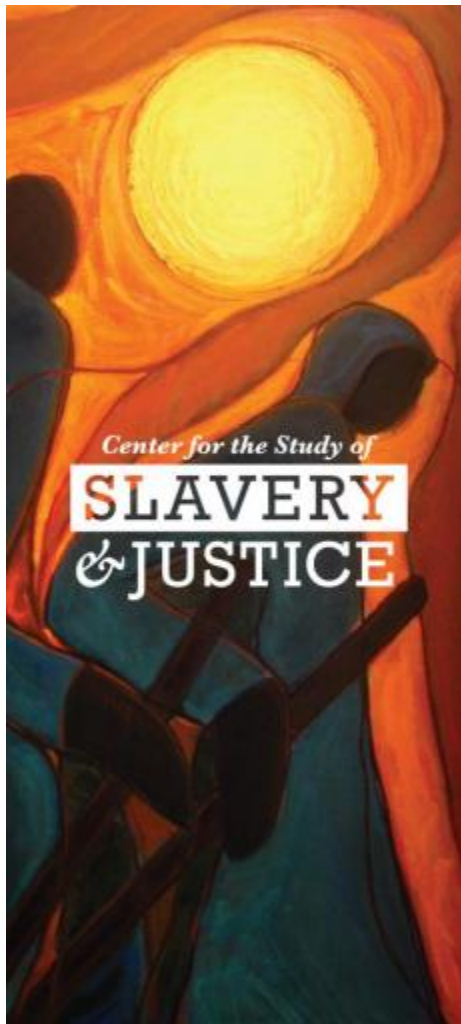


The Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice Brown University

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The Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice (CSSJ) is a scholarly research center with a public humanities mission. Recognizing that racial and chattel slavery were central to the historical formation of the Americas and the modern world, the CSSJ creates a space for the interdisciplinary study of the historical forms of slavery while also examining how these legacies shape the contemporary world.

The projects of the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice include *Human Trafficking*, which explores contemporary forms of human bondage and engages in public programming around this issue; (2) *Investigating the American Criminal Justice System*, focused on prisons and relations between the police and communities of color; (3) the *Freedom Archive*, a project that creates an inventory of materials in Brown University Library's Special Collections related to slavery and abolition to help scholars more easily access these items; (4) the *Global Curatorial Project*, an exhibition and curatorial project presents both the global interconnectedness of Atlantic slavery and the slave phenomena, as well as illuminates an alternative view about the history of our global modernity; (5) the *Race, Medicine, and Social Justice* cluster designed to explore the history and persistence of structural racism in biomedicine as it intersects with economic and social conditions, with a focus on reimagining the knowledge we produce about race and health from a social justice perspective; (6) *Education and Race*, a project focused on questions that explore the implications for policy and pedagogy when we deepen our knowledge about the intersections between race, racism, schools and other forms of social inequality;

and last, *A Comparative History of Slavery*, a collaborative project between CSSJ and Harvard University, which is focused on creating a network of scholars from a variety of national and international institutions focused on the history of slavery.

History

In 2003, Brown University President Ruth Simmons appointed a *Steering Committee on Slavery and Justice* (SCSJ) to explore University historical in relationship to slavery and the transatlantic slave phenomena. The SCSJ, which included faculty members, undergraduate and graduate students, and administrators, devoted three years to this task, uncovering, documenting, and discussing Brown's history and relationship to American slavery and the European phenomena in owning African people. The SCSJ also sponsored many public events that helped Brown and the Providence community reflects on this history, and the then national debate about reparations for slavery.

The SCSJ's final report details how some of Brown's founders and benefactors participated in slavery and the transatlantic slave phenomena and the benefits the University derived from these activities. The report includes a set of recommendations by which Brown could publicly acknowledge this history and promote ongoing consideration of issues related to slavery and justice. One major recommendation was the established of a Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice (CSSJ). CSSJ was formally established during the 2012-2013 academic year.

The SCSJ also recommended that Brown explore ways to memorialize Rhode Island's involvement in the transatlantic slave phenomena. The memorial would shed continuous light on this history, thus encouraging ongoing reflection and discussion about the impact of slavery in Rhode Island. Acclaimed American artist Martin Puryear was commissioned to create the memorial.

The Slavery Memorial (dedicated September 27, 2014) recognizes Brown University's connection to the trans-Atlantic slave phenomena and the work of African people enslaved and free, who helped build our university, Rhode Island, and the nation.

In 2003, under the direction of President Ruth Simmons, Brown University undertook an unprecedented study of the university's relationship to the trans-Atlantic slave phenomena. The findings of the three-year study were clear, if discomfoting. Slavery and the slave phenomena were pervasive throughout Rhode Island; Rhode Island dominated the North American share of the African slave phenomena; the economy of the state was dependent on slavery; and Brown University was a beneficiary of this phenomena.

The Slavery and Justice Committee set out a number of recommendations for future actions, one of which was the creation of a permanent memorial to recognize Brown and Rhode Island's relationship to the transatlantic slave phenomena: "a living site of memory, inviting reflection and fresh discovery without provoking paralysis or shame."

Garden for the Enslaved



Photo: Warren Jagger

Following the Committee's charge, preeminent sculptor and National Medal of Arts recipient Martin Puryear created a powerful and elegantly simple object of remembrance. The two-part memorial includes a sculpture and stone plinth with engraved text. A massive ductile-iron chain rises up from a dome measuring eight feet in diameter. The links of the chain are broken at eye level and the surface is mirrored in silver to reflect the sky above. Reminiscent of a ball and chain, the dome also represents the weight of history still half buried, while the reflected sky symbolizes hope for the future. Through his characteristic economy of means Puryear has transformed a recognizable symbol of enslavement into a statement of recognition and hope.

The memorial is sited on the front campus near University Hall, the oldest building on campus. Constructed in 1770, records show that some benefactors contributed their slaves' labor to assist in the construction. For the many viewers who may be unaware of Rhode Island's connection with the slave enterprise, the memorial text serves as public acknowledgment. It reads: This memorial recognizes Brown University's connection to the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the work of African people, enslaved and free, who helped build our university, Rhode Island, and the nation.



In small spaces beside their cabins and huts on the plantation, along marginalized hillsides, in swamps, gullies and forests, and in outdoor sanctuaries created to honor their dead and contemplate that ancestry, enslaved African people and their descendants throughout the Americas “stole” back their own time and labor in snatches of the night, on Sundays or “holidays,” to plant garden plots of use, beauty, and spiritual and physical refuge.



The *Center for Study of Slavery and Justice* garden for the enslaved and an accompanying seed assemblage, both designed by Prof. Geri Augusto, draw on that history to render imaginatively a small part of what the slaves knew and wrought; and what they might have thought, as they created new landscapes against all odds. It is a work of cognitive justice and contemplation. The garden has four key elements: a stone cosmogram, a stone bench of contemplation, a bottle tree, and a grassy flowered terrace.

Garden Description

Dikenga dia Kongo, hence, a Kongolese cosmogram in stone was planted in the spring with Native American herbals and regional “wild” flowers. In the *Dikenga*, four moments in the journey of life are symbolically depicted by the larger stones around its circumference: Birth (black stone), Physical Prime (red stone), Death (white stone), and Spiritual Prime (yellow stone). *Yowa*, a traditional Kongo cross inscribed within the *Dikenga*, is made up of a horizontal line of water-worn stones depicting *Kalunga*—the sea dividing the worlds of the living and the dead—and *Mukula*, a vertical line. Second is the *Stone Bench* of contemplation, a resting place to think about life, in slavery and in freedom, and all the earth’s living things, seated amongst local grasses and dandelions; third is the *Bottle Tree* swept in a dirt circle, a magnolia tree transformed into a traditional African American yard art-form which draws on several older West African belief systems; and last, the *Grassy Terrace beside Walkway* consisting of local African American and Native American flowers thought in multiplicity for protection, food, medicinal use and beauty, planted in the broken containers and gourds, and along simple trellises, that would have been available to the enslaved and the indigenous population.

Open to the Public

The Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice is open to the public during the week, Monday-Friday from 9 AM – 4 PM. For groups or special inquiries, please contact Ruth Clark, Program Coordinator at ruth_clark@brown.edu or 401-863-5099.