheney was perfecting his abolitionist speeches, Benjamin Bates was exploring the Androscoggin River as a potential site for a new textile mill.⁷ In a hundred-year anniversary edition of the *Lewiston Sun Journal*, Daniel Dexter imagined what ran across Bates’ eyes as he first gazed upon the mighty Great Falls of the Androscoggin. He writes that Bates saw

⁶ Emeline Stanley Aldrich Burlingame Cheney, *The Story of the Life and Work of Oren B. Cheney, Founder and First President of Bates College* (1907), 4, 32, 78-79, 127.

⁷ Bates Manufacturing Company, "The Story of Bates Manufacturing Company: Weavers to a Growing Nation for a Century," 1950.

in the Falls “cotton—not tons of white water...bales coming up from the South to flow out in evergrowing rolls of fine fabrics.”⁸ Bates left with a profound desire to establish industry in Lewiston that rivaled that of Massachusetts textile towns. By 1850, Bates had secured the funds and started the Bates Manufacturing Company. Over the next two decades, Lewiston became the epicenter of Maine’s textile progress, and Benjamin Bates developed a large personal fortune.⁹ The Bates Manufacturing Company sourced cotton from Francis Skinner, a Boston-based cotton factor who was also a college trustee from 1868 to 1873.¹⁰ Thus Bates College’s cotton connection goes beyond just Benjamin Bates’ wealth, as Skinner and other associates were middlemen for the cotton industry and important influences on early college decision-making. According to Robert Caron, a tour guide at Museum L-A in Lewiston, the Bates Manufacturing Company imported cotton from various locations in the South. Thus, even though some of Bates’ donations to the College came after the close of the Civil War, his wealth was still partially reliant on slave-picked cotton.¹¹

By 1855, as Bates’ mill was finding its footing, Cheney had started the Maine State Seminary, a religious preparatory school in Lewiston.¹² The school had rocky financial beginnings. Over its first decade, Cheney would dedicate himself fully to fundraising, writing articles, hiring teachers, and overseeing the physical building of his new school.¹³ The Maine State Seminary’s start was in part complicated by ongoing conflict over funding with the two

⁸ Daniel Dexter, "Bates Has the Stuff," *Lewiston Sun Journal*, August 1950.

⁹ Bates Manufacturing Company, "The Story of Bates Manufacturing Company: Weavers to a Growing Nation for a Century."

¹⁰ Bates College, "Bates Magazine, Fall 2019," Bates College, https://issuu.com/batescollege/docs/bates_magazine_fall_2019.

¹¹ Personal conversation with Robert Caron, tour guide at Museum L-A in Lewiston, Maine. April 3, 2018.

¹² Oren B. Cheney, "Eulogy on the Life of Benjamin Edward Bates," *Bates Student* 1878, 144.

¹³ Cheney, *The Story of the Life and Work of Oren B. Cheney, Founder and First President of Bates College*, 106.

other Freewill Baptist schools that existed at the time: Hillsdale College and New Hampton Academy.¹⁴ Thus it seems likely that much of Cheney's energy during the 1850s and 1860s was focused on securing financial backing for his new school and mitigating criticisms of its very existence.

The issue of funding is what ultimately brought Cheney and Bates together. Cheney pursued Bates as a potential donor, and quickly Bates became the leading financier of the college.¹⁵ His donations increased in size throughout his life, eventually totaling approximately \$200,000 (roughly equivalent to a multimillion dollar donation today).¹⁶ In Cheney's 1876 presidential address, he recognized the importance of Bates' philanthropy. "We stand on our feet today as a College, because his strong arm is around us and keeps us from falling," Cheney said.¹⁷ In 1864, Maine State Seminary became a four-year college and was renamed Bates College after its loyal patron, Benjamin Bates.¹⁸ The key irony in this deceptively simple history is that Bates, a textile mill manufacturer partially dependent on slave-produced cotton, was funding an *abolitionist* school. This is an irony which was only once directly acknowledged in Bates marketing and communications materials I looked at for my research.¹⁹

This history—an abolitionist founder, a cotton tycoon, a paradoxical relationship—

¹⁴ Alfred Williams Anthony, *Bates College and Its Background: A Review of Origins and Causes* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1936), 174.

¹⁵ Alfred W. Anthony research notes, undated, Dressler Family Collection of Alfred Williams Anthony Papers, Series 1, Box 1, Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, Bates College.

¹⁶ Anthony, notes, undated, Dressler Family Collection of Alfred Williams Anthony Papers, Series 1, Box 1.

¹⁷ Bates College, "Report of the President of Bates College for the Academic Year ... 1878/03," *Report of the President* (1925).

¹⁸ "September 1857: The Maine State Seminary Opens," Bates College, <http://www.bates.edu/150-years/months/september/maine-state-seminary-opens/>.

¹⁹ A 2020 *Bates News* story, "Beyond 'Founded by Abolitionists': Students and Faculty Undertake a More Inclusive Examination of Bates' Founding Story," provides a clear overview of the connection. However, as far as I know, *Bates News* is not primarily used for recruitment and thus I do not count this article as an "advertising text." I will discuss this story in more depth in Chapter 5.

contrasts significantly with the first-years' response "abolitionists." It is clear that Bates recruitment materials would have trouble broadcasting this complicated story in its brief interactions with prospective students. Recruitment materials and presentations have limited time and space and thus must select only some historical facts to be included. The scavenger hunt suggested that abolitionists and Freewill Baptists were part of the preferred narrative. But how exactly is this narrative transmitted? And what does the top-down communication include? Telling of early Bates history usually offers a question that has outward-facing value for the institution: "How has Bates been progressive from its start?" rather than a more curious and critical question like, "How did Bates measure up to its stated values at its start?"

A common description of the origin can be found across the Bates website, in written materials, and in conversations on campus. It is as follows: "Since its founding in 1855 by Maine abolitionists, Bates College has welcomed men and women from diverse racial, ethnic, religious and economic backgrounds."²⁰ This quote is found on the Bates website under the Mission and Outlook section. Similar statements appear in the Bates Viewbook (the most substantive print communication with prospective students), the Explore Bates web page, and Bates 150-year anniversary celebration web pages.²¹ Institutional descriptions of the founding emphasize two facts: that the school was founded by abolitionists and that it was always open to women and people of color. This construction of a flattering historical narrative is in turn reproduced on campus as individuals share this story.

Bates' online storytelling is accessible to anyone with internet access and an interest in

²⁰ Bates College, "Mission and Outlook," Bates College, <https://www.bates.edu/about/mission/>.

²¹ "Bates College Viewbook," Issuu, https://issuu.com/batescollege/docs/2016_adm_viewbook_issuu_sm; Bates College Office of Admission, "Explore Bates," Bates College, <https://www.bates.edu/admission/explore-bates/>; Tim Larson, "Faith by Their Works: Our Progressive Tradition" (Bates College, 2005).

Bates. Yet, from my experience as a prospective college student, I know that admission visits are one of the most common ways to learn about a school.²² Bates even has a fly-in program “Prologue to Bates” for first-generation students and students from underrepresented backgrounds that includes a travel scholarship if needed. Thus, in-person Office of Admission messages are transmitted not just to students who have the financial or geographic resources to visit Bates, but a truly diverse group of prospective students. In order to understand how entering first-year students gain knowledge about institutional history, I participated in an Office of Admission campus tour and information session. These sessions can vary between presenters, thus my experience is anecdotal and cannot be generalized to all tours or information sessions. Yet, I did get a sense of which narrative is favored by the Office of Admission through a look at the tour guide handbook, a campus tour, and an information session. Together, these texts present a rosy view of Bates history and use this history to make claims about campus today.

The Office of Admission tour guide manual, which makes bulleted suggestions for what tour guides should discuss, recommends that students talk about Bates’ “unique” history at the beginning of a tour as it passes Hathorn Hall.²³ The manual itself describes Bates as simply being founded in 1855 and open to all from its start. In all capital letters after this sentence, the manual reads, “We still strive for inclusivity. This suggests that tour guides should pair current inclusion work with historical inclusivity. The tour guide manual provides a framework that is then personalized by individual guides. Some tour guides may complicate the history of the college,

²² It is clear that not every prospective student has access to these materials, but it seems that the vast majority do, with a large percentage even visiting Bates before they apply. This is why I choose to focus on recruitment materials, despite the fact that disproportionately privileged prospective students may access them.

²³ Hathorn Hall was the first Bates building constructed, which makes it an apt place to talk about Bates’ founding.

acknowledging the Benjamin Bates donation and how it ties the college to slavery.²⁴ When I attended a tour in 2019 as part of thesis research, the guide only briefly referenced early history when she said that the college was founded by “abolitionist farmers,” which is factually incorrect. I attribute this misinformation to nerves (and the fact that it was her first tour) rather than actual lack of knowledge about the founding. Yet, when this was said, other participants barely blinked an eye. This experience goes to show the variety with which the Bates history is discussed on tours, and the amount of autonomy individual tour guides have on how they portray Bates history.

Following the campus tour, I attended an information session led by an Office of Admission counselor and Senior Admission Fellow. This session focused more on the college’s founding. It was split into four ways Bates is “unique”: history, geographic location, academic calendar, and Purposeful Work program. The history section of the session posited that our inclusive founding has an important influence on the campus today. The Admission Counselor started by saying that abolitionists had the “radical idea” to start a liberal arts college open to anyone. Her presentation linked the Freewill Baptist, abolitionist ideology of Cheney to this open-education policy, suggesting that these two positive aspects of our founding happened in tandem and because of each other rather than coincidentally separate. She followed this by saying that “our founding informs everything we do” and noting Bates’ test-optional policy, lack of Greek life, and inclusive student club policy. She acknowledged that the school has not always been perfect, but then said no institution has always been on the right side of history. This statement normalizes our historic mistakes (none of which are specified), and suggested that we no worse than any other similar college or university. At the end of the session, the counselor

²⁴ Personal communication with junior Matthew Suslovic, tour guide for Office of Admission. March 28, 2020.

said Bates is not an institution that wants to pretend that equity issues will go away if we do not look at them, but rather one that talks frankly about these problems. This seems at odds with the fact that the session she had just led presented a strongly one-sided view of early Bates history.

Printed Admission materials also project our positive early values into the present. The 2016 Bates Viewbook describes the founders' beliefs as carrying over to today, and features a large, bold headline on its second page that reads, "Ahead of the times from the very beginning." The "Explore Bates" Admission page references the founders: "Over 150 years later, their legacy lives on." Other pages regularly use words like "since" and "from" to suggest that our institutional progressiveness began in 1855 and still shapes our campus today. Our campus truly may be as progressive as we advertise, yet this progressiveness should not be equated directly to our founding. As we complicate the origin narrative, we see how this connection shifts.

References to Benjamin Bates' relationship to the college are also incomplete. In the college's "A Brief History" page, Benjamin Bates is called "the Boston manufacturer for whom the College was named."²⁵ In an online biography of Cheney on the Bates College webpage, Benjamin Bates is described as an "industrialist and philanthropist."²⁶ In James Leamon's Bates history, he writes that Bates was "a Boston and Lewiston industrialist."²⁷ Leamon was certainly aware of Benjamin Bates' cotton connections—in text outlining a longer history of Lewiston, he talks in-depth about the growth of cotton manufacturing the city.²⁸ Yet he does not include this information in his college-sponsored description of the benefactor. Statements on the Bates website have are not untrue. Yet none explain what Bates manufactured, what industry he was in

²⁵ Bates College, "A Brief History," Bates College, <http://www.bates.edu/150-years/history/>.

²⁶ "Oren B. Cheney," Bates College, <https://www.bates.edu/150-years/bates-greats/oren-b-cheney/>.

²⁷ James S. Leamon, "Enduring Values in a Changing World," <https://www.bates.edu/150-years/history/values/>.

²⁸ *Historic Lewiston: A Textile City in Transition* (Auburn, ME: Central Maine Vocational Technical Institute, 1976).

or how he made the money that allowed him to be a philanthropist. The alternative truth that Bates was a cotton textile manufacturer who used slave-picked cotton in his mills, who stockpiled cotton prior to the Civil War, and whose wealth would not have been possible without slavery is left unsaid.

Our institutional history has not always been marketed through the lens of the “progressive origin” as it is today. Research by a group of Bates history students shows that the Office of Admission only began marketing our abolitionist origin in 1986.²⁹ Wang et. al’s research tracks marketing strategies from 1950 to today, showing the evolution of this discourse over time. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Office of Admission referenced religious roots, while in the early 1970s this language shifted to emphasize Bates’ coeducational origin and openness to students of all religious traditions. In 1971, the college started recruiting black students more systematically, and in 1979, after the Civil Rights movement, Admission materials first referenced civil rights in conjunction with the founding of the college.³⁰ In 1986, this shifted to specifically use the word “abolitionist.”³¹ While first-years today can reference abolitionist origins without a second thought, this was likely not the case prior to 1990s. This matters because it suggests that past “truths” about the founding may have been quite different from the current narrative.

I spoke to Leigh Weisenburger, Dean of Admission and Financial Aid, about the shifting Bates brand. Dean Weisenburger arrived at Bates in 2004 and has worked at the College since. She said that since she has been at Bates, coordination between the Bates Communication Office and the Office of Admission has increased. As a result, language around the founding and the

²⁹ Judy Wang et al., "A Darker Shade of Garnet: Bates Marketing through the Years " (2019).

³⁰ Personal conversation with Joe Hall. February 12, 2020.

³¹ This was around the time Bates become test-optional, according to Leigh Weisenburger.

general “Bates brand” have become increasingly consistent across departments and offices. Additionally, Dean Weisenburger said that over the last fifteen years, Bates has begun advertising itself as bold rather than humble. The College also distinguishes itself from peers with its emphasis on social justice, and according to Dean Weisenburger, the “founded by abolitionists” claim is one of many pieces of Bates’ progressiveness. She said that open admission and a lack of fraternities or sororities are two other important pieces of Bates history. So, according to Weisburger, Bates College’ increasingly coordinated overall marketing relies on a number of elements of its early history to claim progressiveness.

This marketing strategy is shared by, but is not as fundamental to, advertising done by similar schools. According to *Cracks in the Ivory Tower*, branding and marketing are normal aspects of universities.³² Yet authors Jason Brennan and Phillip W. Magness estimate that an average United States college spends \$472,000 a year on marketing. Framing higher education as an industry with “semi-fraudulent” advertising as a result of budget constraints and business needs gives logic to overly-positive self-portraits. But Bates seems unique in the way it emphasizes a rosy version of its history. Oberlin College, Bowdoin College, and Colby College are all small liberal arts colleges with historical and/or geographic similarities to Bates. All make claims referencing positive aspects of their early history within their marketing.³³ Bowdoin and Oberlin talk about their histories within general college overviews, while Colby designates this information to a web page designated solely to the school’s past. Yet none use their history as extensively as Bates does.

³² Jason Brennan and Phillip W. Magness, *Cracks in the Ivory Tower: The Moral Mess of Higher Education* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 3, 46, 51.

³³ Colby College, “Colby’s History,” Colby College, <https://www.colby.edu/about/colby-history/>; Bowdoin College, “Bowdoin at a Glance,” Bowdoin College, <https://www.bowdoin.edu/admissions/at-a-glance/index.html>; Oberlin College, “About Oberlin,” Oberlin College, <https://www.oberlin.edu/about-oberlin>.

This chapter began by asking why the first-years I spoke with had such a hegemonic, limited understanding of Bates' early history. This thesis complicates the sound-bite history—founded by abolitionists, open to all from its start—beginning, in this chapter, with a description of the relationship between Oren B. Cheney, an abolitionist, and Benjamin Bates, a cotton textile manufacturer. Through analysis of recruitment and marketing texts, I saw an intentional and coherent narrative about the relationship between Bates' past and present which claims that Bates' progressive past gives rise to its uniquely progressive present. Bates is not alone in marketing a particular brand, but it does stand out from peers in how much it relies on a partial history to sell campus culture today.

We must reconceptualize this rhetoric given the discrepancies between its claims and the more complex history. This thesis will a starting point for this crucial reimagination, beginning with historical context to better understand the origin. There is clearly a paradox at the heart of Bates' founding—but why would this paradox exist in the first place? And can we get more specific information about the motives behind and impact of Oren Cheney and Benjamin Bates' choices? Going forward, I will consider these questions and put them in conversation with the Bates College of today.

Chapter 2: Gaps in the Archives

“The presences and absences embodied in sources (artifacts and bodies that turn an event into fact) or archives (facts collected, thematized, and processed as documents and monuments) are neither neutral or natural. They are created.”

—Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*

My first impulse upon learning about the relationship between Oren Cheney and Benjamin Bates was to want more *facts*. Specifically, I wanted to know where the Bates Manufacturing Company cotton came from. I knew that work of this nature had been done at Georgetown, where a ship manifest, bill of sale and archival letters were used to trace more than 200 descendants of enslaved people sold by the school in 1838 to pay off its debt.³⁴ While I recognized that research of this precision was probably not possible at Bates, I hoped to find something. Tracing cotton to specific places and people moves the harm done by Benjamin Bates, and by extension, Bates College, away from the abstract and towards the concrete. The enslaved people whose forced labor contributed to the financing of our school could show *who actually bore the costs* of Bates’ founding paradox. Knowing more specifics might also allow us to trace harm to the present day—who are the descendants of the enslaved and what are their outcomes like? How could we create relationships with or make reparations to them? This seemed pivotal to me in understanding my own personal relationship to slavery, concretizing institutional wrongs and making amends.

The majority of preserved Bates Manufacturing Company documents are located in the Lewiston Public Library archival collection, about a mile away from Bates College and just blocks away from the old Bates Mill. There, semi-organized boxes of ledgers, payroll records, journals, invoice books and more are tucked into a back room with other archival documents. A

³⁴ Rachel L. Swarns, "272 Slaves Were Sold to Save Georgetown. What Does It Owe Their Descendants?," *The New York Times*, April 16, 2016.

finding aid for the Bates Manufacturing Company records lists about 130 boxes of original documents in total. I was lucky someone had compiled a finding aid at all—it was done while the library had temporary funds for an archivist. Not everything in the finding aid could be found, however, and as an inexperienced archive-goer I had trouble simply navigating the stacks. So I decided to start where others had left off. Before I began the thesis, other students had compiled a digital spreadsheet of cotton invoices. This spreadsheet included dates, quantities, prices and, most interestingly to me, companies and locations. I hoped that these company names—words like H. J. Hall, Pierce & Bacon, and Bardwell & Co—as well as locations listed—such as New Orleans, Louisiana, and Columbus, Georgia—would offer clues that would help trace Bates Manufacturing Company cotton to specific plantations and people.

At first, I was overwhelmed by the sheer number of Lewiston Public Library documents and their relative disorganization. I wanted anything that might show Southern links from before the Civil War, so I looked for invoices, cotton vouchers or other related documentation from between 1850 and 1861. I became disenchanted after pulling out book after book of payroll ledgers from the 1930s, difficult-to-read nineteenth century letter books (including that of Benjamin Bates), and railroad documents from the 1850s. Even cotton invoices I found, which seemed promising, often had no reference to anything or anyone South of Boston. None seemed to have the information I wanted. Then, for a few weeks, I got excited as I followed a red herring.³⁵ Some of the 1858 invoices listed, along with typical invoice information like quantities, prices and names, peculiar-looking symbols (see far left column in the image below). I wondered if these symbols represented brands of particular plantations—the letters would be the initials of plantation owner. These markings might have lined up with brands burned onto

³⁵ This detail was originally pointed out to me by Professors Anelise Shroust and Joe Hall of Bates College, and Research Librarian Chris Schiff helped me significantly with my quest to understand it.

enslaved people so that enslavers could track them if they tried to escape. Yet, after spending significant time puzzling over what to make of the mysterious symbols, I concluded that they represented cotton factors, who were go-betweens for plantation sellers and Northern buyers.

Today, understanding the convoluted cotton record proves difficult. Cotton did not transfer directly from plantation to mill; rather, it moved from plantation seller to factor to agent to mill buyer.³⁶ Factors and agents were brokers of the cotton trade who traveled between regions, helped negotiate deals and scoped out products. Once cotton was purchased in the South, shipments stopped at various ports, so cotton invoices often only reference a section of a bale of cotton's journey. Thus, even what is preserved in the archive is complicated, as cotton was not usually shipped directly from plantations to mills. 1854 invoices from the Bates Manufacturing Company list departures from Columbus, Georgia, and New Orleans, Louisiana. These same invoices mark shipments as arriving in Boston. Separate records describe movement from plantations to Southern ports and from Boston to Maine. The intricacy of these records—and their varying preservation and archival locations—makes tracing the Bates Manufacturing Company's cotton very difficult. This feeds into a false sense of Northern cleanliness regarding enslavement—without the smoking gun that was the Georgetown slave sale record, it is easier for institutions and individuals to plead ignorance or deny their historic reliance on enslavement.

The difficulty I faced in tracing cotton to specific bodies is a symptom of the way that nineteenth-century capitalism privileged products over human lives. Harold Woodman's book on the nineteenth century cotton industry, which I used to understand the Bates Manufacturing Company records, centers around a discussion of the product—cotton—while rarely referencing

³⁶ Harold D. Woodman, *King Cotton & His Retainers: Financing & Marketing the Cotton Crop of the South, 1800-1925* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1968).

the initial producer—the enslaved person.³⁷ The Lewiston Public Library has boxes and boxes of receipts from cotton transactions, railroad trips and material inventories. References to actual people are limited to higher ups within the Bates Manufacturing Company and personnel and payroll ledgers. Most documents spend little time on the lives of workers, instead favoring an economic record. Just as enslaved people are left out of the story, so too are many Lewiston mill workers.³⁸

I now see how it will take far longer than a year, and far more than one person, to do ground-breaking archival work like which occurred at Georgetown. My earlier high hopes and subsequent disappointment reflect, in part, my naivety regarding archives and enslavement. I wanted an easy fix. But direct ties were not the way of slavery and thus for many Northern institutions, a smoking gun might not exist. Instead, evidence will require tedious research, outside contact and travel. Still, future researchers should dedicate time to tracing this cotton, as humanizing this history removes a level of abstraction that gets in the way of individuals and institutions like Bates taking responsibility for the harm done at expense of their own growth. We should remind ourselves that the difficulties of this work are far from coincidental; rather, they are the product of a market that put profit ahead of humanity and which moved cotton in complicated ways that obscured the humans who made that cotton possible.

The body of academic literature on slavery and the archive is growing, and can be useful in understanding the challenges overly excited researchers like myself may face. Saidiya Hartman, a literary scholar and cultural historian at Columbia University, theorizes the “afterlife

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ For further development of these ideas, consider Mary Poovey’s *Making a Social Body* and Walter Johnson’s *Soul by Soul*. I had hoped to include these two works in this chapter but was not able to due to lack of resources at the end of my writing process.

of slavery” and traces the forgotten lives of enslaved people left out of archives.³⁹ In her article, “Venus in Two Acts,” Hartman writes about a metaphorical girl named “Venus” who represents the black girls that appear only briefly in the archives of enslavement. Hartman writes, “Hers is the same fate as every other Black Venus: no one remembered her name or recorded the things she said, or observed that she refused to say anything at all.”⁴⁰ So, the silences that I found in the Lewiston Public Library began with the very record of enslaved people I wanted to learn about. The archive is neither ahistorical nor apolitical; rather, the archive privileges the oppressor and leaves out the voices of the oppressed. Hartman frames this as an exercise of power, writing, “The archive is inseparable from the play of power that murdered Venus and her shipmate and exonerated the captain.” In this case, the difficulty I had tracing complicated links to enslavement allows those that benefit from that enslavement at Bates College today to avoid thinking about the human cost of their education.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot also argues that silences within archives and artifacts themselves are a product of power rather than malice.⁴¹ Trouillot argues that any historical representation is an act of silencing, as the archival process and historical research itself necessarily picks and chooses what to focus on. He likens this process to that of a sportscaster who cannot describe every action that happens in a game lest his audience become completely lost. Trouillot’s argument differs from that of Hartman as he says that some of these choices are a result of mere practicality. Trouillot uses the example of Caribbean slave births, which are underrepresented, as slave owners would not always record births until the infant had lived for some period of time

³⁹ John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, “Saidiya Hartman,” <https://www.macfound.org/fellows/1038/>.

⁴⁰ Saidiya V. Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): first quote on page 2, second quote on page 11.

⁴¹ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 50-51, quote on page 51.

due to high infant mortality rates. According to Trouillot, “Slavery and racism provided the context within which these silences occurred, but in no way were the silences themselves the direct products of ideology. They made sense in terms of the reporting, in terms of the logic of its accounting procedures.” This does not mean that underrepresentation was not violent; rather, it simply attributes this violence to something other than malice. Racism justified enslavement, but the difficulty I faced in the Bates Manufacturing Company papers was not directly a result of this. Rather, it reflects a record of actors working with a racist system that put premium on product rather than people.

The abstractions I found in the archives are a result of power relations. Yet future research could begin to disrupt these silences by tracing strands of evidence to specific people and places that produced Bates Manufacturing Company cotton. For the scope of my research, this unfortunately was not possible. Instead, in the following two chapters, I investigate economic and political trends in the nineteenth century in order to contextualize Oren Cheney and Benjamin Bates’ relationship. In this way, I begin to put the puzzle pieces together even without the archival sources I originally sought out.

Chapter 3: Lords of the Library

“[There is an] unholy union...between the cotton planters and fleshmongers of Louisiana and Mississippi and the cotton spinners and traffickers of New England—between the lords of the lash and the lords of the loom.”

—Charles Sumner, United States Senator, Massachusetts

If we are not yet able to understand the relationship between *Bates College* and the South, why not look into the North-South relationship more generally? Simplistic histories frame the Civil War as the battle between the morally pure, benevolent North and the evil, enslaving South. Binary descriptions as such fail to represent the impact of slave economies on the entire American economy. The growth of the Northern industrial sector in the nineteenth century was inextricably linked to cotton and the South. Slave labor was crucial fuel in the explosion of the Southern cotton crop and Northern textile production in the nineteenth century.⁴² Thus, slavery did not impede American economic growth—it drove it. And as slavery fueled this rapid expansion of industry, economically surviving institutions, including many colleges and universities, were supported by enslavement. Thus the lords of the lash supplied the lords of the loom, who in turn donated to the lords of the library. The economic links between enslavement and individual fortunes must be taken into account when we consider both why Cheney accepted Bates’ donation and what to make of this donation today. This is to say that Bates College’s connection to slavery is in no way abnormal, but that it is still inexcusable. Rather, by comparing our history to that of other schools and the nation in general, it becomes more clear how Bates can be a leader in addressing its own past.

Slavery drove economic expansion in the nineteenth century. Over this era, the American economy grew dynamically, due in large part to changes in the cotton industry. In the 1820s,

⁴² Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

annual cotton production totaled 160 million pounds. By 1860, that number had risen to 2.3 billion.⁴³ According to historian Edward Baptist, torturous disciplinary techniques brought about this increased productivity.⁴⁴ Without enslaved hands picking cotton in Southern fields this growth would not have been possible.⁴⁵ The explosive increase in Southern production of cotton occurred in tandem with industrial growth in the North. In the 1820s and 1830s, the Northern textile industry emerged as a major economic force with many merchants moving into the mill business.⁴⁶ By 1840, the North alone was using over one hundred million pounds of cotton picked by enslaved people. Cotton was also the foundation of America's global business—from 1815 to 1860, cotton was the bulk of U.S. export. By 1860, it made up 57.5% of exports.⁴⁷ Thus the growth of the Northern textile industry in the early nineteenth century would not have been possible without the existence of slavery.⁴⁸ This dynamic and interlinked growth continued through the 1860s. By the time that Cheney founded Bates College in 1864, cotton manufacturing was the leading United States industry.⁴⁹ This was not separate from abolitionist thought—as I will discuss in the following chapter, some abolitionist action was a direct response to the Northern slave economy.

Given that slavery was a national institution that provided material and financial fuel for the booming Northern industrial economy, it follows that enslavement supported the similarly

⁴³ Eugene R. Dattel, *Cotton and Race in the Making of America: The Human Costs of Economic Power* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009), 388.

⁴⁴ Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, "Introduction," in *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 15.

⁴⁵ Dattel, *Cotton and Race in the Making of America: The Human Costs of Economic Power*, xi.

⁴⁶ Thomas H. O'Connor, "New England Mill Magnates and the South," *Textile History Review* 5, no. 2 (1964): 48, 51.

⁴⁷ Ronald Bailey, "The Slave(ry) Trade and the Development of Capitalism in the United States: The Textile Industry in New England," *Social Science History* 14, no. 3 (1990): 388.

⁴⁸ O'Connor, "New England Mill Magnates and the South," 51.,

⁴⁹ Ronald Bailey, "The Other Side of Slavery: Black Labor, Cotton, and Textile Industrialization in Great Britain and the United States," *Agricultural History* 68, no. 2 (1994): 389-90.

American and Northern institution of higher education. Many of today's leading universities and colleges were founded in Northern states before the Civil War. Thus, enslavement and the growth of American higher education co-occurred, often working in a mutually beneficial way. Craig Steven Wilder makes this argument in *Ebony & Ivy*. Wilder argues that the American system of higher education could not have existed without African oppression through slavery and colonization. He writes,

American colleges were not innocent or passive benefactors of conquest and colonial slavery...the Academy never stood apart from American slavery—in fact, it stood beside church and state as the third pillar of a civilization built on bondage.⁵⁰

Wilder explores examples of institutions financed by enslavement as well as those that reinforced ideas of racial inferiority through legitimized racial institutions in order to make his provocative, rousing argument. For the purposes of understanding the Bates link, I will briefly outline the histories of five schools backed by slavery. Through these examples, I will show how Bates has a unique relationship to enslavement given its abolitionist founding, but that it is one of many colleges and universities with significant stains in their histories.

Perhaps today's most widely known institutional link to slavery is that of Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. A 2016 *New York Times* article entitled, "272 Slaves Were Sold to Save Georgetown. What Does It Owe Their Descendants?" thrust Georgetown's reparations process—and problematic history—into the public eye. Georgetown was originally founded by Jesuits in 1789.⁵¹ Throughout its early history, the university relied on profits from Maryland slave plantations due to a Jesuit rule prohibited the school from charging tuition until the mid-nineteenth century.⁵² In 1838, facing mounting debt, two Georgetown presidents managed the

⁵⁰ Wilder, *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*, 11.

⁵¹ Swarns, "272 Slaves Were Sold to Save Georgetown. What Does It Owe Their Descendants?."

⁵² Georgetown University Working Group on Slavery Memory and Reconciliation, "The Georgetown Slavery Archive," Georgetown University, <http://slaveryarchive.georgetown.edu/>.

sale of 272 enslaved people to Congressman Henry Johnson of New Orleans, Louisiana. The profits helped pay off the school's debt. Today, the sale would be equivalent to an influx of 3.3 million dollars. The Georgetown sale is unparalleled due to its size and provided financial stability for Georgetown in time of institutional insecurity.

Georgetown's history and modern reckoning has received much media attention in part due to its shock value. An American institution, created to educate the minds of elite students, sold enslaved people in order to stay afloat? This sale is obviously antithetical to the stated goals of the institution and inhumane regardless of its mission. More covert financial links between slavery and higher educational institutions like that of Bates are less obviously problematic and also arguably equally important. It is these relationships that can slip through our vision, hide in archives and sustain unequal power dynamics through quiet and surreptitious economic systems. In her 2010 text arguing that mass incarceration is the modern equivalent of slavery, Michelle Alexander writes,

Our understanding of racism is therefore shaped by the most extreme expressions of individual bigotry, not by the way in which it functions naturally, almost invisibly (and sometimes with genuinely benign intent), when it is embedded in the structure of a social system.⁵³

Alexander's idea that part of the function of racism is to obscure its own subjugation in systems can be applied to the histories of Bates and other institutions. Schools with more invisible links to slavery still have plenty to reckon with. Alexander might even say these examples are more important, as they show the ubiquity of racism within our higher educational system.

Histories of Princeton University in New Jersey and Washington College in Maryland can provide context for these subtler financial ties. Princeton was founded by Presbyterian

⁵³ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010).

ministers in the mid-eighteenth century. According to the “Princeton and Slavery” website, a majority of the founding trustees (16 out of 23) “bought, sold, traded, or inherited slaves during their lifetime.”⁵⁴ Thus enslavement was the original source of Princeton’s funding. Washington College, which was established on the Eastern Shore of Maryland in 1782, received funding from a slave sale. Investigations into the college’s past suggest that William W. Peacock sold four enslaved people, including children, in order to pay off his debt to the college. According to Patrick Nugent, Deputy Director of the C.V. Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience at Washington College, it is likely that administrators of Washington College participated in and potentially forced the sale.⁵⁵ These relationships differ from that of Georgetown in terms of scale, but are not quite similar to that of Bates. Yet that leaves us with an important question: Was Bates alone in accepting a major donation from someone whose industry relied on enslaved labor but not whose wealth was directly from enslavement?

The histories of Williams College and Harvard University provide context for this question, suggesting that colleges located in New England, especially near large textile industry centers, accepted donations from local mill magnates. Like Benjamin Bates, the Lawrence brothers were mill magnates that supported local schools. Abbott and Amos Lawrence invested in cotton mills in the early nineteenth century, eventually becoming wealthy and developing booming economies in Massachusetts.⁵⁶ In 1844, when Williams was deeply in debt, Amos Lawrence donated tens of thousands of dollars made primarily from the cotton textile industry to keep the institution afloat.⁵⁷ Over his lifetime, Lawrence gave between thirty and forty thousand

⁵⁴ Martha A. Sandweiss, "The Princeton & Slavery Project," Princeton University, <https://slavery.princeton.edu/about/project-history>.

⁵⁵ Personal conversation with Pat Nugent in Chestertown, Maryland. January 6, 2020.

⁵⁶ "Vii. Abbott Lawrence," *The American Journal of Education* 1, no. 2 (1856).

⁵⁷ Robert F. Dalzell, *Enterprising Elite: The Boston Associates and the World They Made*, vol. 40. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987), 146.

dollars to the College. This sum is much less than the amount Benjamin Bates gave to Cheney, but it is still significant. In Amos Lawrence's biography, he is described as a 'model benefactor' that derived great joy from his generosity.⁵⁸ Amos' brother, Abbott Lawrence, is also cited as an 'efficient friend' of education who donated to charitable organizations in order to alleviate suffering and advance intellectual projects.⁵⁹ Abbott Lawrence founded the Scientific School at Cambridge (later the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard) with a roughly \$150,000 donation. Lawrence's donation was pointed—he had a specific interest in furthering scientific knowledge that would aid the efficiency of the textile industry.

Donations by the Lawrence brothers, which in total are comparable to that of Benjamin Bates, can tell us two important facts. First, that Bates was not alone in profiting off of cotton and donating to higher education.⁶⁰ Second, that colleges and universities located near large mill centers—Harvard and Bates included—were likely to court men of local industry for financial support. According to *Ebony & Ivy*, the Lawrences were involved in a general culture of philanthropy that was simultaneously benevolent and self-interested. Some textile manufacturers pointedly donated money to colleges because they needed more qualified engineers and planners. Nineteenth-century wealthy men often felt that it was both their societal duty and economic imperative to further the educational cause.⁶¹ Yet Williams and Harvard were not abolitionist colleges like Bates, and thus it may have been easier for their founders to stomach a donation that was indirectly related to enslavement.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 145-46.

⁵⁹ "Vii. Abbott Lawrence," 2, 5, 7.

⁶⁰ I would like to have developed this idea further using information from *Ebony & Ivy*, but unfortunately the text was not available to me for the last two weeks of my research process.

⁶¹ Wilder, *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*, 286.

Given each of these higher educational institutions with historic relationships to slavery—all of which differ in scale and visibility—what should be made of our institution’s history? First, economic histories suggest that enslaved peoples’ labor was foundational for increased cotton production and booming industrial growth in the nineteenth century. Thus, Benjamin Bates’ fortune, which was made from cotton textile manufacturing, was inherently linked to the slaving South. By extension, Bates College, which was kept on its feet by money from the mill industry, exists because of slave labor. Second, slavery was not only a Southern institution. Therefore, this history makes Bates profoundly American and anything but abnormal. Forced labor of African people supported wealth and economic growth in both the South *and* the North. Northern businessmen like Benjamin Bates recognized this connection. Instead of seeing the two economies as competing, they understood them to be interdependent.⁶² Neither could exist without the other—a significant portion of Southern cotton sales were to the North, and Northern industry was in large part based around a good picked by enslaved people.

This concept of slavery as a national institution—as well as the histories of the five schools outlined above—tell us that almost all of the wealth available to fund colleges like Bates would have been linked to slavery in some way. In the mid-nineteenth century, cotton made up the majority of American exports. As a result, wealthy men in Northern mill towns were likely to have made their money within this booming industry. This was true in the North even beyond cotton manufacturing. According to Ronald Bailey, “The early industries in New England... were all derived from maritime activities dependent on the slave-based Atlantic economic system.”⁶³ Merchants, shipbuilders and insurance agents—just to name a few—all depended on

⁶² O'Connor, "New England Mill Magnates and the South," 58.

⁶³ Bailey, "The Slave(ry) Trade and the Development of Capitalism in the United States: The Textile Industry in New England."

enslavement for their careers even before the cotton boom. Shipbuilding in particular was important to the Maine economy.⁶⁴ Thus, Cheney may not have been able to avoid the evils of enslavement by courting donors other than Benjamin Bates. It seems possible that he saw this decision as the best of many bad options. In a world where slavery was economically ubiquitous, it seems unlikely that any pragmatic action by Cheney could have matched his lofty ethical beliefs.

Additionally, the context of higher education and slavery positions Bates' inexcusable link to slavery as relatively normal. Rather than this excusing Bates from responsibility, however, I suggest that this just makes the conversation about contemporary reparations at Bates all the more difficult. Georgetown's past more clearly necessitates financial reparations, and in 2016, the school announced that it would give preferential admission to descendants of enslaved people sold to keep the university afloat.⁶⁵ At Bates, a similar policy might seem excessive or impractical. Yet, doing nothing is not a suitable alternative. And given how we deploy a flattering narrative of our past in marketing materials in order to advertise our modern campus as a racial haven, we have a particularly heavy responsibility to investigate the complexities of our history and suitably complex responses. The financial context for Benjamin Bates' donation—both on a national and educational scale—is meant to complicate our institutional conversation about our past, not end it.

⁶⁴ I regret that I did not have the time to develop my research on shipbuilding in Maine more, as this link between New England and the South furthers my argument that Cheney could not avoid slavery when searching for funding.

⁶⁵ Rachel L. Swarns, "Georgetown University Plans Steps to Atone for Slave Past," *New York Times*, September 1, 2016.

Chapter 4: Clean Hands

“White complicity is not exclusively a matter of ‘doing’ or ‘not doing’ but also a matter of just ‘being.’”

—Barbara Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good*

Wealth driven by enslavement may have been the norm in the nineteenth century, but why would an *abolitionist* accept slave money to fund his college? Would he have even thought about this paradox? There currently exists no relevant evidence in the one surviving year of Cheney’s diary, his personal papers, the Bates Manufacturing Company papers or Emmeline Cheney’s biography of her husband. Thus it is necessary to consider the greater abolitionist context in the Antebellum North regarding these sorts of questions. How were abolitionists thinking about and interacting with an economy dependent on slave labor? Abolitionist thought varied widely and was at times hypocritical. Only a radical niche of abolitionists actually attempted to create an alternative economy free of the stain of slave labor. Cheney would likely have been aware of these various ideologies, and may have shied away from nihilism due to its lack of long term economic impact.

The Free Produce movement is the most extreme abolitionist organization I have come across. Free Producers encouraged individuals to abstain from buying or using goods that were produced with slave labor.⁶⁶ Supporters of the movement attempted to raise awareness that consumption of slave-made goods directly fueled the slave economy and to develop an alternative to that economy. The movement is comparable to today’s fair trade movement, which encourages consumers to buy products that come from ethical environmental and social sources.⁶⁷ Despite (or potentially due to) its radical rethinking of market engagement, Free

⁶⁶ Carol Faulkner, "The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860," 27 (2007): 378.

⁶⁷ Deborah G. Rossi, "The Stuff of History: American Free Produce Association Label, 1839-1847," *Connecticut History* 47, no. 2 (2008): 253.

Produce struggled to grow in popularity. Abolitionism was only embraced by two percent of Northerners, and Free Produce represented a radical niche of that already small group. At its prime, the movement was institutionalized with the advent of Free Produce stores and associations. The first of fifty Free Produce stores opened in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1826, and the last closed in 1867. Free Produce stores were meant to be one-stop-shops for abolitionists hoping to align their ideology with their consumption habits. The American Free Produce Association was formed in 1838 to promote the fair trade cause and publish supportive press like the *Non-Slaveholder* journal.⁶⁸

Supporters of Free Produce joined the movement for a variety of reasons—as an economic weapon, as a way of preserving moral purity and as a means of affecting agency in the market. Secondary sources emphasize the import of individual moral purity to Free Producers. This is epitomized by the “clean hands” message used by Free Producers. Elizabeth Heyrick, a female Free Produce activist who wrote an influential pamphlet on the immediate abolition of slavery said that “slavery could taint the individual’s soul (and skin) even from afar.”⁶⁹ Similarly, the Philadelphia Female Association for Promoting the Manufacture and Use of Cotton asked, “How shall we cleanse our hands of this evil?” The idea of bodily purity was linked to the abstinence movement, which emphasized abstention from sinful acts like drinking alcohol.⁷⁰ In some ways, Free Produce was more about the individual’s ego and lack of guilt rather than how

⁶⁸ Lawrence B. Glickman, "'Buy for the Sake of the Slave': Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (2004): 890, 95.

⁶⁹ Faulkner, "The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860," 381, 87, 98.

⁷⁰ This emphasis on temperance cannot help but make me think of Oren Cheney’s own commitment to temperance. Professor Joe Hall told me that Bates College could just as easily be marketed as “founded by prohibitionists” as “founded by abolitionists.” Thus Cheney’s ideology lined up with that of Free Press in a curious way on the issue of alcohol.

consumption—or lack of consumption—could impact the actual enslaved people.⁷¹ Carol Faulkner notes the selfishness of this mindset. She says, “In principle, adherents hoped their boycotts could contain slavery. In practice, they seemed to make a fetish of their own purity.”⁷²

While Free Producers were adamant about their dedication to consumer action and individual purity, few joined the movement under the guise that Free Produce alone would eliminate slavery. Some saw Free Produce simply as a “matter of ideological consistency” or a way to translate their beliefs into practice.⁷³ Others saw it as a symbolic boycott or a way to enact Christian social change values.⁷⁴ More still viewed Free Produce as just one piece of the abolitionist puzzle, noting that a boycott of slave-produced goods was important for the reasons above *and* that it should be accompanied by other actions.⁷⁵ While it is difficult to know which of these motivations was most common, it is clear that Free Produce supporters were passionately dedicated to their cause for reasons beyond its practical value (although practical value was certainly a factor for some).

These reasons for participation varied amongst activists, and were stratified along racial lines. White Free Produce abolitionists were much more likely than black Free Produce abolitionists to emphasize individualistic moral purity.⁷⁶ According to Carol Faulkner, whites “set themselves apart from other advocates they deemed inconsistent” in effect giving themselves a self-congratulatory pat on the back. Black abolitionists, on the other hand, were

⁷¹ Timothy L. Wood, "Not at Any Price: Abolition and Economics in the 1842 Indiana Quaker Schism," *Fides et Historia* 46, no. 1 (2014): 15.

⁷² Faulkner, "The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860," 398.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 397.

⁷⁴ Wood, "Not at Any Price: Abolition and Economics in the 1842 Indiana Quaker Schism," 14, 20.

⁷⁵ Glickman, "'Buy for the Sake of the Slave': Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism," 902.

⁷⁶ Faulkner, "The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860," 398-99, quote on 99.

likely to join Free Produce “as a practical means of ending slavery rather than a path to personal salvation.” This focus on pragmatism also could be attributed to the lack of safety experienced by all blacks under the system of enslavement. Even free blacks faced potential danger and mistreatment as long as enslavement was legal.

The movement’s emphasis on the link between consumer, producer and laborer shifted the onus of responsibility towards the individual. Under the Free Produce ideology, there was no such thing as a sympathetic observer.⁷⁷ Supporters believed that market relations were as “real and consequential” as actually owning slaves, running a cotton textile mill or accepting a large sum of money linked to slavery.⁷⁸ Language from the Indiana Yearly Meeting of Anti-Slavery Friends exemplifies this perception of accountability:

It is evident that they who purchase the produce of oppression, supply the means by which it is kept in existence. It is the desire of money, that induces the master to drive the panting slave under the lash, to produce a supply of those articles for which he can find a market.⁷⁹

Thus, rather than continuing to focus on the faraway slaveholder as the driver of slavery’s evils, Free Producers centered the consumer’s desire for goods as a source of oppression. Under this ideology, individual abolitionists had a special responsibility to align their consumption choices with their activism. Free Produce was more than just a boycott, as its supporters attempted to establish an alternative economy.⁸⁰ The movement gave consumers a new and unique power to enact change through their engagement in the market.

⁷⁷ Glickman, "Buy for the Sake of the Slave': Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism," 894-98.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 898.

⁷⁹ Wood, "Not at Any Price: Abolition and Economics in the 1842 Indiana Quaker Schism," 7.

⁸⁰ Glickman, "Buy for the Sake of the Slave': Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism," 893-94.

Even at its height, the movement was extremely controversial within the abolitionist community. This may provide context for Cheney's acceptance of Benjamin Bates' donation. Individual consumer activism, despite its seemingly private and individualized approach, was not always thought to be the most effective sphere for political action. While this movement shows us that there was a level of awareness about capitalist complicity with slavery, there was absolutely no agreement that the market was the most pressing issue facing antislavery activists. On the contrary, Free Produce was often at odds with centrist abolitionism.

From the perspective of Free Producers, mainstream abolitionists were “‘participants,’ ‘accessories,’ ‘aggrandizers,’ ‘enrichers,’ ‘countenancers,’ and ‘abettors.’”⁸¹ From the opposite perspective, Free Producers were “‘inconsistent and irrelevant ‘sentimentalists’” that had a “‘selfish obsession with personal morality.’”⁸² Critics saw the Free Produce movement's focus on abstinence as a waste of time and energy. Faulkner writes that critics saw Free Produce supporters as paying “‘obsessive attention to the details of daily life.’”⁸³ They saw this intense fixation on one's own inconsequential actions as selfish, as it moved the focus of antislavery onto one's own morality rather than action on the part of the greater movement. Free Produce was also criticized for focusing too much on the outward appearance of the activist—the nineteenth-century version of trying to look “‘woke enough’”—rather than actual change making.⁸⁴ Last, critics saw Free Produce as splintering the full antislavery movement by calling slaveholders out rather than engaging them in the cause. Some mainstream activists wanted to work within the system of slavery to show slaveholders how their practice was wrong rather than

⁸¹ Ibid., 895.

⁸² Faulkner, "The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860," 379.; Glickman, "'Buy for the Sake of the Slave': Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism," 903.

⁸³ Faulkner, "The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860," 404.

⁸⁴ Glickman, "'Buy for the Sake of the Slave': Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism," 903, 894.

alienate these powerful individuals from the cause. Under this thought, antislavery activism should be first and foremost a community-building movement. Free Produce, with its rigid focus on individual purity and extremely high standards, did not match this priority.⁸⁵ During the 1840s, many abolitionists began to move away from the movement, and by 1850 Free Produce had lost the majority of its support.⁸⁶ At an antislavery convention in 1847, Wendell Phillips Garrison—a prominent abolitionist that had previously been an outspoken supporter of Free Produce—announced that he “would happily face the ‘Great Judgement’ attired in slave-made cotton of South Carolina.”⁸⁷

Even at the height of its popularity, Free Produce was inaccessible. Secondary sources on Free Produce suggest that the movement’s lack of economic viability greatly limited its potential for success, as it was impractical on a systematic and individual level. Like fair trade goods today, Free Produce goods were more expensive than their slave-made counterparts. The movement put an enormous economic burden on individuals, who were expected not only to find Free Produce goods but also to pay a higher price for a lower quality product. This was an issue as individuals were asked to make economically unappealing decisions that were outside of their means. For blacks and poor whites working in the North in low paying jobs, it was near impossible to be as selective about purchases as the movement demanded.⁸⁸ Thus, only wealthier (and at times white) abolitionists were actually able to support the Free Produce cause on the level of purity that the movement demanded. This limited the amount of support for the

⁸⁵ Wood, "Not at Any Price: Abolition and Economics in the 1842 Indiana Quaker Schism," 10.

⁸⁶ Faulkner, "The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860," 394.

⁸⁷ Glickman, "'Buy for the Sake of the Slave': Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism," 904.

⁸⁸ Faulkner, "The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860," 403.

movement and made it an exclusive movement that both judged outwardly and was inaccessible to some who wished to join.

Despite its lack of direct economic or political impact, the Free Produce movement was able to achieve symbolic success insofar as it asked provocative questions about slavery, consumption and the North. Free Producers raised awareness about Northern participation in enslavement. By focusing on the individual consumer, regardless of geography, Free Produce suggested that all Americans had a responsibility and connection to enslavement.⁸⁹ According to Faulkner, this was a “rare acknowledgment (at least among white abolitionists) of the complicity of the North.” Despite its systemic ineffectiveness, the Free Produce movement forced abolitionists to consider the hypocrisy of their own practices and to reconsider the Northern innocence. While the movement was limited, its geographic scale and advertisements in abolitionist media spread its message to channels that Cheney likely would have encountered. Yet we cannot directly map this movement onto Bates College’s origin. Free Produce was centered around individual consumption choices, and operated on the scale of the personal. Cheney’s acceptance of the Bates donation was about something much larger—the funding of an institution that could benefit many. Cheney may have felt he had the chance to do something positive with money made from morally wrong means and may have, in fact, had few alternatives.

Antislavery fairs used this very ideology to turn a capitalist system against enslavement. These fairs gained popularity in New England and Pennsylvania, and were often put on around the holiday season so that consumers could buy Christmas gifts while supporting the abolitionist cause. Goods sold were rarely marketed as free of slave labor like in Free Produce stores. Rather,

⁸⁹ Ibid., 379, 404.

the fairs operated under a utilitarian ideology that good could come of products made under unethical means. Proponents of antislavery fairs may have seen this sort of activism as transforming something bad into something good. These fairs had short-lived national significance. In 1847, the Boston Fair raised over half of the Massachusetts Antislavery Society's operating budget.⁹⁰ The Massachusetts Society was the main supporter of the American Antislavery Society. Thus it seems that the Boston Fair was fundamental to overall abolitionist work for at least a brief time.

Glickman distinguishes antislavery fairs from Free Produce, with the former acting as "consumption in service of political struggle" and the latter as "consumption as political struggle."⁹¹ Surprisingly, these two movements seemed to have a generally positive relationship. Some fairs sold free produce goods and were supported by Free Producers themselves. However, the obvious critiques from the more radical sect remained, and some Free Producers said that the fundraising aspect of antislavery fairs did not absolve the individual of moral guilt for purchasing slave-linked products. Glickman writes that antislavery fairs lacked the ability to hold individuals to the high standard of Free Produce. Consumers were encouraged to shop ethically but not to understand the chain of events which led their cotton or sugar to end up under their Christmas tree. While Boston antislavery fairs—some of the largest in the United States—peaked before Cheney was well into his professional career, the culture of utility may have remained in the Boston abolitionist movement and could have influenced Cheney's thinking about Benjamin Bates' donation.⁹²

⁹⁰ Deborah Van Broekhoven, "'Better Than a Clay Club': The Organization of Anti-Slavery Fairs, 1835-60," *Slavery & Abolition* 19, no. 1 (1998).

⁹¹ Glickman, "'Buy for the Sake of the Slave': Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism," quote on page 902, 01-02.

⁹² An article by Julie Roy Jeffrey, "'Stranger, Buy...Lest Our Mission Fail:' The Complex Culture of Women's Abolitionist Fairs," mentions an antislavery fair in Maine, but I could not find more

Cheney was not alone in his paradoxical relationship to slavery's capitalism. Some vocal abolitionists had a deep financial stake in slave labor itself. The story of Rowland Gibson Hazard, a Rhode Island manufacturer, exemplifies this contradiction. Hazard was an active antislavery advocate.⁹³ He also ran a manufacturing company that not only used slave-grown cotton, but supplied enslavers with necessary clothing and blankets for their enslaved people. Thus, despite the fact that Hazard had personal relationships with Southern enslavers and relied on slave labor for supplies, he spoke out publicly against enslavement. In response to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, he said, "My own convictions are that it [slavery] is the worst existing form of society for all concerned...I am convinced that the slave laws are so repugnant to the moral sentiments of this section [the North] and the religious convictions of this section, that there can be no peace until they are repealed." Historian Christy Clark-Pujara argues that Hazard's contradictory stance on enslavement fits into the nineteenth-century national economic context. "In the antebellum North, a region dependent on southern raw goods, Hazard's seemingly hypocritical activities made sense," she writes. "Hazard's sentiment was grounded in genuine moral objections to the institution of slavery; however, his moral objections did not override his own economic interests." Thus Hazard's abolitionism was strong, but it failed to trump the lure of potential profit.

Abolitionists recognized links between their consumption and enslavement, but they often avoided direct confrontation with the dilemma these conflicts posed. At times, however, even devout abolitionist organizations had no way of avoiding decisions between morality and

information about it and it was likely to have happened while Oren Cheney was on the younger side—in college, or maybe in his twenties.

⁹³ Christy Clark-Pujara, "The Business of Slavery and Antislavery Sentiment: The Case of Rowland Gibson Hazard—an Antislavery 'Negro Cloth' Dealer," *Rhode Island History* 71, no. 2 (2013): 35, 41, first quote on page 44, second quote on page 50.

economic growth. Like Bates, New Hampton Academy was founded by Freewill Baptists and prided itself on its antislavery ideology. Yet it accepted a donation of ten thousand dollars from Colonel Rufus G. Lewis, whose wealth “was mainly in plantations and slaves at the South.”⁹⁴ The donation was met “with bitter opposition” and New Hampton leaders were divided over whether to accept it, but ultimately the Academy did take money linked to enslavement.⁹⁵ A letter written by George Chase, the second president of Bates, questions whether Freewill Baptists would be willing to send their children to a college “maintained by the fruits of slave labor, and dominated in its policy by a slaveholder.”⁹⁶

We cannot know whether the same questions came up for Cheney in thinking about Benjamin Bates’ donation. Yet, the history of New Hampton does tell us something valuable—that Bates College was not the only abolitionist college to accept money linked to slavery. In fact, Colonel Lewis’ wealth was much more obviously related to enslavement than Benjamin Bates’. Thus, it seems possible that Cheney could have justified his acceptance of Bates’ donations in reference to New Hampton’s funding being even more contradictory. New Hampton and Bates’ histories speak to the takeaways of this section—that abolitionists had varying ways of approaching an economic system that was intertwined with enslavement. Free Producers boycotted, antislavery fairs benefitted off of, and businessmen like Rowland Gibson Hazard embodied hypocrisy. There was no “right” way for abolitionists to participate in the market, and it is likely that Cheney would have been aware of these and other financial ideologies as he interacted with Benjamin Bates.

⁹⁴ George Chase to John Sewall, 1883, draft correspondence, Office of the President, George Colby Chase records, Box 2, Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, Bates College.

⁹⁵ Anthony, notes, undated, Dressler Family Collection of Alfred Williams Anthony Papers, Series 1, Box 1.

⁹⁶ Chase to Sewall, 1883, Office of the President, George Colby Chase records, Box 2.

Chapter 5: “It’s in the Air in Maine”

“I don’t think we’re free in America. I think we’re burdened by our history of racial inequality...It’s in the air in Maine, just like it’s in the air in Mississippi. It doesn’t matter where you go, there is this contaminant that we’re all breathing in.”

– Bryan Stevenson, Bates College Commencement, 2018

The last two chapters have widened our understanding of the world Oren Cheney and Benjamin Bates operated within, suggesting that they responded to an economy driven by slavery and a variety of abolitionist perspectives on how to interact with that market. Bates College marketing flattens these complexities into a simplistic narrative: founded by abolitionists, open to all from its start. This narrative is then pushed into the present day as the Office of Admission suggests that the school’s progressive origin makes it especially equitable and accepting today. This selective storytelling is at a minimum problematically incomplete, and at a maximum negatively shaping experiences of students of color on campus today. In this section of the thesis, I argue the stronger version of this claim: that an inadequate origin story necessarily contributes to marginalization of students of color, and that we cannot completely confront inequity of student experience without shifting this rhetoric. Yet, as an institution we are at a crucial turning point with this issue, as knowledge of the complexities of our history is becoming widely held. A more coordinated effort to shift this understanding would allow the College to honestly address our present campus inequity.

Student research, as well as anecdotal experiences, suggests that students are attracted to Bates in part because it was “founded by abolitionists.” In 2019, two Bates students conducted original research on student perceptions of Bates’ early financial history.⁹⁷ Perla Figuereo and Alya Yousuf, both juniors, learned about the topic as part of a Digital Cultures course with

⁹⁷ Perla Figuereo and Alya Yousuf, "Uncovering the Financial History of Bates College," Medium, <https://medium.com/@pfiguere/uncovering-the-financial-history-of-bates-college-cda43cb527fe>.

Professor Anelise ShROUT. For a final project, the pair surveyed 65 Bates students about their opinions of Benjamin Bates, Oren Cheney and the discourse around their history. Sixty-five percent of Figuereo and Yousuf's survey-takers were white, while the rest were students of color. This aligns roughly with the diversity of Bates' overall student body.⁹⁸

Figuereo and Yousuf asked participants for their level of agreement with a list of phrases, including, "I was attracted by the fact that Bates College was founded by abolitionists in 1855." Participants were able to respond on a scale of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree. According to Figuereo and Yousuf's research report, 59.4% of participants noted that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Thus the majority of survey takers were influenced by the "founded by abolitionists" claim as prospective students. Figuereo and Yousuf were generous enough to share their data with me, and when I analyzed it further and compared responses of white students and students of color, there did not appear to be a significant difference in response between the two groups (see Figures 3 and 4 in Appendix for more detail). This suggests that white Bates students and Bates students of color were *both* attracted to the school by its incomplete and flattering historical narrative.

Conversations with Figuereo, who is Dominican, and Ursula Rall, who is Blasian, confirm that this is the case. Figuereo said that as a prospective student, she found Bates' history appealing. This was not the only reason she came to Bates, but it was an important factor in her decision making process. Rall, who has been involved with Bates' first-generation to college orientation program Bobcat First!, said that many first-generation students come to Bates because they see the school as a good fit due to its progressive history. In casual conversations with friends about my research, most of whom are white, many have echoed this sentiment. And,

⁹⁸ Bates College Office of Admission, "Student Profile," Bates College, <https://www.bates.edu/admission/student-profile/>.

when I was a prospective student looking for a school with a cultural commitment to social justice and a diverse student body, I was attracted to Bates for what I saw as a long-term commitment to social justice.

It is also clear that many students who come to the school for its history find Bates to be less racially diverse or equitable than they expect. While this is certainly not abnormal amongst predominately white liberal arts colleges—many colleges market themselves favorably in order to attract students and donors—it is especially problematic when students of color are marginalized at a school that aims and claims to be racially progressive. This is the case at Bates. Rall said that she thinks Bates’ history matters because students of color and first-gen students expect the campus to be more accepting and diverse than it is based on the way institutional history is advertised. When it turns out not to be this way, they are surprised. A junior student who is white shared a similar sentiment with me, telling me that she came to Bates partially because it seemed to be more diverse than other comparable schools, but that it has not lived up to her expectations. These misperceptions come from more than just the “founded by abolitionists” claim. Yet this is a unique aspect of our marketing in that it is given significant weight and is particularly incomplete.

In my time at Bates, high-profile incidents, including negative interactions between Bates security and students of color, have brought racism to the forefront of campus conversation. In May 2017, an interaction between a black male student, staff and security escalated and the student was handcuffed in front of his peers.⁹⁹ Descriptions of the incident vary—an article in *The Bates Student* by a coalition of students said, “A black male student was forcibly grabbed by a Bates Security officer, violently taken to the ground, placed in a headlock and ultimately

⁹⁹ Clayton Spencer, "Update on Recent Campus Events," *ibid.*
<https://www.bates.edu/president/2017/05/19/update-on-recent-campus-events/>.

handcuffed in front of his peers.” An independent investigation reports simply that a black male student was handcuffed in front of peers.¹⁰⁰ Regardless, a statement by Bates President Clayton Spencer acknowledged that the incident “surfaced issues of race and climate on our campus that are pre-existing and long-term” and that this is representative of a gap between efforts to create an inclusive campus community and the lived experience of many Bates students of color.¹⁰¹

As President Spencer’s statement suggested, racial inequity on campus extends far beyond high-profile incidents; rather, it manifests in small moments in dorms, classrooms and Commons (the only Bates dining hall). A *Bates Student* Forum article by Khadeeja Qureshi begins as follows,

The first thing you probably see as you swipe into Commons is the long ‘POC (people of color) table’ which lays itself out in front of a room full of white students. Both lower-class and upper class students of color retreat to this table during breakfast, lunch and dinner.¹⁰²

One would have to walk into Commons with their eyes closed to miss what Qureshi is talking about: since my first year at Bates, a table of primarily black students have sat at the first table in the dining hall. After passing them, what remains is a sea of mainly white faces. This segregation extends beyond just Commons—as a student at Bates, I have noticed that white students mostly socialize with other white students, and students of color with other students of color. Qureshi portrays this segregation as a response to “white domination” of space, which she defines as “the disregard and exclusion of minority students.”¹⁰³ In another Forum article, junior Kyle Larry

¹⁰⁰ "Update and Findings of Independent Investigation," Bates College, <https://www.bates.edu/president/2017/06/14/update-and-findings-of-independent-investigation/>.

¹⁰¹ "Update on Recent Campus Events".

¹⁰² Khadeeja Qureshi, "Stop Dominating Space: White Party Culture and Exclusion across Campus," *Bates Student*, November 6, 2019.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

argues that students of color “stay in racial homogeneous groups out of necessity, unlike our white peers who do it out of luxury.” He follows,

When you’re on a campus where people who do not look like you are dominant, you do not know how to navigate that space without the feeling of getting judged, so we help each other out and remind each other that we’re here for a reason.¹⁰⁴

According to Larry and Qureshi, students of color socialize primarily with each other as a means of getting by and in response to white exclusion and domination on campus. Is *this* the campus that is advertised as progressive and inclusive since its start?

Thus far, I have suggested that many students come to Bates for its inclusivity and diversity, but that many find campus different than they expect. Overly positive marketing is more than an offshoot of this disparity; in fact, it may actually futher the marginalization it disguises. First, the rosy narrative attracts well-meaning but unaware white students (and faculty/staff) that perpetrate racism, and second, it creates an assumption that Bates is better than our counterparts and thus that its constituents do not need to do antiracist work. My first claim is based both on personal experience and interviews. As a white person that genuinely wants to work against racism, I can think of many times in which I have done harm to students of color through what I saw as my own activism and learning. This has happened within the classroom when I speak too much, in social spaces when I fail to challenge my white friends on their racism for fear of their responses, and within the process of the thesis, during which I reached out to affinity clubs on campus and was told that I was asking them to do undue emotional work. This dynamic plays out again and again at Bates and beyond—do-gooder white person tries to disrupt racism and instead reproduces it. Rall noticed this trend but had a more favorable view of it, stating, “I think there’s a lot of students here who mean well, but don’t necessarily realize the

¹⁰⁴ Kyle Larry, "The Myth of Self-Segregation," *ibid.*

ways they marginalize.” She followed this by noting that many students have never had to think about race before and are thus so woefully behind in the work that it becomes extremely awkward for her to talk to them about race.

Even more importantly, our current institutional origin story allows us to think that we have fewer racial issues than other campuses and thus have less work to do. Rall repeatedly stressed to me that she thinks the most important result of shifting institutional rhetoric would be interrupting this sense of complacency and self-satisfaction. Rall said,

I think a lot of people, when they see the history, and they hear that students of color have always been accepted, they just want to believe that Bates is equitable. They just want to believe that Bates is inclusive, and Bates is perfect and Bates is a racial utopia. And it's just like, ‘Why aren't people happy?’

Thus, Rall argues that a rosy-eyed institutional origin story (and the claims about the present that come with it) allow Bates-affiliated individuals to avoid doing the work that our campus so clearly needs. She also suggests that this origin story discredits the complaints of students of color when they voice concerns. It is clear that more honest acknowledgement of issues on campus leads to reform. After the 2017 incident between security and a black student, many Bates faculty and staff were able to participate in racial equity training. In my interviews, almost every administrator referenced this training as reshaping their view of campus culture.

Yet there is good news: the training has been only one of many drivers of shifting campus thought. Through the work of dedicated individuals, many of whom started this work before me, an understanding of the issues with the old origin story and knowledge of a more complex one is rising. In his 2018 Convocation remarks, Associate Professor of History Joe Hall posed the questions I ask in this thesis to the incoming first-year class, as well as the college community. He asked, “If Oren Cheney was an abolitionist, deeply opposed to slavery, and Benjamin Bates was making his money weaving cotton grown by enslaved people, why was Oren Cheney taking

Bates' money?"¹⁰⁵ Foregoing an obvious answer, he talked about primary sources (of which there are few relevant ones) and the abolitionist context, concluding that he hopes the new class inquires about questions like the one he had posed. Since 2018, Professor Hall has asked his "Historical Methods" students to look into Bates' own history. Many have looked at the school's racial history and have contributed to groundbreaking research about topics such as cotton factors and the Office of Admission which have crucially contributed to my own thesis. Professor Hall has also given a mock class on this topic as part of Admitted Students Day. In the future, Professor Hall plans to require students to trace specific cotton purchases to plantations or individuals in the South.

Professor Hall is not the first to introduce these ideas. In the early 2000s, professors Sue Houchins and Margaret Creighton prompted similar questions.¹⁰⁶ In 2019, Assistant Professor of Digital and Computational Studies Anelise Shrouf wove Bates history into her "Data Cultures" course. Students in the course transcribed cotton invoices and early Bates donation records, and did individual qualitative research on Bates history (some of which is included in this thesis as well). Today, student presentations have also raised awareness about the complexities of Bates history. In April 2019, students from Professor Hall's Historical Methods course presented their research at Mount David Summit to a crowded Keck classroom. Professor Shrouf's students also presented their individual projects to the college community in December 2019. In January 2020, Rall and I led an educational workshop about Bates' ties to slavery and abolition which was attended by 100 people. These individual efforts are outstanding, but they are limited insofar as

¹⁰⁵ Joseph Hall, "Convocation 2018 Remarks," Bates College, <https://www.bates.edu/news/2018/09/07/convocation-2018-remarks-associate-professor-of-history-joseph-hall/>.

¹⁰⁶ Jay Burns, "Beyond 'Founded by Abolitionists': Students and Faculty Undertake a More Inclusive Examination of Bates' Founding Story," *Bates News*, February 26, 2020.

they are isolated to their individual corners of campus. To date, there has been no organized group effort overseen by Administration to shift our historical discourse.

This conversation is occurring more informally within administrative offices. I spoke to Communication staff, Administrators and Admission staff about their understanding of and approach to institutional history. Every administrator and faculty member I spoke to was willing to entertain my questions about complexities of the history, and most were open to shifting our institutional origin story narrative. In February 2019, Bates Communications (BCO) newswriter Emily McConville published a story on Bates' early twentieth-century debate team, highlighting how black debaters were excluded.¹⁰⁷ In the Fall 2019 issue of the *Bates Magazine*, which goes out to current families and alumni, the "cotton problem" was directly mentioned.¹⁰⁸ Most notably, in February 2020, BCO Editorial Director Jay Burns published a lengthy story on student and faculty research into Bates' founding story. The story is admirable in its historic precision and scope—Burns and his staff interviewed a large number of individuals involved in this work and included ample background on Cheney, Bates and Bates Mill cotton. It seems that BCO stories are targeted more towards current students, parents and alumni (rather than prospective students), so there are limits to the platform. However, it should be noted that this story is the first major outward-facing acknowledgement of the complexities in Bates' history. Rising BCO coverage of these sore spots is an extremely important avenue for raising awareness, but are for naught if they are taken to be solely self-congratulatory and are not part of a more coordinated effort.

¹⁰⁷ Emily McConville, "Recalling When Bates Fought, yet Benefited from, a Racist Debate Organization," *ibid.*, February 28 2019.

¹⁰⁸ Bates College, "Bates Magazine, Fall 2019" 22.

Vice President for Campus Life and Dean of Students Josh McIntosh also said he is aware of the intricacies of Bates' history and spoke to me about wanting to improve the experiences of students of color at Bates. Dean McIntosh has attended student talks on the issue (as well as mine) and was well aware-of and passionate about changing Bates' historical narrative. He spoke to me about alumni attachment to the abolitionist narrative and suggested that changing our marketing could lead to backlash from this group. Dean McIntosh also spoke about his own efforts to change how he advertises the history to job candidates, particularly those of color. Both Dean McIntosh and Chief Communications Officer Sean Findlen were excited to talk about my research and their own understanding of institutional complexities. They were more hesitant to commit to changing the Bates Viewbook.¹⁰⁹ Thus just as when I spoke to BCO staff, Dean McIntosh seemed genuinely knowledgeable and interested, yet was not ready to say that as a college, we should seriously commit to changing our marketing strategy.

Leigh Weisenburger, Dean of Admission and Financial Aid (and whose interview I referenced in Chapter 1), shared this awareness of Bates' complicated history and referenced various steps that the Office of Admission has taken in the right direction. According to Dean Weisenburger, the inclusion of Professor Hall's mock class in Admitted Students Day as well as potential changes to the tour guide manual are the beginning of this work. Interestingly, she noted that these changes may be particularly palatable to Generation Z applicants, who "want facts and they want truth." Dean Weisenburger noted her general openness to these conversations. She said, "There's an opportunity and a challenge and we're excited by that."

¹⁰⁹ This could be due in part to the coordination that Dean Leigh Weisenburger mentioned in my interview with her, as referenced in Chapter 1. If administrative offices are working in conjunction on documents like the Viewbook, they may not want to commit to changes.

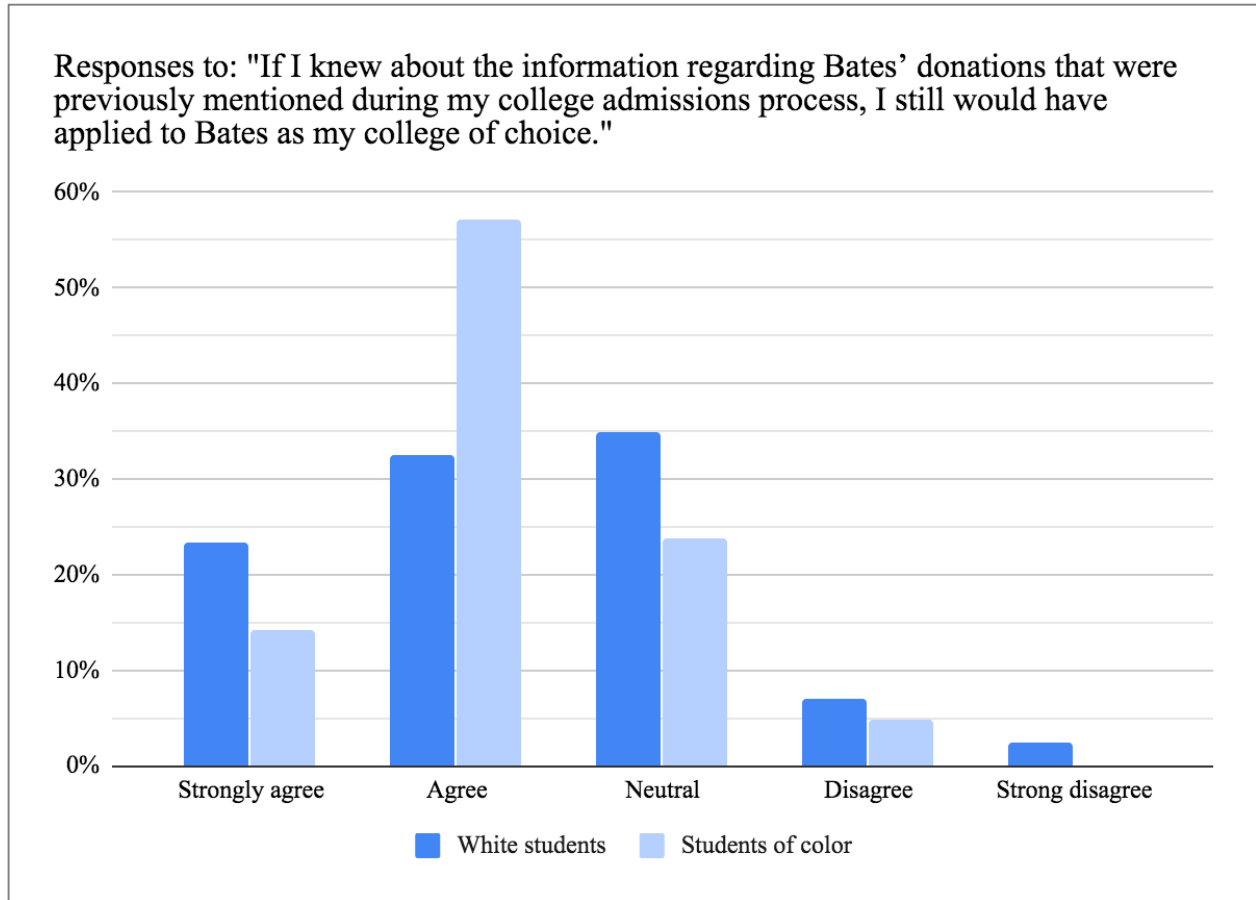


Figure 1. Data from Figueroa and Yousuf's research shows that white students were more likely to say that they strongly agreed (23.5%) compared to students of color (14.28%). Students of color were more likely to agree (57.14% compared to 32.55%).

While I did not specifically ask Dean Weisenburger if she was worried about negative consequences from these changes, I can see how fears about falling admission rates (particularly for students of color) could arise. Recently, the Office of Admission has made a purposeful effort to eliminate barriers to entry for marginalized groups, and any changes which work against this effort could undermine this goal.¹¹⁰ This prompts an important question—would shifting marketing negatively impact diversity recruitment? Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that many students are attracted to Bates because of the narrative that it was founded by abolitionists.

¹¹⁰ "Bates College Attracts Record Number of Applications for Incoming Class," *Bates News*, February 21, 2018.

Figuerero and Yousuf's research begins to address this concern. They asked about students' level of agreement with the phrase, "If I knew the information regarding Bates' donations that were previously mentioned during my college admission process, I still would have applied to Bates as my college of choice." The response to this statement is striking. Most notably, 57.14% of students of color responded "Agree" to this statement, compared with 32.55% of white students. Slightly more white students—23.25%—responded "Strongly agree," compared with 14.28% of students of color.¹¹¹ While I ran no statistical analysis on this data, and it is student-gathered data and not necessarily representative, this discrepancy suggests that diversity recruiting would be unchanged—and maybe Bates' student body would even become more diverse—if the current founding rhetoric shifted.

Rall's personal experience provides context for this trend. Rall said that her family had always taught her that the United States was "built on the backs of slaves." So, when she learned about the Bates College connection to slavery in Professor Hall's class, she was not surprised. "That's just something that's been a very natural part of how I was taught to think about history," she said. "You can't escape slavery, even if Bates was more honest. There isn't another other school I could apply to [that isn't linked to slavery]." Thus, even as a prospective student, Rall already understood the ubiquity of slavery.

In contrast, I cannot remember a time in which I understood how interlinked enslavement and American economic growth were before my sophomore year of college. I have no memory of my parents or teachers ever discussing this with me. I only came to understand the fundamental role of slavery when I started to wonder about Cheney's acceptance of the Bates donation as part of a course with Professor Hall. Similarly, after Rall and my MLK Day

¹¹¹ For the rest of the survey response percentages, refer to Figure 5 in Appendix, where a table of values regarding responses to the statement are located.

presentation, a white student came to me with a curious question. With genuine curiosity, he asked me, “Do you know of any school that is not linked to slavery?” He seemed hopeful that I would say yes, ready to understand what school had a morally pure past. I was surprised by his question. At this point, I shared Rall’s sentiment that one could not find an American university founded before 1861 without ties to enslavement. Could this difference between Rall and a previous version of myself be symptomatic of hesitancy on the part of white students to say that they would still apply to Bates if they knew about its complex history? It is possible that overall, white students are less likely than students of color to understand the reality of slavery’s impact on American capitalism and thought. Thus they may be more oversensitive to complexities within a school’s history.

While this is in no way a definitive explanation of the trend in Figuereo and Yousuf’s data, it is certainly a possible place to start. And, regardless of *why* students of color were more likely than white students to answer this way, this trend *itself* is an important response to potential concerns regarding recruitment. Going forward, more research should be dedicated to this topic. The Office of Admission’s goal of recruiting a more diverse student body seems to be a microcosm of a genuine aim of the college and its people to provide a positive environment for students from many backgrounds.¹¹² Yet as Bryan Stevenson, Bates’ 2018 Commencement speaker, often says, one cannot move on from their history until one recognizes and understands it. Without addressing our institutional historical narrative, our college will not be able to actualize goals regarding racial equity.

¹¹² Bates College, "Mission and Outlook".

In fact, addressing the history itself may bring about positive results on campus. Rall told me that she has felt empowered by her research into Bates history. Rall's ancestors were enslaved in Alabama and most likely picked cotton there. She said,

Their labor made these spaces; their labor made the people who created the industries in this country. You know, I have a space here just as much as anybody else. I think it can be easy to feel like I don't have space in places like this or to look at them and think, 'Why would I have a space here?'

Thus Rall indicates that understanding Bates' links to enslavement has helped her deal with the feeling of marginalization and lack of belonging at a predominately white institution that Larry described in his article. Rall cautioned me that she speaks only for herself—she said that for some people of color, thinking about the history of slavery can be “disheartening.” It is clear that Bates students, and students of color in particular, have a variety potential reactions to elevation of Bates' complex history. This is to be expected—the group “students of color” includes upwards of 500 students from a wide variety of background, and to assume that this group shares one opinion would be inaccurate and stereotypical. At the same time, a group's rejection of this history (whether that be white students or students of color) should not be a reason to close off this discussion.

Another concern with historical education about racism is that it can perpetuate the sort of self-satisfactory complacency that Rall acknowledged already occurs. If well-meaning individuals, particularly well-meaning white people, learn about historical racism, will this become a distraction from issues they have more direct control over, such as their own racism? In other words, if white people at Bates become obsessed with the complexities of the institution's history, is it a way for them to project an image of wokeness, or genuinely believe in their own wokeness, without actually being woke? Shannon Sullivan writes about this conflict in a book chapter entitled, “Demonizing White Ancestors.” Sullivan argues that overt criticism of

problematic white ancestors is problematic insofar as it “attempts to absolve contemporary white people of any connection or complicity with white domination.”¹¹³ She does not advocate for the racist behaviors of white people from any time period, but rather suggests that looking at the humanity of problematic white people of the past may “free [contemporary] white liberals of their fantasy of angelic innocence.” So, updated marketing should both include a more complex story while encouraging prospective students to take on a critical, rather than self-congratulatory, perspective at Bates.¹¹⁴

While Sullivan’s argument focuses particularly on reactions to white slaveholders, it can be extended to figures like Oren Cheney and Benjamin Bates, both of whom had flaws and could be easily demonized. Under Sullivan’s view, distancing can occur, but it is not a productive action for antiracist white people to take. Rather, this response could distract individuals from examining the ways they perpetuate racism in their everyday life. There have been many times throughout this project that I have worried about this for myself. Has my time spent on historical research into the complicated financial history of Bates been a distraction from reflecting on my actions in social and educational spaces at Bates and beyond? Throughout my writing process, I have been thoughtfully called out a number of times by peers of color for ways that my research and my everyday life is racist. I am under no impression that my historical understanding and contemporary activism absolves me of this. It is my hope that this same mentality will be employed by white people at Bates that learn about and act on this history going forward. It

¹¹³ Shannon Sullivan, *Good White People: The Problem with Middle-Class White Anti-Racism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014), Both quotes from page 66.

¹¹⁴ Professor Joe Hall made a comment about this in his 2018 Convocation remarks. He said, “Your quest, your development, depends on your questions... What it’s really about is you and the questions you want to ask.”

seems likely that these lessons about the past and present will improve these conversations and relationships going forward.

Chapter 6: Reparations

“Don’t simply point your finger accusingly at the past. Universities are truth-seeking institutions. Honor that fact.”

—James Campbell, Former Chair of Brown Committee on Slavery and Justice

If our college is ready to take on the difficult task of acknowledging our history and taking steps to repair harm done, it is worth considering how other universities and colleges have done this work—and what aspects of their practices are worth emulating. In this section of the thesis, I consider the work of four schools in this area. Following that, I use suggestions from a Bates community workshop to apply teachings from these schools to the Bates context. Reparations at Bates would not mirror the work done at any other school thus far—rather, reparations should be tied to the culture and history of our individual school. By continuing an already messy and contentious conversation with more coordinated action, Bates can address disparities on campus and lead other schools with complicated ties to do similar work.

According to Brown University’s now well-known report, “Slavery and Justice,” reparations have a long history. Put simply, “reparations” means that people deserve compensation when they are wronged by someone else. It is a “right to redress.”¹¹⁵ Since the abolition of American slavery, the United States federal government has not given any formal financial reparations to black Americans.¹¹⁶ Recent debates about this topic are relevant to the way colleges and universities are addressing their past. In the 1990’s, national reparations conversations became salient again. In 1989, Congressman John Conyers introduced HR 40, a bill calling for a nonpartisan commission to be appointed “to examine the institution of slavery, subsequent *de jure* and *de facto* racial and economic discrimination against African Americans,

¹¹⁵ Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice, “Slavery and Justice,” Brown University, https://www.brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/documents/memorials.pdf.

¹¹⁶ Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*, June 2014.

and the impact of those forces on living African Americans, and to recommend remedies to Congress.”¹¹⁷ Yet the bill has never advanced in the floor of the House, despite the fact that Conyers reintroduced the bill during every session of Congress when he served.¹¹⁸ Additionally, a 2014 article by author and journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates contributed to the national debate. Entitled, “The Case for Reparations,” Coates’ persuasive and intricately researched story argues that American prosperity was built upon racial inequity and thus that black Americans deserve financial reparations. He begins not with slavery, but twentieth-century racist housing practices, and shows how centuries of discrimination have created a massive wealth imbalance. Yet despite these (and many other) efforts, there have been no large-scale reparations in the United States. This is deeply concerning. Slavery systematically stripped black and brown individuals of their most basic rights based on the color of their skin. This inequity continues to manifest today.

Yet it is far easier to say that reparations should be made than to flesh out what they would *actually look like*. Part of what makes this so difficult is simply the amount of time that has passed. Immigration, death and birth have diluted contemporary ties to both enslavers and the enslaved. Yet reparations are still possible. An article in *The Washington Post* suggests three conditions of clarity which make reparations most likely: the institution that was culpable still exists; there is a distinct, identifiable population who or whose ancestors were harmed, and there is a community mobilizing claimants’ rights.¹¹⁹ Thus, reparations are most achievable when the ties from past to present are clearest, and when a harmed community has organized to take

¹¹⁷ Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice, "Slavery and Justice" 72. Quote modified slightly for ease of understanding.

¹¹⁸ Coates, "The Case for Reparations."

¹¹⁹ Thai Jones, "Slavery Reparations Seem Impossible. In Many Places, They're Already Happening.," *The Washington Post*, January 31, 2020.

action. One space where this is happening with particular energy and focus is the higher education community.

Since 2001, groups of faculty, staff and students at 70 universities and colleges have looked into their own institutional relationships with slavery.¹²⁰ The movement is trending in a community that often has a herd mentality—it began with just a few schools taking leadership, but has grown rapidly in recent years. The Brown report, which was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, looks at restorative efforts around the world, grouping them into three categories: apologies, truth commissions and reparations.¹²¹ These categories are useful classifications for efforts made by colleges and universities to investigate their relationships to historic racism:

Possible reparative efforts at colleges and universities		
<i>Apologies</i>	<i>Truth-seeking</i>	<i>Reparations</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public apologies by university administrators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renaming buildings, awards, Departments and/or scholarships • Creating memorials • Funding or organizing institutional research, sometimes through an undergraduate seminar course • Creating websites, digital archives and symposiums • Changing marketing language about institutional histories • Joining the Universities Studying Slavery consortium • Creating committees to investigate institutional links to slavery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly paying descendants of enslaved people • Reinvesting in communities where descendants now live • Directly paying historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) • Reinvesting in on-campus resources for students from underrepresented backgrounds

Figure 2. Possible actions for colleges and universities to take regarding their problematic pasts. The actions are sorted under categories laid out in the Brown report.

¹²⁰ Leslie M. Harris, "Higher Education's Reckoning with Slavery," *American Association of University Professors*.

¹²¹ Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice, "Slavery and Justice". For the purposes of this categorization, I will consider truth commissions to encapsulate all truth-seeking efforts.

It is clear that some of these actions are more applicable to the Bates context than others.

Much of this research has been done despite fear of repercussions. According to Leslie M. Harris, a leader in the early movement at Emory University, some schools are concerned about the impact of public action on their reputation and alumni donations.¹²² These fears are likely to be held by some at Bates. If our college more publicly acknowledged its ties to slavery, and committed to investigating them, would we still be seen as a progressive, inclusive school? And, would alumni be upset if their perception of the school is disrupted? Harris says these sorts of questions have been overcome with ethical beliefs and persistent research, and that the work has even helped history students see how historical research is applicable to contemporary life. Still, schools have faced criticism from students and descendants, which I will outline in this chapter. I will focus on four schools which have either been leaders in the universities and slavery movement or which are particularly comparable to Bates: Brown University, Princeton University, Georgetown University and Colby College. By surveying these four institutions, I will also provide examples of all of the above actions.

Brown is generally understood to be the first public leader of the universities and slavery movement.¹²³ The Brown report was the work of a group of Brown faculty, staff and students appointed in by then-president Ruth Simmons, the first black president of an Ivy League institution. Simmons said that reparations are a subject which, given the school's history, Brown had "a special obligation and a special opportunity to provide thoughtful inquiry."¹²⁴ Leadership

¹²² Harris, "Higher Education's Reckoning with Slavery."

¹²³ According to Leslie Harris' article, "Higher Education's Reckoning with Slavery," Emory University and Yale University were also leaders around the same time that Brown's Steering Committee was appointed.

¹²⁴ Brown University Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice, "Slavery and Justice" 4.

from Simmons seems to be a crucial part of why, in 2003, Brown became one of the first schools to pioneer this sort of work. In 2006, the “Slavery and Justice” report was published. It provides an overview of Brown’s own history, reparations efforts around the world, and potential applications and recommendations. In accordance with Simmons’ request, the report sought to “provide factual information and critical perspectives to deepen leadership.”¹²⁵ The report does just that—it is a useful guide to context and process for schools seeking to look into their histories. While the report is only one part of Brown’s overall reparations efforts, it is most notable for our use as it provides a survey of global reparations work, notes on process, and was groundbreaking work.

Another notable truth-seeking effort occurred at Princeton, which began formally looking into its own history as part of an undergraduate seminar in 2013.¹²⁶ In the seminar, which was taught in the University Archives, students investigated early links to enslavement. Later, with the help of post-doctoral fellows, the Princeton & Slavery project continued this research and eventually compiled their findings into an interactive “Princeton & Slavery” website. The study is distinct insofar as it originated from student research, is the largest of its kind, and has significant community partnerships. The website combines research done by 40 authors ranging from undergraduate student to faculty members, and is meant to be an ongoing project. While there certainly are many other schools (Brown is one) that have created digital archives for their historical research, the Princeton website does stand out as it is particularly interactive, inclusive

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Sandweiss, "The Princeton & Slavery Project".

and practical.¹²⁷ It includes high-school-level and college-level lesson plans for teachers, video stories and primary sources.

While Brown led the movement and Princeton has a notable website, Georgetown has what some see as the most high-profile reparative efforts. Earlier in the thesis, I described Georgetown's history, noting that the school sold 272 enslaved people to pay off its debt in 1838.¹²⁸ A history this troubling necessitates a strong response—and Georgetown has arguably the strongest response of all schools. Georgetown has given public apologies, engaged in truth-seeking efforts and made reparations. The "Georgetown Memory Project," which originated via alumni fundraising, hired eight genealogists to track descendants of the slave ship, and told those individuals about their connection to the school.¹²⁹ In 2016, the school was the first to give preferential admission (akin to legacy preference) to these descendants. However, descendants were not included in the relevant steering committee, and some criticized the school for this lack of inclusion.¹³⁰ Afterwards, in 2017, the school formally apologized for the 1838 sale.

In 2019, Georgetown students voted to increase tuition by \$27.20 in order to benefit the descendants.¹³¹ According to *The New York Times*, the reparations fund they proposed would be the first time a prominent American organization paid direct reparations for slavery. However, student referenda at Georgetown are nonbinding, and the school's administration did not approve the plan to have a student-funded reparations initiative. Instead, Georgetown has planned to create a \$400,000 fund that will be made of up of "voluntary contributions from alumni, faculty,

¹²⁷ For those that are interested in learning about a specific school's relationship to slavery, googling "X school and slavery" often will do the job. Many more schools have similar websites that are extremely useful tools.

¹²⁸ Swarns, "272 Slaves Were Sold to Save Georgetown. What Does It Owe Their Descendants?."

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ "Georgetown University Plans Steps to Atone for Slave Past."

¹³¹ Adeel Hassan, "Georgetown Students Agree to Create Reparations Fund," *ibid.*, April 12, 2019.

students and philanthropists.”¹³² That money will go towards community projects in Maryland and Louisiana, where many descendants now live.

Two groups have criticized this action: students and descendants. First, student organizers disapproved of the administration’s failure to uphold the student referendum and for the ambiguity of their plan. One organizer who is also a descendant of an enslaved couple said that the plan “delegitimizes and undermines [the] student effort and the democratic vote of the undergraduate student body” and “contains no clear criteria, accountability measures or transparency with regards to construction or implementation.”¹³³ Thus, administrative action may have devalued student action. Additionally, descendants were critical of the project’s process as well as its scale. In 2020, a New York Times opinion documentary featuring a descendant community in Mechanicsville, Louisiana, questioned how much a \$400,000 fund can do for such a large group.¹³⁴ According to the piece, if the overall fund was split amongst the whole group, each descendant would receive only \$50. This stands in stark contrast to the \$1 billion that these descendants sought in 2016 for a foundation focused on educational, health and housing.¹³⁵ While a fund of that scale may have been aspirational, the descendants featured in the documentary are clear that what Georgetown has proposed is not enough. Additionally, some descendants were critical of their exclusion from the steering committee and overall reparations process.

¹³² Rachel L. Swarns, "Is Georgetown’s \$400,000-a-Year Plan to Aid Slave Descendants Enough?," *ibid.*, October 30, 2019.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ DaVita Robinson, Valerie White, and Maxine Crump, "Our Ancestors Were Sold to Save Georgetown. '\$400,000 Is Not Going to Do It.'," *ibid.*, February 6, 2020.

¹³⁵ Rachel L. Swarns, "Georgetown University Plans Steps to Atone for Slave Past," *ibid.*, September 1, 2016.

Colby College, a small liberal arts school in Waterville, Maine, has also taken controversial steps to atone for its past. Colby is interesting insofar as it is the closest college to Bates (both in type of school and geography) that has publicly addressed its history. In 2017, President David Green renamed his house after Samuel Osborne, a former slave who worked as a janitor at the college. In conjunction with this change, the school started an equity initiative that offered free shuttles, free ski passes and internship funding to students. These steps received high-profile coverage in *The Boston Globe*.¹³⁶ However, a student article in *The Colby Echo* argued that President Greene's decision is problematic insofar as it exemplifies the ways Colby is not sufficiently dealing with its own racism.¹³⁷ According to the article, the renaming of the house was announced at the same time as a major development campaign. Student Alison Levitt says that this was a "shallow gesture aimed at raising more money for the capital campaign rather than really recognizing Osborne's complex story."¹³⁸ She also notes that Osborne faced racism on campus but that fundraising materials say he was beloved by the campus community. Thus, in the case of Colby, renaming the President's house was a high-profile decision that came under fire for its potential superficiality.¹³⁹

Finally, there is collaborative work being done by all of these schools (and many more) to address slavery's legacy. The Universities Studying Slavery (USS) consortium was created by the University of Virginia and has grown to encompass over sixty schools looking into their

¹³⁶ Laura Krantz, "At Colby College, an Honor for a Former Slave," *The Boston Globe*, November 25, 2017.

¹³⁷ Alison Levitt, "Evaluating Colby's Dark Past with 'Janitor Sam' Osborne," *Colby Echo*, April 19, 2018.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ I hoped to expand more on Colby's reparative efforts, as it is the closest school to Bates that has engaged in formal reparations. Future researchers should consider in more depth three questions: What was Samuel Osborne's life like? What has President Greene done to increase equity? And was this criticism part of a larger campus discussion, or was it limited to a few detractors?

histories.¹⁴⁰ The group meets semiannually to share best practices and research, and is currently working on a pilot program with Tougaloo College, a historically black college (HBCU).¹⁴¹ According to Leslie Harris, the Emory leader, HBCUs have struggled to recover from the 2008 financial depression. So, USS is piloting the “Tougaloo College Research Development Fund,” which will “provide infrastructural support that would help the college [Tougaloo] apply for and track federal funds.”¹⁴² Efforts of this sort—financial partnership between a university or group of universities and an HBCU—offer an alternative direct approach to the Georgetown-style community fund. For schools which already have links to HBCUs or which cannot track specific descendants, this could be an interesting step.

To recap: Brown, Princeton, Georgetown and Colby did varying work to address their institutional ties to slavery. Their work has not *necessarily* been the most important or most effective, but stands out in its relevance to Bates. Brown compiled a research report via committee; Princeton undergraduates created an interactive historical website; Georgetown publicly apologized, gave preferential admission and created a community fund; and Colby renamed a building and started an equity initiative. Each of these actions were tailored to their school’s context. There is no “one size fits all” solution to the slavery’s legacy. Regardless, we can use the work done at these schools to inform our approach to Bates’ own history.

Ursula Rall’s and my workshop on Bates’ ties to slavery and abolition offered some suggestions for what reparations could look like at Bates. As part of Bates’ 2020 MLK Day celebration, Ursula and I provided historical education to Bates community members and created space for a group conversation about reparative steps. Approximately one hundred people came

¹⁴⁰ Kristen Doerer, "How Colleges Confront Their Racist Pasts," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Harris, "Higher Education’s Reckoning with Slavery."

¹⁴² "Higher Education’s Reckoning with Slavery."

to the workshop, the vast majority of whom were students. Also present were a few community members and a handful of professors, faculty and staff. A few students mentioned that they were tour guides or worked in the Office of Admission. Approximately ninety percent of attendees were white.

Our workshop began with a presentation arguing that Bates' early history is complex and that our community should take this into account when considering Bates and reparation. This presentation outlined much of what I have said in thus far. After offering background, we explored consequences and action. We asked the audience to break into small groups and discuss three questions:

1. What do you think of the complex links between Bates and enslavement?
2. How can this history be advertised concisely to prospective students and community members?
3. What reparations, if any, do you think Bates should make?

Most groups were abuzz with conversation, and one even talked through a break in the middle of the discussion. After the groups had gone through the three questions, we brought everyone back together to share. Attendees were much more reluctant to share in the larger group, but we coaxed a few ideas out of them. Some ideas mirrored work done at Georgetown, Brown, and the like, while others were more Bates-focused, creative and unique. Some of the more in-the-box ideas proposed were as follows:

1. Make a separate website or offshoot of the Bates website detailing our complex history.
2. Have an educational program at Accepted Student's Day or during first-year orientation.¹⁴³
3. Start a semester-long course focusing on universities and slavery, with a specific section about Bates.
4. Expand the OIE for more interracial dialogue.

¹⁴³ As I noted earlier, Joe Hall has already led an educational program at Accepted Student's Day. To my knowledge, there is no mention of a complex history during first-year orientation. However, there is an expanded racial equity training during orientation that could include some mention of our founding paradox.

5. Alter Admission discourse on the origin story and include a section in campus tours on our complicated past.

Others were tailored more uniquely to the Bates context, such as:

1. Develop a deeper relationship with Morehouse College, a HBCU, through financial support and/or other programs.¹⁴⁴
2. Include a Bates and slavery day in first-year seminar courses.¹⁴⁵
3. Use the phrase “Why We’re Called Bates” to incorporate information about our complicated history into programming or advertising within the Office of Admission.
4. Create a scholarship in the name of already celebrated black Bates graduate like Benjamin Mays or Peter Gomes that is specifically for a student of color.¹⁴⁶

Participants surprised and excited Ursula and me with the high level of creativity, thoughtfulness and trust they brought to the discussion. Going forward, Bates cannot think solely in-the-box about reparations, as many of the best practice solutions thus far have been implemented at schools that are much larger, have much starker ties to slavery, and do not advertise themselves as “progressive” like us. Additionally, Bates’ endowment is more limited than some peer colleges which will impact its scope of reparations. This must be taken into consideration. Reparations ideas should be tailored to the unique needs and history of our institution and cognizant of a variety of perspectives on the current state of affairs on campus.

Work done at Brown, Princeton, Georgetown and Colby can provide valuable information to Bates. Reparative efforts should:

- Acknowledge the past and sensitively represent painful histories.
- Be realistic while pushing beyond what is seen as “adequate” or “doable.”
- Center conversation with a variety of parties in the college community, including students, faculty and staff of color as well as descendants of enslaved people.

¹⁴⁴ Bates and Morehouse have a special relationship, at least in part due to revered Bates graduate from the class of 1920 Benjamin Mays. Mays went on to become president of Morehouse College for 27 years as well as becoming a “spiritual mentor” to Dr. Martin Luther King. Now, Bates and Morehouse (as well as Spelman) have a semester or year exchange program. Additionally, two Morehouse students travel to Bates each MLK Day for a Bates-Morehouse debate.

¹⁴⁵ First-year seminars are introductory writing courses which all Bates first-years are required to take.

¹⁴⁶ Peter J. Gomes, class of 1965, became a well-known Harvard preacher. The Bates College chapel is now named after him.

And we must expect these conversations to be messy. Colby and Georgetown have both faced extended criticism for their work. But doing something is almost always better than doing nothing. As we go into this work with an emphasis on process, individuals involved must understand that criticism will happen and be open to changing in light of open evaluation of those critiques.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis, I wanted to understand the curious response first-year students gave me during an AESOP scavenger hunt. Why did so many of them know that Bates was founded by abolitionists, but little else? They had enrolled at a school called “Bates” with barely any idea about where this name came from. Now, I can see how these first-years were influenced by a Bates College marketing strategy which utilizes only the most positive aspects of the school’s history. My research demonstrated that prospective students are told the school was founded by abolitionists, but not that it was funded by a cotton textile manufacturer whose wealth was dependent on slave-picked cotton. Bates College marketing, including Office of Admission programming, projects this selective history onto the present to claim that our campus is uniquely progressive and has been since its start.

The Bates community deserves a more complete story. This will take thoughtful work going forward. Tracing the cotton trail back to specific plantations and people could bring the harm done in founding our school out of the abstract and into real lived experiences. Knowing names from the past can also lead to descendants in the present, as was done at Georgetown. This work should be just the beginning of a longer journey to explore the archive. Even without the archival discoveries I hoped for, a deeper understanding of the economic and political world Cheney and Bates worked within contextualizes their actions. In the nineteenth century, slavery was fundamental to the American economy, including the Northern economy. Thus institutions of higher education founded in this era had little choice but to pursue donations of questionable ethical origin. Cheney could have rationalized this reality in a number of ways. In general, abolitionists took varied approaches to the market—some tried to create their own alternative economy, some tried to use capitalism for good, and some just leaned into the hypocrisy. The

relative failure of Free Producers—abolitionists that most prioritized moral purity—may have influenced Cheney’s choice of pragmatism over purity.¹⁴⁷

I have suggested that our failure to talk about the origin story in a complex way has detrimental effects on campus culture today. In my time at Bates, I have seen students of color mistreated both in high-profile incidents and day-to-day microaggressions. It is promising that the damaging discourse is shifting in small corners of campus, but thus far there has been no coordinated effort reform our marketing. Without this, the success of racial equity programs will be limited, as students will come to Bates assuming it has no issues or be oblivious of the need to look for them. I have not offered specific recommendations for reparations at Bates because I believe that is work must be done in community. However, I have outlined ways other schools have navigated this space and discussed potential critiques. Reparative efforts have been most successful when they acknowledge painful pasts, are tailored to each individual school’s history and culture, and include individuals of color and descendants (if possible) at the table. The conversations will be messy and contentious. This should be welcomed as a necessary part of a good process.

There are limitations to the scope of my research that offer opportunities for expansion by the next researchers. Bates takes pride in its origin not just because it was founded by abolitionists but also because it was open to all, regardless of race or gender, from its start. I do not explore the relative success of the open attendance policy, but I suspect that the early experiences of black and brown students on campus might also contradict with the marketed

¹⁴⁷ Bates College and the surrounding area of Lewiston-Auburn would probably look significantly different if he had not accepted the donation. In fact, Bates College might not exist at all.

story.¹⁴⁸ Reimagining the Bates origin story is incomplete without this research. I was also unable to look into the current financing of the College to see whether contemporary donors' work aligns with Bates' stated mission. Additionally, as I have noted throughout, I was not able to trace Benjamin Bates' cotton to individual plantations or people. This is work that I suspect many of Professor Joe Hall and Professor Anelise Shrout's students will pick up in the future. Further research should also focus on developing resources like pamphlets or websites that are more accessible than a thesis. It is my hope that future researchers will follow all of these threads, and that this thesis can be a useful tool along their journeys.

The level of learning I have had throughout this thesis process is incomparable to anything that I have experienced. I now see that slavery's legacy is inescapable and that my own honest acknowledgement of this fact can help me see the present more clearly. I have heard that whiteness is a fog that, when lifted, allows you to see the world more accurately. Now, I have a slightly clearer view, and a better sense of where I am still fogbound. This thesis has helped me navigate the world in a fuller and more honest way. It has also forced me to reframe my own expectations of this kind of work. I recommend that future researchers be realistic about the timeline for change. This work takes a long time. But this is no excuse not to do it. Most importantly, the work will only be successful if the right people are at the table. Without input from people of color and descendants before, during and after decision-making, reparative work will be unduly limited.

Bates College is truly full of well-meaning and thoughtful faculty and staff members that have the potential to effectively address our history and make positive change. It is common for

¹⁴⁸ Tim Larson's 2005 Bates thesis, "Faith by Their Works," does touch on these questions. Interested readers should look into his work, which is on the Bates website. My thesis also does not address the fact that Bates occupies indigenous land which is another crucial aspect of reframing the origin story.

college students to demonize administrators, and I went into this process expecting these individuals to be significantly more defensive and closed-off than they were. Every person I spoke to—including, briefly, President Clayton Spencer—was aware of the discrepancy between the marketed origin and more complex story and was open to my thoughts on how this should shift. Coordinated and thoughtful development of this work will benefit Bates as a whole. This is both an obligation to the school's students, faculty and staff as well as an opportunity to open space for others to recognize the ubiquity of slavery's legacy.

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Appendix

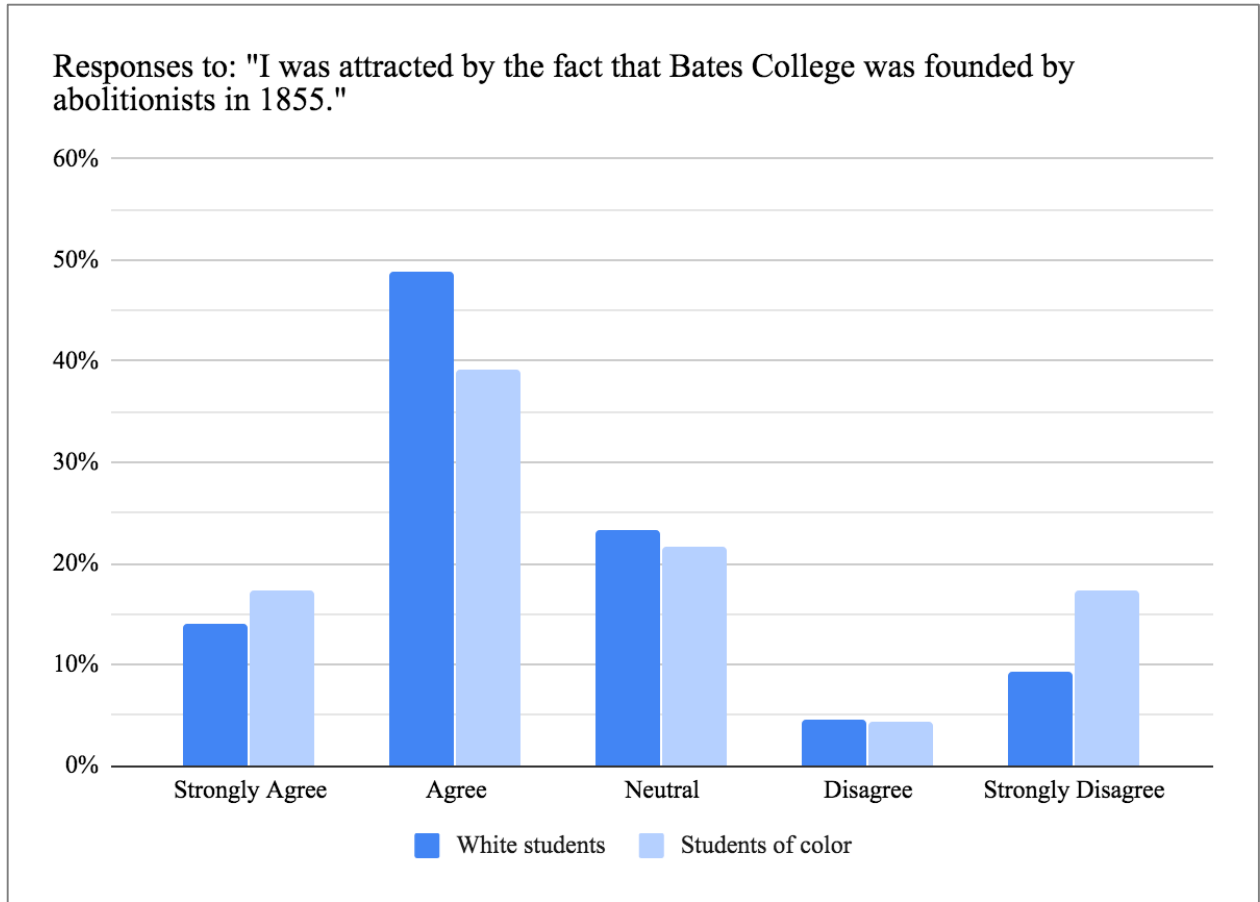


Figure 3. I analyzed data from Perla Figuereo and Alya Yousuf’s research project, “Uncovering the Financial History of Bates College.”. There was little difference between the two group’s responses to, “I was attracted by the fact that Bates College was founded by abolitionists in 1855.” White students were slightly more likely to agree, while students of color were slightly more likely to strongly disagree.

Responses to: "I was attracted by the fact that Bates College was founded by abolitionists in 1855."		
	<i>White students</i>	<i>Students of color</i>
<i>Strongly Agree</i>	13.95%	17.39%
<i>Agree</i>	48.80%	39.13%
<i>Neutral</i>	23.35%	21.73%
<i>Disagree</i>	4.65%	4.34%
<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	9.30%	17.39%

Figure 4. Percentage breakdowns for Figure 3 graph.

Responses to: "If I knew about the information regarding Bates' donations that were previously mentioned during my college admissions process, I still would have applied to Bates as my college of choice."		
	<i>White students</i>	<i>Students of color</i>
<i>Strongly agree</i>	23.25%	14.28%
<i>Agree</i>	32.55%	57.14%
<i>Neutral</i>	34.88%	23.80%
<i>Disagree</i>	6.97%	4.76%
<i>Strong disagree</i>	2.32%	0.00%

Figure 5. Percentage breakdowns for Figure 1 graph, which suggest that students of color would be particularly likely to apply to Bates even if the history was represented more fully.