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# From Slavery to College Loans

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## ABSTRACT

My story begins back in 1793 when November Caldwell was “gifted” to Helen Hogg Hooper (whose father-in-law, William Hooper, signed the Declaration of Independence), the wife of the first president of UNC–Chapel Hill, Joseph Caldwell. November Caldwell is my great-great-great-grandfather. Currently, I owe over six figures in student-loan debt to the very institution that enslaved my ancestors. We are at a particular place in the political history of our nation. White supremacy is morally corrupt. It requires that we deny the humanity of human beings for one reason or another. It is hard to stand up against white supremacy because folks who do are often ostracized from their families and communities. We have all been socialized to believe in white supremacy—it was one of our nation’s founding principles. In this essay I hope to break open a dialogue about the white supremacist hegemony institutionalized within our neoliberal university system. Connecting the past atrocities of slavery with actual educational experiences of the descendants of those who served the proslavery institutions has not been widely publicized or talked about. We must interrogate our history or we will be doomed to continue to repeat the horrific inhumane atrocities.

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It all started May 1992. My father was taking me to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) to participate in a recruitment program for talented Black students from across the state. Prior to dropping me off at my destination, my father took me to a graveyard behind Connor Dormitory on UNC’s campus. There was a gazebo and small paved path that

separated one side of the graveyard from the other. My father told me that Whites were buried on the side with the gazebo, and Blacks were buried on the other (even in death, Jim Crow was a necessary evil). He took me to an obelisk that had four names on it:

November Caldwell (UNC–Chapel Hill, n.d., “November Caldwell”)

Wilson Caldwell (UNC–Chapel Hill, n.d., “Wilson Caldwell”)

David Barham (UNC Archives 2018)

Henry Smith (Documenting the American South, n.d., “Original Joseph Caldwell Monument”)

Dad told me that November and Wilson were our ancestors. He said that we had been here all along. November and Wilson were born into slavery, lived through emancipation, and emerged as free men.

UNC–Chapel Hill was the first public university in the nation. The cornerstone UNC–Chapel Hill was laid in 1793. It was the only public university in the United States of America to confer degrees in the eighteenth century (UNC–Chapel Hill, n.d., “History”). Curiously, absent from the brief history of UNC–Chapel Hill on its website, was the displacement of Indigenous Nations that occupied the land on which the school was built as well as any mention of coerced chattel labor, like November and Wilson.

November Caldwell was the coachman for Joseph Caldwell, the first president of UNC–Chapel Hill. During reconstruction in 1869, his home was terrorized by a Ku Klux Klan mob (UNC–Chapel Hill, n.d., “November Caldwell”). Wilson Caldwell, November’s son with Rosa Burgess, helped save the university from annihilation by the Union soldiers. His ambassadorial skills saved the university from being burned to the ground.

I began my research about my familial connection to UNC in earnest after moving across the country to accept a job in an academic library. I realized and reflected upon the fact that my student-loan debt had ballooned to six figures while I was still unable to earn a salary commensurate with such an enormous debt.

During my research in the University Archives at UNC Chapel Hill, the only reference to Rosa Burgess was as Wilson’s mother and wife of November Caldwell (Battle 1895). There is nothing in the university archive that describes, nor honors her life and contributions to UNC. Outside of references with respect to my male ancestors, very little is available within the UNC–Chapel Hill archives about Rosa Burgess.

Rosa Burgess and Susan Kirby (wife of Wilson) both lived under the *partus sequitur ventrem* legislation (Battle 1895). *Partus sequitur ventrem*, translated from Latin, means “birth follows womb.” Essentially freedom was attached to motherhood. If the mother was enslaved—the law stated that her children would also be enslaved.

Rosa Burgess and Susan Kirby were married to November and Wilson, respectively. Rosa was Wilson’s mother. Rosa and Susan did not have

control or agency over their bodies. They were forced to procreate to create wealth for the agents and leaders of the nation's flagship public university.

According to the law, enslaved women were property. Their wombs were seen as factories to produce wealth for their "masters." Any children born to my ancestral grandmothers were considered property. Any children born to November Caldwell and Rosa Burgess "belonged" by law to President David Lowry Swain (Documenting the American South, n.d., "David Lowry Swain").

My great-great grandfather, Wilson Swain Caldwell, was therefore the property of President Swain. President Swain purchased Rosa Burgess from Governor Iredell. Legally, Wilson Swain's surname was Swain because he was the legal property of President Swain.

Yes, the powerful and wealthy men of their ilk (men with their names on many of the buildings at UNC-Chapel Hill)—leaders of the great state of North Carolina—were conceivably law-abiding rapists.

Once emancipated, my great-great grandfather, Wilson, changed his surname to Caldwell, to match that of his father—November. Wilson and Susan gave birth to my Great Grandfather Bruce Caldwell. Bruce was my Grandmother Catherine Constance Caldwell Stanback's father. Bruce Caldwell married Minnie Stroud. Minnie Stroud's mother was Emma Kelly—Emma Kelly was the only female ancestor from my father's womb tree that was not listed with a spouse.

My grandmother, Catherine Caldwell Stanback, described her grandmother as very light skinned with green eyes and straight hair. Though *partus sequitur ventrem* was no longer the law of the land, paramour rights were a terrorizing reality for women of my great-great grandmother's generation. In theory Jim Crow laws were created to keep Blacks and Whites socially separated. White men, especially White men in the South, lived in a society where they had *carte blanche* access to Black women. White men were not compelled to offer Black women and their daughters the liberty of freedom from intimate and bodily violations on a daily basis. The great leaders of this state felt it more important to be able to legally and socially rape Black women rather than confer the right and respect to be able to consent to sexual intercourse.

During Reconstruction, Wilson Caldwell was appointed as a justice of the peace in Chapel Hill. This meant that this Black man, my great-great-grandfather, adjudicated disagreements between residents—Black and White. He held the position for a year.

In 1869, November Caldwell's home was stoned by a mob of the Ku Klux Klan. In fact, by 1871, the United States Government had launched a Congressional investigation in order to ascertain the depth and breadth of KKK activity throughout the South (168 Congress Joint Select Committee

1872). Dr. Pride Jones, the person in charge of the investigation of the KKK in Orange County, NC, refused to provide names or specific incidents related to KKK activity, and no record of the attack on November Caldwell was listed. Shortly thereafter, Wilson was removed as Chapel Hill's first Black justice of the peace.

As noted in his biography, Wilson left Chapel Hill for Durham in the hopes that he would be able to earn more money to support his wife and children (Battle 1895). Wilson Caldwell and Susan Kirby had a total of twelve children, but seven died. What living conditions were Wilson and Susan subjected to that contributed to the deaths of seven of their twelve children? Five of the seven children died from consumption (now known as tuberculosis). The silence is the violence.

Chapel Hill was considered to be more genteel and kind to human chattel—some would even opine—overindulgent. Wilson Caldwell was literate, and during slavery (his formative years) it was illegal to teach a slave to read. It was Wilson, along with the White leadership of the university, who advocated for and received the benevolence of the Union soldiers (perhaps giving the general a bride helped—as he could not justify the pillaging of his betrothed's homeland). Wilson was emancipated after the Civil War. David Lowry Swain was mortally wounded in a riding accident—he was thrown into a tree by his horse, and Wilson cared for him until his death.

In 1992 during my first visit to UNC–Chapel Hill, I did not understand just how rooted and connected to the university I was. My ancestors toiled the land. As the reality of my six-figure student-loan debt with compounding interest loomed over my psyche, I dug deeper into the research. It inevitably spelled out how intimately and intricately my ancestors were connected to the building, growth, and preservation of our nation's flagship public university. Outside of the segregated graveyard obelisk, nothing stands to recognize their service, sacrifice, and commitment. Not one building, statue, or monument on that campus stands without screaming the blood of their sacrifice.

The statue that stood prominently on campus during my undergraduate career at UNC–Chapel Hill was not a statue that honored the Black people who helped build, sustain, and ultimately save the school, but instead Silent Sam, a symbol of the Confederate soldiers who fought to keep my ancestors as chattel and coerced labor both physical and biological.

How many of the descendants of the Iredell, Caldwell, and Swain families graduated from UNC? Did they owe student loans?

June 2000, I had relocated to rural North Carolina after my maternal grandmother, Betty Jean Stringer (Nana), passed away. Her death was unexpected. She was the anchor of my mom's family. Her death left me feeling aimless, with little direction and no clear path to a career. I moved to

DC and started working in the nonprofit sector but ended up working at a local gym. Prior to Nana's passing in March 2000, we had a difficult conversation about me coming out as a lesbian.

The caveat: prior to going to North Carolina my first year in 1993, Nana told me, "Don't go down there to Chapel Hill and let them girls turn your head around." At that time, I had no idea what she was talking about. I wasn't even out to myself. I had no idea I was queer. I always had really intense relationships with my female friends, but it was never romantic. That all changed in undergrad.

I realize, now, that my grandmother was concerned about my ability to survive. She was concerned that I would be prejudged about my ability or completely disregarded because I was (in her words) "choosing to be different." We argued about choice. I told her that who I was was not a choice. She saw something in me before I could see it within myself for myself.

I sent her a Valentine's Day card that year and later followed up with a phone call to check on her after she had gotten home from the hospital (I mean who stays mad at their grandmother?). She said she knew the card was from me as soon as she opened it. We laughed and talked. We told each other we loved each other and exactly one week later, March 22, 2000, she passed away in her sleep at home while my grandfather was at work.

When I went home for her funeral, she had stuck my card next to the telephone in the wall. She looked at it every day. My grandparents loved me so much. It was their love that showed me, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that I mattered. They taught me that I did not have to submit to those who sought to oppress, repress, and subjugate me in any way.

I was among the first generation of women from my womb tree who was born with the right to vote, the right to demand and expect consent, and the right to choose how and if I wanted to biologically reproduce in the history of our nation. Think about that.

Black women were not afforded the right to vote until 1965. If you have a Black mother who was born before 1965, and you are female, you are among the first generation of your womb tree to be afforded the right to vote from birth (especially and specifically if you're from the South.)

I was unemployed, so I went to the Employment Security Commission down in Rowan County, North Carolina. The person behind the desk took one look at my degree, my employment profile, and me, and said, "You look like a rebel, you should work in a library." She recommended that I apply for a job at a small theological library. I was hired on the spot as a library technical assistant. I worked at three libraries over the next four years and decided to go teach English in South America. I came back from South America, fluent in Spanish. After I had landed another job in a public library, I thought it was time for me to pursue a graduate degree in the field.

My first reference question did not come during my first job in a library. In fact, it came when I was six or seven years old. My mom and grandparents encouraged me to learn about Black history and to do my book reports on Black historical figures. Harriet Tubman was my favorite historical figure. Madam CJ Walker, Shirley Chisholm, Malcolm X, Septima Clark, and Frederick Douglas were just some of the historical figures my family thought I should know about. I was an advanced reader.

My mom purchased *The New Book of Knowledge* encyclopedia set for me and my brother. She painstakingly and patiently taught me how to use the index—find the volume and page numbers that led to the entry I sought. We practiced once or twice (it didn't take me long to understand), and from that day on, any time I asked my mom anything that she thought could be found in those volumes, she would say, "Look it up!" An encyclopedia set for a single mother of two was a major financial sacrifice and Betty A. Stringer (my mom) was not about to let her investment sit on the shelves and collect dust. She made sure I used them weekly, if not daily.

My mom was a single parent with two children. She taught me to be independent. I was never really allowed to go over to my friend's homes, and if they wanted to play with me on the weekends, all play dates happened at our house. A friend from school came over one Saturday for a play date and announced she was having a little brother or sister. She asked me if I knew where babies came from. I told her I did not, but that we could look it up. That Saturday, I conducted my first reference interview. We looked up various terms—I can't remember them all—reproduction was one of them. We ended up finding the entry for "baby." We learned about chromosomes, zygotes, ovaries, and sperm. We mispronounced some of the terms to one another. I remember giggling and trying not to make too much noise to arouse attention or suspicion of surreptitious activities. After she left, I had so many questions for my mom.

It was on that blessed day that I inquired about the person who contributed the other half of my chromosomes for the first time. I asked my mom, "Where did the other half of my chromosomes come from?" She answered my question with a question of her own, "What have you been reading?" I said, "the encyclopedia." She hugged me and took me to the library to get more kid-friendly books on reproduction.

A few days later, my father came to our house and introduced himself over dinner. I met my father, A. Leon Stanback, Jr. Biology led me to my father—later on in my life I learned that my father was a chemistry major in college. The divinity, majesty, and serendipity of nature, research, and science converged and led me to my dad.

My father was a lawyer who went on to serve our state as a parole commissioner, a superior court judge, and ultimately a district attorney. He was running to be a district attorney the year I was born. He lost. He was appointed to positions to serve as a respected jurist and prosecutor by

Republican and Democrat governors. After a career of over thirty years as legal professional, he retired.

As my father was ending his professional career as a jurist (he retired in 2009), I began my professional career as a librarian. Up to that point, I had served as a library assistant, library technical assistant, and documents assistant. I graduated from UNC–Chapel Hill with a master's of science in library science, with a concentration in international development, and with awards for exceptional expository composition.

My first job out of graduate school was as a diversity resident librarian/research assistant professor. I published an article and helped write an ARL Spec Kit. I served on committees, participated in conferences, and went to one of the most respected leadership-training institutes for early career librarians. I took classes in grant writing, quadrupled the number of faculty who participated in our institutional archive (repository), and provided reference assistance at two separate service points in the library as well as provided virtual chat reference. Did I mention I speak Spanish? It took five years after my two-year residency ended to find employment.

I challenge and question authority. As a gender-nonconforming, queer, person of color who identifies as female, I have to be keenly aware of my environment.

What does this have anything to do with my college loans? After I completed my graduate degree at UNC–Chapel Hill, I graduated with over \$90,000 in debt. It's hard to pay back a loan when it's more than double your yearly income. My first position was only a two-year appointment.

With a forbearance application, the interest rates incurred ballooned the balance. My debt has increased over 30 percent in less than a decade. Now I owe close to \$150,000. Recently, NPR reported that the loan-forgiveness program has denied 99 percent of its applicants (Turner 2018). Students, who have been working as firefighters, nurses, teachers, and police officers, are watching their financial plans implode due to the rejection of their qualifications to have their college loans forgiven.

What does this mean for me? I'm saddled with a six-figure debt that continues to increase. Institutionalized racism continues to ossify instead of providing equitable educational opportunities to those who have been and continue to be oppressed, repressed, and suppressed. With every published article, I continue to question and challenge institutionalized racism and articulate its white supremacist connections. I sincerely believe that this makes it difficult for me to obtain gainful employment within our profession.

When I was growing up, my elders told me on many occasions that my mouth would get me into trouble. Because I was raised in the South by a multigenerational family who refused to bow, bend, or break, my advocacy for the downtrodden continues to threaten my ability to provide for myself and my family. And yet, I am compelled to write, now more than ever.



White supremacy is morally reprehensible. It continues to compromise the moral integrity of this nation. Fannie Lou Hamer (1967) once said, “I don’t want equal rights with the white man; if I did, I’d be a thief and a murderer.” Some of our national leaders identify with hatred. I don’t think segregation is always a bad idea. Sometimes people with similar cultural, religious, spiritual, and gender-specific beliefs and practices need to get together to discuss current events and the social climate. Those communities should not, however, encourage the destruction and dehumanization of others who are different.

It is time for our country—and our profession—to face our complicated, complex, violent, and inhumane past. The leaders within LIS must interrogate how the organizations they lead internalize and exhibit the phobias, the isms, and the anti’s. They must recognize where ideals don’t necessarily match up with actions. They then have to decide what they are going to do about it all. However, there cannot be an expectation that anything will change if no one is willing to have the tough conversations that need to happen for institutions and organizations to transform and become more inclusive and equitable.

During my professional career, I have never been given the authority and autonomy to help push an organization into real change.

According to David James Hudson:

The dominance of diversity’s essentializing, individualist anti-racist politics in LIS has inhibited treatment of regimes of racial subordination as sociohistorical constructs. What kinds of analysis might the treatment of race as a historically constituted phenomenon enable within the field, then? What lines of inquiry open up in LIS when we approach race as a formation produced in and through the exercise of power rather than as a natural, preexistent, and unchanging demographic attribute around which “race relations” are organized. (2017)

If the LIS profession is in fact ready, willing, and able to interrogate structural racism, institutionalized racism, and the way the organizations and institutions we represent perpetuate white supremacy and racism, radical efforts are necessary. Apologies and lip service are not enough. If the institutions and organizations are indeed ready to sincerely approach equity and diversity, here are a few suggestions:

1. Higher salaries, especially in cities where the cost of living is high
2. Institutional support with housing—providing reduced on-campus housing or housing vouchers
3. College loan repayment (apart from salary allocation)
4. Systems of reporting discrimination that actually protect the workers and their civil rights over the interests of the organizations and institutions
5. Cross-cultural competency training led by people from diverse backgrounds as a mandatory part of professional development

6. Cede, and relinquish, power—if the entire administrative core of the institution is overwhelmingly homogenous and does not reflect the inclusive student body that most institutions purport to have, it will be impossible to build a community of equity and inclusion

On April 12, 2007, the North Carolina Legislature along with Governor Perdue apologized for slavery with a resolution signed into law.<sup>1</sup> Chancellor Folt (Fortin 2018), the first female chancellor at UNC–Chapel Hill, was the first chancellor to apologize for slavery. Both the state of North Carolina and the university have apologized for slavery. But what are they going to do about it? Pay reparations to descendants of slaves? Take down Silent Sam permanently (Barnett 2018)? Offer descendants of slaves free public education? Silent Sam was placed on UNC’s campus by the Daughters of the Confederacy. Julian Carr, during its unveiling, described beating a Black woman until her skirts hung in shreds (Spruill, Jenkins, and Parker 2013). The statute was put in place to intimidate my ancestors. It was a reminder that even though it was illegal to “own” Black people, it wasn’t illegal to terrorize.

What does reconciliation look like? The Ghanian Akan adinkra symbol Sankofa translates to mean “go back and get it.” We must go back and get our history. We must face it as a nation and start teaching our next generation the painful, resilient story of this nation.

Whom does it belong to?

Whom does it value?

Who has the most visible and intelligible civil rights?

What happens to those who are not represented in the aforementioned number?

Are they given resources to achieve an equitable position, or are they exploited and further disenfranchised?

As a queer gender-nonconforming Black woman, I would be remiss if I did not connect my experience to the imperialist white supremacist misogynistic capitalist hetero-patriarchal oligarchy. My race, gender, and gender expression all impact the way that I am able to move through society at large.

Currently twenty-eight of fifty states in this nation do not have nondiscrimination laws for LGBTQ people (Out and Equal Workplace Advocates 2017). In twenty-eight of fifty states I can be fired and denied employment based on my sexual identity. Not one public, private, academic, or corporate library within the great state of North Carolina hired me as a full-time benefit-earning employee since I graduated from UNC–Chapel Hill with publications, presentations, professional development, and foreign-language skills.

In 2018, my alma mater celebrated its 225 birthday. Two hundred

twenty-five years ago, it was legal to rape Black women. Today, it is legal to discriminate against queer, gender-nonconforming people. It appears as if we have not evolved—as if our historicity has never been examined and reviewed, and as if our leaders have not gleaned any knowledge that would help our nation grow, change, develop, and mature into a true world leader.

Have the indigenous and first-nation leaders who are the descendants of the original inhabitants been invited to the university in order to begin the healing process of displacement and theft? Has there been any discussion of how to make amends and how to repair the damage and trauma?

Who on the Board of Trustees (BOT) owes student loans? The trustee member who lives in my hometown owns an 8,000 square-foot home that cost him over \$1.2 million in the early 2000s. He and his children have all graduated from UNC—did any of them accrue student-loan debt? Are there any women of color, any gender-nonconforming, transgender, or queer members of the BOT?

This begs the questions: Who does the law protect? Who does the law exploit? What is the reason for this exploitation? In the United States, the benefits go to the wealthiest among us—those who financially profit the most. In this nation, our corporations have the same rights as human beings. This means that humans equate business and vice versa—everyone is concerned with the bottom line and being in the black. Our current president is a titan of (shady) business. He is the first, in my lifetime, to have commercial real estate in Washington, DC, while simultaneously serving the people in public office. He is the first elected public official, in my lifetime, to publicly talk explicitly about sexually assaulting women. He also still manages to have opinions about the reproductive rights of women. He has the ability to shape and form our national policies that impact, not just the citizens, but people from abroad.

As a nation and LIS profession, we have some decisions to make. What kind of society, profession, and earth are we trying to leave for the next generation? Will we ever have the courage to discuss where we actually come from?

Also as LIS professionals, we have access to the truth—the research, the literature, the historical documentation—in ways that others may not have. This in turn mandates that we have a unique responsibility to make sure that we do not become guarded gatekeepers, but instead that we break the chains and allow more access to relevant and authoritative information to combat retrogression.

It's my humble opinion that until we can face our past, we won't be able to fully appreciate our present and march into our future as a healthy nation successfully sustaining and developing its people, all its people.

The invasion of the Americas and the modern slave trade pulled peoples throughout the Atlantic into each other's lives, and colleges

were among the colonial institutions that braided their histories and rendered their fates dependent and antagonistic. The academy never stood apart from slavery—in fact it stood beside church and state as the third pillar of a civilization built on bondage. (Wilder 2013)

The personal is political. The bodies of Black, Brown, and Indigenous women have been used as factories to produce both physical and biological labor and wealth for close to millennia. It is time for a real transformation and change, not just meaningless rhetoric.

Do we still have to submit to the same oppressive structures that continue to enshrine oppression and subject our progeny into debt peonage? *Debt peonage* is a term coined by Clyde Woods to describe the intergenerational debt that Blacks in the Mississippi Delta were subjected to due to white supremacist planter oligarchs, whose “planter control . . . allowed them to decide who ate and who starved, who was poorly housed and who was homeless, and who lived and who died” (Woods 2017). A person who had a strong opinion, who wanted to stand up to oppressive planters, risked financial ruin at best, death at worst. Is the fate better today for a person whose purpose is to stand up to oppression, a person who indeed was sent to make change for a better world? What about a person whose six-figure education and experiential opportunities land them right in the middle of a LIS career?

Every time a person chooses to speak against institutionalized racism, structural racism, and white supremacy, they run the risk of losing. What’s even worse is what would happen if we all stayed silent? In my heart of hearts, I know and believe that there are people out there who want to see something different for this nation and this profession. What we want, and what we’re willing to do to get it, are two entirely different things.

In a sense, sacrifice and relinquishing of power and resources are required. Sometimes apologies aren’t enough. Commemorative statues and plaques do not repair the phenomenological, psychosocial, sociohistorical trauma of those who survived slavery, rape, displacement, and genocide.

Now, as a nation, as a profession, we must reach back. We must engage and evaluate where we come from as a nation. We must face our fears and lean into the uncomfortable, sad, frustrating, and triumphant truth. Doing so will free generations to come, perhaps heal some wounds of the past and hopefully our nation.

The very real consequences of breaking white solidarity play a fundamental role in maintaining white supremacy. We do indeed risk censure and other penalties from our fellow whites. In my own life, these penalties have worked as a form of social coercion. . . . I have chosen silence all too often. But my silence is not benign because it protects and maintains the social hierarchy and my place within it. (DiAngelo 2018)

We have to start from the beginning. We must understand and speak the undeniable truth that indigenous and native peoples were here first.

We must investigate, we must tell. We then have to understand that although Europeans were a little late to the party in figuring out seafaring and global travel, Africans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders had been crisscrossing the planet for ages before Europeans began cataloging the physical features of Africans, Asians, and Pacific Islanders (e.g., North American narcotics found in Egyptian mummies) (Gordon 2015).

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (n.d.), only 8 percent of high school seniors in the United States of America can identify slavery as the cause of the civil war. Often, students are taught US History with very little context and information about people from diverse backgrounds. Contributions, struggles, heartbreaks, and triumphs of Indigenous, Black, Asian, Latina/o, Mexican, Chicana/o, and LGBTQ people are often marginalized or given cursory attention. Students are not taught our history as a nation on a critical, in-depth, and multicultural level. Often students from diverse backgrounds must seek their own history, find their own stories and how those fit into the larger, more dominant narrative of our nation.

Throughout my education in the North Carolina public school system, I only received a cursory education about the contributions of Black people to our nation's history. I was taught about slavery; Harriet Tubman; Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks; the civil rights movement of the late 1950s and 1960s, but an overall comprehensive education about the contributions of Blacks, Asians, Indigenous, LGBTQ, and other minorities was sorely lacking. The knowledge that I gained about contributions of Black historical figures mostly came from my family. I am grateful for my family and all they did to ensure I learned about my history. My great-great Aunt Fannie would sit me down and show me photos of our ancestors and tell me their stories.

The United States was founded on a cultural hegemony that privileged and assigned control to the white patriarchy and relegated other racial, cultural and gender groups to a culture of silence. The present historical context points to a changing world where white patriarchal supremacy, designed to silence and subjugate other cultural and racial groups, is no longer working. (Macedo 2006)

The gravity of my father walking with me in the cemetery on UNC's campus on that sticky spring day resonates with me now more than ever. Economic justice is not a far-fetched ideal that can never be grasped or obtained. We must painstakingly, patiently, and thoroughly investigate our collective complex history. We cannot run from the truth, and we must hold the institutions accountable for benefitting from the labor of our people. We must hold these institutions accountable for the theft and displacement of first nations. We must somehow move into a more just and free future, so that our children and our children's children's children will know that we actually evolved and learned from the mistakes.

## NOTE

1. North Carolina General Assembly. "Resolution 2007–21, Senate Joint Resolution 1557," April 12, 2007, <https://www.ncleg.gov/Sessions/2007/Bills/Senate/PDF/S1557v3.pdf>.

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