The University of Virginia occupies a unique place in the history of higher education in America. Frequently described as the most beautiful university campus in America, its history is intimately associated with one of the nation’s Founding Fathers. While there are many named after early presidents and revolutionary luminaries, the University of Virginia is the only one that was envisioned, founded, designed, and overseen by one of the nation’s first presidents.

Its beginning was inauspicious. In July of 1817, Thomas Jefferson stood in a field about a mile from the Albemarle County courthouse to block out the location of the buildings he planned to erect for “Central College.” Having recently purchased land from John Perry, the seventy-four-year-old Jefferson used his theodolite to fix the center of the northern square, “the point destined for some principal building.”

Jefferson had been thinking about the importance of education in the new nation for decades; he had even sponsored a bill in Virginia, which did not pass, for expansive primary and secondary education for all white male citizens as early as 1779, a fairly radical concept in its time. He wrote to his friend James Madison, “Above all things, I hope the education of the common people will be attended to, convinced that on their good sense we may rely with the most security for the preservation of a due degree of liberty.” Even though not successful in that goal, after retiring from the presidency and returning to Monticello in 1809, Jefferson turned his attention to the designs for an institution of higher learning, Central College (which later became the University of Virginia). Correspondence with colleagues had helped sharpen his plans and he worked tirelessly to build political support for state funding to create a public university. In his mind, this work had a certain
urgency. Nearly fifty years after the Declaration of Independence, he worried about the future of American democracy and he thought a broad and liberal education available to all voting citizens was the best way to ensure America’s future. As he wrote to a friend, “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.” His decades of work toward establishing a public institution began to take physical shape on that day in 1817, and at the University of Virginia, the moment is often presented as particularly prescient; a sculpture depicts the solitary genius of Jefferson, alone in a field, dreaming the university into existence (fig. I.1).

Importantly, however, Jefferson was not alone on that day, nor was he alone as the work of constructing the university became a reality. From its beginning through the end of Civil War, the University of Virginia was the work of many individuals, including hundreds of enslaved laborers. It began on that July day when Jefferson marked off the “old field”; accompanying Jefferson was his overseer, Edmund Bacon, an Irish builder named James Dinsmore, and “ten hands,” a nineteenth-century term used to indicate enslaved laborers. Together the group used twine, shingles, and pegs to mark off the “foundations of the University.” After marking it off, Jefferson “set the men at work.”

Much of the history of slavery at the University of Virginia is masked by phrases like “hands” and “set at work.” From constructing and maintaining the buildings to feeding and caring for the faculty and students, enslaved people brought into existence and then sustained the institution. Additionally, and more abstractly, it was the state’s slave-based economy that provided the wealth that made it possible for most of the students of the university to attend (despite Jefferson’s interest in educating the “common people” a vast majority of the students came from the state’s and the region’s slaveholding families). The university’s history was thus tied inextricably to the history of the South. Many of its alumni became important southern politicians and intellectual leaders; they were congressmen and governors, leading voices in the proslavery movement, soldiers in the Confederate Army, and political leaders in the Confederate States of America.

Much has been written about the history of the University of Virginia. It holds a special place in the annals of American higher education because of the fame of its founder, the beauty of its architecture, and its unique liberal arts approach to education in a period when most schools were still
dominated by the preparation of students for lives as clergymen or lawyers. The prevailing narrative history of the school emphasizes the fact that Jefferson was concerned with the health of American democracy; that he believed that the nation’s future depended on a well-educated electorate. As he wrote his friend, “Enlighten the people generally, and tyranny and oppression of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day. . . . The diffusion of knowledge among the people is to be the instrument by which it is to be effected.”

Jefferson’s university was unlike any of the others in America at the time, and it set a precedent that has influenced the design of American universities ever since. Part of that legacy is in the organization of knowledge, and part of that legacy is in the architectural setting. Many others have written exten-
sively on these subjects; we know much about the particular genius of Jeff-
erson’s plan for public education. What none have addressed in a sustained 
way, however, is the how Jefferson’s designs for the university were intimately
linked with his understanding of living in a slave society. The central para-
dox at the heart of UVA is also the central paradox of the nation, the unres-
solved paradox of American liberty. How it is that the nation that defined the
natural rights of humankind did so within a system that denied those same
rights to others based on the color of their skin? And what does it mean to
have a public university founded to preserve those democratic rights that is
likewise founded and maintained on the stolen liberty of others?

In recounting the university’s history, for too long the role of slavery has
not been addressed. In 1867, Isabella Gibbons, who was formerly enslaved at
the University of Virginia, asked, “Can we forget the crack of the whip, cow-
hide, whipping-post, the auction-block, the hand-cuffs, the spaniels, the iron
collar, the negro-trader tearing the young child from its mother’s breast as a
whelp from the lioness? Have we forgotten that by those horrible cruelties,
hundreds of our race have been killed? No, we have not, nor ever will.”7 Ser-
vie then as one of the first teachers in the Charlottesville Freedmen’s School,
Gibbons believed that those memories would remain fresh. Even though
they did remain fresh in the African American community, at the University
of Virginia they were quickly and intentionally forgotten. University narra-
tives erased the history of slavery and those who were enslaved. Instead, the
focus was placed on Jefferson, the faculty, and the students. In the last decade
that has begun to change. This book is an attempt to fulfill Gibbons’s admo-
nition that we not forget.

National conversations about the legacy of America’s original sin have
prompted America’s universities to look closely at their own histories. In
2003, Brown University president Ruth Simmons commissioned a report on
Slavery and Justice, and highlighted the indebtedness of that institution to
the revenue from the African slave trade. Craig Wilder’s 2013 Ebony and Ivy:
Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America’s Universities focused attention on the financial underpinnings that the profits from enslavement pro-
vided for America’s oldest institutions of higher education, especially those
in the Northeast. In the past decade, many other universities have turned
their scrutiny on themselves, undertaking projects (often faculty and stu-
dent led) to understand each institution’s indebtedness to slavery: Harvard,
Princeton, Yale, William & Mary, Washington & Lee, Emory, the Univer-
The University of South Carolina, the University of Mississippi, to name a few. Most recently, national attention was captured by Georgetown University, where in 1838 Jesuit priests sold 272 people from a Maryland plantation to Louisiana in order to raise money for the college. In a first step toward reparations, Georgetown promised preferential admission status to any descendants of those 272 people.

The majority of America’s early universities were intertwined with slavery. Some benefited from gifts given by those who earned money through the slave trade or the business of insuring ships and enslaved persons. Others owned a few people who worked at the institution. Others were supported either directly by slaveowners in the South, or by northern industrialists who profited from the labor of the enslaved. The 272 people sold to raise money for Georgetown is the largest known sale of people to benefit an American university. Many of the descendants of those enslaved people have been identified. The Georgetown history is a pointedly poignant one particularly because of our ability to connect to living descendants today; it allows us to personalize the cost of institutional slavery that might otherwise remain abstract. Additionally, the act of selling people crystalizes the most dehumanizing aspects of slavery and thus focuses a spotlight on American higher education’s obligation to acknowledge the broad debt that most of America’s early institutions of higher education owe to enslavement.

At the University of Virginia, the role of slavery was much more deeply entangled and even more pervasive, shaping the lives of students, faculty, and the enslaved. In its very inception, even in Jefferson’s own imagining of what the University of Virginia could be, he understood it to be an institution with slavery at its core, both in how it operated and in its purpose. He believed that a southern institution was necessary to protect the sons of the South from abolitionist teachings in the North. Jefferson wrote to his friend James Breckinridge and expressed his concern with sending the youth of Virginia to be educated in the North, a place “against us in position and principle.” He worried that in northern institutions young Virginians might imbibe “opinions and principles in discord with those of their own country. This canker is eating on the vitals of our existence, and if not arrested at once will be beyond remedy.” In other words, Jefferson believed it was important to educate Virginians, and other southerners, in an institution that understood and ultimately supported slavery. As many historians have discussed, Jefferson’s own thinking about slavery was enormously complex and contradictory, but
it is important to note that at the end of his life, he created an institution that helped to perpetuate the institution by protecting the future leaders of the South from antislavery thought in the North. Ultimately, the southern institution he created also helped shape the articulation and promulgation of an increasingly aggressive proslavery argument.

Revealing the complexity of his relationship with slavery, Jefferson himself had written about the corrupting influence of slavery on the morals of southerners even as he wanted to remove southerners from northern colleges that critiqued the institution. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he had written of the “unremitting despotism,” of slavery and noted how “[t]he parent storms, the child looks on, catches the lineaments of wrath, puts on the same airs in the circle of smaller slaves, gives a loose to his worst of passions, and thus nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny, cannot but be stamped by it with odious peculiarities. The man must be a prodigy who can retain his manners and morals undepraved by such circumstances.”

A painter in the early nineteenth century captured poignantly the violence that enslaved people faced on a daily basis. On the back of a portrait of an unknown individual, the artist created a dual image with the words “Virginian Luxuries,” at the bottom (fig. I.2). This chilling image captured the depravity that Jefferson had warned about decades earlier in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Most of the students who attended the university had been nursed in the exercise of tyranny at home. When they came to the university, their education in tyranny only deepened.

In fact, Jefferson’s own reality was one so intimately connected with slavery that he probably could not imagine a different reality. His earliest memory was being carried on a pillow at the age of two by an enslaved person and when he died in 1826 his last moments were eased by his enslaved butler, Burwell Colbert, who adjusted Jefferson’s pillows in his waning hours.

He had never known life without slavery and the educational institution he designed in the last decade of his life had slavery at its core. Slavery remained essential to the University of Virginia for the first fifty years of its history until the end of the Civil War brought freedom to the people who lived and labored there. This is the story we will tell in the following chapters.

Jefferson wrote that he imagined his university to be an “academical village,” as he called it and as students today still refer to it, a place where faculty and students would live and learn together. Jefferson’s design consisted of four
parallel rows of buildings, with a massive structure at the north end, called the Rotunda, and open-ended to the south (fig. I.3). Each of the four rows consisted of dormitory rooms for students interspersed with larger structures called pavilions on the inner two rows (the collective space referred to as the Lawn) and larger buildings called hotels on the outer two rows (referred to as the Ranges). The pavilions were designated by Roman numerals, odd on the west side (I, III, V, VII, and IX), and even on the east side (II, IV, VI, VIII, and X). The hotels were designated by letters, A, C, and E on the west side and B, D, and F to the east (fig. I.4). The Rotunda that closed the northern end was intended as a space for meetings and classes and it housed the library. The pavilions served a dual function—classroom space on the ground floor and lodging for the faculty on the upper story. The hotels were intended as dining halls for students and residences for the people hired to serve as hotelkeepers. Jefferson’s attention to the university is legendary; he designed each of the buildings, attended to numerous details, visited regularly during construction, specified the curriculum, selected the volumes to be purchased for the library, and guided the selection of the original fac-
ulty. The architecture of each of the principal buildings was distinct: the Rotunda was modeled after the Pantheon in Rome and each of the pavilions and hotels was inspired by a different architectural precedent, most of them derived from published guides to ancient architecture. They were intended to serve as models of good architecture for the benefit of the students. This is the general outline of a history repeated over and over again. It has such broad cultural currency among the University of Virginia community that nearly every faculty member, student, and alumnus could easily repeat it. This is the shared public memory for the University of Virginia community. What is not a part of that commonly shared story, however, is the fact that the university’s existence was made possible by a large enslaved population. From the day that Jefferson stood in that field with “ten hands” and “set the men at work,” until the day that freedom finally came to Virginia in 1865, enslaved African Americans helped to make the university what it was.
Fig. I.4. Plan of the Academical Village in 1827 from 2013 Cultural Landscape Report of the University of Virginia.
Construction on the university began in 1817 and for nearly ten years the University of Virginia was one of the—if not the—largest construction sites in America. Dozens of artisans—white and black—lived and worked to erect the buildings of the university. Many of these workers were enslaved. Some were owned by the white builders who came to Charlottesville, but the need for both skilled and unskilled labor was immense. In order to secure the labor that was needed, the university hired enslaved labor from slave-owners in Albemarle and the surrounding counties. For many who came to construct UVA, they were dozens of miles from their homes, and probably did not see their families for the months or years they were hired out to the university. Hiring out enslaved labor was a common practice in the American South, bringing in a cash income for the owners. Most of the people who were hired were men; the names of more than one hundred have been rediscovered. Some people were hired for a short term and specific jobs, while others were hired year after year to work at the university. Some provided the grunt work of earth moving, forming terraces and digging cellars; others were skilled artisans working alongside free white workers laying bricks, plastering walls, and shingling roofs.

It was not until 1825 that the university opened its doors to students. The school was governed by the Board of Visitors; Jefferson was its first rector and other members of the board included James Madison, James Monroe, and John Hartwell Cocke. Even before students arrived, the board established a series of rules, called *Enactments*, to govern the institution and the people living there. After a couple of years, the board passed numerous amendments and published a second heavily edited version in 1827. These were regularly updated and provide great insight into the tensions that emerged as the Academical Village grew. The number of students increased steadily over the period from 1825 to the beginning of the Civil War, with a marked increase beginning around 1850, from about 120 in its first year to about 600 just before the Civil War. The number of faculty also grew from the original eight to seventeen in 1860. At first, the faculty lived in the pavilions on the Lawn and they were each given the use of the building and the garden behind to modify as they wished with approval of the board. As the number of faculty soon exceeded the number of pavilions, they also lived in other places nearby.

The first *Enactments* (the rules passed by the Board of Visitors for run-
ning the university) specified that the hotels were to be rented to individuals (called hotelkeepers) who were expected to provide for the meals and other domestic needs of the students. The hotelkeepers were allowed the use of the hotel building and the areas just behind each hotel, the workyards, where it was expected that food would be grown, meals would be prepared, and linens would be washed. After the experience of the first few years, a revised version of the Enactments added new expectations to the role of the hotelkeepers, now directing them also to closely monitor student behavior. They were told that it was their “duty” to “suppress any disorder or riot.” As the years progressed, the board required that the behaviors of both hotelkeepers and students were increasingly monitored and regulated.

The reason for this change is that the early years of the university were marked by significant student unrest and tension between the faculty and the students. The young men who came to the University of Virginia were mostly drawn from the state’s planter class. Believing that they were masters themselves, they resented the rules placed on them by the faculty, many of whom they would not have viewed as their social equals. They were certainly not used to discipline, and the Enactments spelled out a long list of behaviors they were expected not to engage in: drinking, card playing, and gambling at the top of the list. It also spelled out a lot of behaviors they were expected to partake in: wearing a uniform, arising with the ringing of the six a.m. bell, and attending classes. Unaccustomed to such strictures, and feeling as if many faculty rules treated them like a “parcel of children,” many of the students expressed their displeasure through riotous means, using the cover of darkness to harass the faculty with noise-making or sometimes with considerably more violent activities. Banging on doors, breaking windows, and burning privies were common activities. The riotous behaviors of the students reached a crescendo when Professor John Davis was shot dead as he tried to unmask a rioting student.

For the first fifty years of the university’s history, there were three groups of people living in the Academical Village: faculty and hotelkeepers (and their families), students, and enslaved workers. The enslaved people were owned primarily by the professors and the hotelkeepers. According to census data, the faculty and hotelkeepers collectively owned between 125 to 200 people. In addition, faculty, hotelkeepers, and the institution itself often rented enslaved people from other owners, sometimes for a short-term project and
sometimes annually for a period of several years. It is possible that the population of enslaved people living in the Academical Village may have been even larger than reported in the census. As at many other southern universities, from the beginning the students were not allowed to bring personal servants with them. This rule appeared alongside many others in the very first publication of the *Enactments*. The Board of Visitors, with Jefferson as its rector, passed the following regulation months before the university had any faculty or any students: “No Student shall, within the precincts of the University . . . keep a servant.” That rule remained in place until the end of the Civil War.

The rule was not, however, one that removed students from the institution of slavery or its “unremitting despotism.” It was, instead, part of the system of order that the board and faculty wished to inculcate at the institution. That is, the rule was likely intended to ensure that the faculty would be able to assert control within the Academical Village. If the students had their own personal enslaved attendants, then the faculty would not have any authority over those enslaved workers. In addition, the rule may have been intended to provide a certain degree of social leveling. Jefferson had always imagined that the university would be open and available to students of intellectual merit, not merely those who could afford it. In fact, it was originally intended that many of the early students be supported by scholarships, although scholarships for a small portion of the students were not fully funded until 1845. Through this rule, the students who did not have the financial means to have a personal servant would not be distinct from those who did. The board also passed a uniform rule, which specified that clothing of coarse fabric be worn by every student. This also was intended to have a social leveling effect, or at least to remind students of their place in the hierarchy of the university. Whatever the impetus for the rule that forbade personal servants, it did not work in reality. The students at the University of Virginia acted as if they were masters of any and all enslaved in the Academical Village. Most of the students came from southern slaveholding families where they were accustomed to the relationship of master and servant, and the “unremitting despotism” of slavery remained a defining feature of life in the Academical Village.

In addition, students at the university found themselves at the center of the intellectual debates surrounding the place of slavery in southern society. As the decades progressed, slavery became the nation’s most pressing political issue and the university’s faculty became some of the nation’s lead-
ing proslavery voices. In their classrooms, their social clubs, and at public speeches, students at the university were surrounded by conversations that only cemented the notions of mastery they had been taught at home. Former students regularly returned to the university to lecture, and their speeches in support of slavery served as important reinforcement for the messages students heard all around them. In fact, many of the university’s graduates became leading politicians throughout the South and thus the university’s role in promoting proslavery thought spread far. A UVA alumnus and member of the U.S. House of Representatives, Robert M. T. Hunter, told students on the Fourth of July events in 1839 that slavery was “the only relation in which the two races can coexist in harmony, and operate for the mutual benefit of both.”15 In the inescapable proslavery rhetoric of campus conversations, their education in the tyranny of slavery only deepened.

The pervasiveness of proslavery sentiment is illustrated by student reaction to the visit of Catharine Beecher in 1855. As the sister of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of the wildly popular and influential antislavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Beecher was met with “threatening demonstrations” and “treated to a mock serenade, and Mrs. Stowe was burnt in effigy.”16 The university thus served to do so much more than educate students in the law, languages, and anatomy; the university served to create the South’s leading class. Both inside the classroom and out, students received constant reinforcement in the lessons of the proslavery movement that argued for a natural hierarchy based on race. At the University of Virginia, students learned to be southern gentlemen; they learned the skills and attitudes necessary for a position in the South’s master class.

The regular daily contact between students and the enslaved was part of the design of the institution from its inception. As the faculty turned their attention to operating the university, they spelled out expectations for the hotelkeepers that governed the expectations of the enslaved. In addition to providing food (and they even specified a minimal menu), since none of the students were allowed to bring their own enslaved servants, each of the hotelkeepers was expected to provide services to the students in their dormitories. These began with lighting a fire by six a.m. and bringing fresh water at the start of the day. It was expected that the rooms be swept, the beds made, firewood or ice delivered as appropriate for the season, in addition to the regular washing of sheets, windows, and so forth. All of these duties were to be performed by enslaved people generally owned or hired by
the hotelkeepers. In 1835, the faculty minutes recorded that each hotelkeeper should keep at least one enslaved person to wait on every ten rooms, with up to twenty students.17

In general, the hotelkeepers, each of whom generally owned or hired ten to twenty people, assigned different tasks to different individuals. Some were responsible for the duties of food preparation and serving and some were responsible for tending to the students in their dormitory rooms. In general, hotelkeepers had both adults and children who waited at table, in one document described as “three men and several boys,”18 and in another as “two men, & a servant woman, and a boy & girl about 10 years old.”19

Only the students dined at the hotels. Faculty members were expected to provide for their own domestic needs and so they also owned people who were expected to take care of daily domestic chores. The workyards behind the hotels and pavilions were the busy worksites of the more than one hundred enslaved individuals who provided for the domestic needs of the faculty and students. Nineteenth-century life was messy. Preparing food for the several hundred people who lived inside the Academical Village (free and enslaved) meant that livestock had to be kept, crops had to be grown, animals had to be butchered, and meat had to be smoked. Cooking involved tending pots over open flames all day long, and laundry involved cauldrons of boiling water, washboards, and clotheslines. As it had at Monticello, this dirty work took place mostly out of sight, primarily in basements of the pavilions and hotels and in the workyards behind these buildings. From the beginning, Jefferson understood these areas to be the necessary work zone for domestic life, expecting the professors to add additional buildings because, as he noted, “a smokehouse is indispensable to a Virginia family.”20

With time, dozens of buildings were added to the gardens: slave quarters, kitchens, washhouses, smokehouses, woodsheds, and privies, among others. As the university became more crowded, there were additional rules passed that were intended to diminish the messiness of life in the gardens. For example, new rules forbade the keeping of animals inside the precincts, and yet complaints continued to be lodged about residents keeping cows and pigs and more broadly about insanitary conditions. The university had been built on a hilltop and the lack of free-flowing water often proved challenging to cleanliness and health. A number of significant epidemics occurred, some resulting in the deaths of both students and enslaved, and when these occurred the enslaved were tasked with additional cleaning measures such
as spreading lime or whitewashing buildings. Significantly, having so many people living in such densely packed quarters meant that there were constant points of friction.

For decades a fairly simple narrative, one that focused on the genius and creativity of Jefferson’s designs, dominated the early history of Thomas Jefferson’s university. Of the popularly available books that told the history of the university, or in the materials the university itself presented in official publications or in the exhibition space of the Rotunda, slavery was never mentioned. The narrative skipped quickly from Jefferson’s designs to the Civil War, to the twentieth century. Changing this narrative and uncovering this history has been a multiyear effort of many individuals. Research by local historians, archeological excavations, and papers by students all asked important questions that began to challenge the prevailing narrative. It has required a community coming together to demand change. This volume relies heavily on this broader community effort.

The initial research efforts made it clear that there was evidence to help tell this story, but the challenge is, as it is for so much of the history related to slavery, that the evidence is scarce, incomplete, and scattered. Importantly, we do not have any sources that come directly from people formerly enslaved at UVA. Instead, the information about their lives and experiences has to be pieced together from multiple sources. Local historian Gayle Shulman published one of the earliest papers on the topic. For twenty years, archaeologist and author Benjamin Ford has been excavating this history. His research informs much of the work presented in this volume. Many faculty members, including several of the authors for this volume, had been teaching the broad outlines of this history for many years, but they knew that what was needed was more expansive archival research. That was daunting, however, because of the many thousands of pages of materials in the university archives. No one person could ever read it all or figure out how to make connections between the many fragmentary bits. In 2012, authors Maurie McInnis and Kirt von Daacke began working with Worthy Martin and the Institute of Advanced Technology in the Humanities (IATH) to create the “Jefferson’s University—Early Life Project, 1819–1870” (hereafter cited as JUEL, http://juel.iath.virginia.edu). With monetary support from the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost and the Jefferson Trust of the University of Virginia Alumni Association, they created a searchable digital archive for the
university’s history. These archives include the university’s official records, letters and diaries of students and faculty, and other pertinent materials. Over the years, dozens of students have contributed to this project by transcribing the university’s archival materials and creating XML tags that make them easily searchable. The students who have worked on this project have also contributed by writing essays and conducting additional research that allow the threads of evidence to be woven together into a richer and fuller story. This book would not be possible without their efforts and we want to acknowledge their important contributions. The work on the project continues; new materials are added regularly and new discoveries and connections emerge.

Despite the efforts of dozens of people, the story remains fragmentary. It is important to note what the archives tell us and what they do not. The most consistent and prolific sources are the university’s official records. These include financial records from the construction period. Here we find notations of the payments made to slaveowners who hired out men they owned to provide construction labor. In these records, we find the names (usually only first names) of more than one hundred enslaved men who helped build the university. Once students arrived, the evidence about slavery is found mostly in the chairman’s journals and the faculty minutes. Each of these were kept in large leather-bound volumes and they record two things primarily: first, the academic progress of students, and second, the misbehavior of students. What we miss in these volumes is any sense of regular day-to-day activities, although there are some letters and diaries of faculty and students that provide information about more routine daily matters. In the official documents we get a wealth of information whenever a student broke the rules in the Enactments. The faculty acted like a court, gathering evidence and testimony whenever a student was accused of misbehavior. This information is recorded in these volumes and from it we can learn a lot about student interactions with enslaved workers, quite often acts of violence. Sometimes enslaved people are mentioned by name, but often they are referred to only as “Captain Rose’s servants,” or some other term that describes them merely as property. Even when an enslaved person is mentioned by name, we usually know little else about them. From census records we know how many people were owned and by whom, and in 1850 and 1860, the census recorded the ages and genders of those people. But they are nameless lists. We know little of their lives. We know little of their families, their heartaches, their
joys, their struggles, and their hopes. The stories we tell in this volume are built up from these scraps of information. But it is incomplete. The work will continue and we hope in future years we will be able to uncover more stories.

Another important form of evidence comes from the buildings themselves. Jefferson’s Academical Village is one of the most intact and unaltered nineteenth-century set of buildings and landscapes in America (except for the Rotunda, which was famously burned in 1895 and later reconstructed). The buildings have been modernized with the addition of plumbing and electricity and technology. Substantial additions, most dating to the nineteenth century, have expanded the pavilions and some of the hotels. Nevertheless, the historic core of each building remains largely intact. The buildings themselves, therefore, are also an important set of documents providing important evidence about the history of their habitation. In 2015, author Louis Nelson and the students in his Historic Preservation course conducted a thorough analysis of the cellars and attics of pavilions, hotels, and student rooms to look for evidence of habitation that might tell us more about the spaces where enslaved people lived and labored. The evidence they uncovered and documented, especially when paired with archival references, has been an important part of understanding the story of slavery at UVA.

Finally, another important aspect of the JUEL project has been to create a three-dimensional digital model of the Academical Village in the period of enslavement (fig. I.5). Because so many of the buildings in the gardens that served the pavilions and the hotels are no longer extant, Lauren Masari at IATH working with JUEL has led the development of a digital model, working to re-create the nineteenth-century Academical Village, and eventually its immediate landscape. This has required the three-dimensional digital reconstruction of portions of the historical landscape; the buildings and structures as well as the major landscape components such as gardens, alleys, walls, and fences that would have been present in the mid-nineteenth-century Academical Village. Creating the digital model has utilized historic images, laser-guided measurements of extant buildings, and drone-guided studies of the topography to aid in reconstructing the proper human perspective. The ongoing digital reconstruction of the nineteenth-century Academical Village allows us to understand better some of the questions that are central to the history we hope to tell.

In 2019, the University of Virginia will begin its official bicentennial celebrations; there was a soft launch in 2017. This is obviously the cause for much
celebration. But it should also be a moment for important institutional reflection. The history of the university is bound up and inseparable from the institution of slavery. It is built on the human suffering of those who labored here. For more than one hundred years after freedom came, other African Americans were denied access to the University of Virginia merely because of the color of their skin. It was not until the late 1960s that the university began admitting a significant number of black undergraduate students, later than even most other southern universities. This is a story that has for too long remained untold. Mindful of the upcoming bicentennial, the authors of this volume hope that these chapters will help everyone understand the paradox of freedom and democracy built on the tyranny of slavery that the University of Virginia embodies. One hundred years ago, at the university’s centennial celebrations, the pageants, plays, and speeches lauded and mythologized Jefferson (fig. 1.6). Only fifty years ago at the university’s sesquicentennial celebrations, Jefferson continued to be the focus of the events. The year was 1969, the university had only recently begun to admit African American undergraduate students in sizable numbers, and students were dissatisfied with the official celebrations and organized a counter-event.
Fig. I.6. “Shadow of the Builder: Back to the Old Rotunda” UVA centennial celebration poster, 1921.
to insist that the university do more to diversify its student body and its curriculum. From the official recognition of the university’s history at both of these events acknowledgment of slavery was absent. The current community-wide effort has been an effort to make sure that we no longer forget, as Gibbons called for in 1867. The celebrations of the bicentennial events have been and will be very different. The 2017 opening Bicentennial celebration acknowledged a very different history by including a sequence highlighting the enslaved laborers who built the university, monologues by Jefferson’s African American descendants, and a rendition by Andra Day of Billie Holiday’s protest song “Strange Fruit” (fig. I.7).

When we began this work, it seemed urgent and too long overdue. As at many universities, African American students at the University of Virginia report encountering an unwelcoming and sometimes even a hostile environment. The institution’s long silence about its indebtedness to slavery and another century of segregation undoubtedly contribute to that feeling. The disconnect between the university’s story of itself, that it was founded in order to ensure the continuance of democracy, and its history of excluding black students for nearly the first 150 years is palpable.

The continuing legacy of that paradox was brought to the world’s attention when on August 11 and 12, 2017, a “Unite the Right” rally including large groups of Neo-Nazi and white nationalist protestors gathered on the campus of the University of Virginia and in downtown Charlottesville (fig. I.8). Their event was intended in part to protest the city’s consideration of removing an equestrian monument to Robert E. Lee from a central location in the downtown to a more remote public park. The organizer of the event, Richard Spencer, was likely attracted to the university for several reasons. An obvious connection is that he is a graduate of the University of Virginia. Being a graduate, he was keenly aware of the clash between the city’s currently progressive political culture and its history as a bastion of Jim Crow politics and racial oppression. Charlottesville schools participated in the “massive resistance” movement in the 1950s, closing rather than integrating after the Brown v. Board of Education decision ordering the integration of public schools. Racial inequality is a legacy still palpable in the city’s school system. The University of Virginia remained all male and all white until the late 1960s. It was one of the latest to integrate its undergraduate population, and women were admitted only in 1970.
Ever since the August 11 rally at the university that brought white supremacist protestors into conflict with student counter-protestors, the work of this volume has taken on an even greater urgency. While there is much that is still not known about the hundreds of individuals who labored to create and sustain the University of Virginia, we hope that this volume will allow readers to understand how the legacy of slavery is still felt on this and many other college campuses. The scars of that history are written into its landscapes and its buildings. In 2013, President Teresa Sullivan launched the President’s Commission on Slavery and the University. That group has played a vital role in reshaping how the institution’s history is told and has helped to change the collective memory of the university community. Previously, the university’s landscape had largely obliterated any acknowledgment of slavery. The gardens are now beautiful and idyllic retreats. Virtually all of the slave quarter and kitchen and washhouse buildings are gone. The ones that remain have been substantially altered. There are no historic markers that address this history. But that silence has ended. In 2015, the newest residence hall

Fig. I.7. Gale Jessup White and Calvin Jefferson speak at the UVA Bicentennial Celebration, 2017. Behind them stand other descendants of enslaved laborers from UVA and Monticello and James Madison’s plantation Montpelier and James Monroe’s plantation Highland.
was named Gibbons House in honor of William and Isabella Gibbons, who were enslaved at UVA. In 2017, a new building for Facilities Management was named for Peyton Skipwith, an enslaved laborer, freed in 1833, who worked as a stonemason at UVA. In 2015, the commission dedicated the newly rediscovered African American Burial Ground. The historical interpretive materials in the Rotunda were substantially redesigned to deal head-on with the history of slavery. In addition, the Board of Visitors approved the design of a Memorial to Enslaved Laborers that will have a prominent location just to the northeast of the Rotunda, near Brooks Hall (fig. I.9). The memorial, currently under construction, will forever serve as a public, physical reminder of the central paradox of the institution and the hundreds of people whose lives and labor enabled the creation of the University of Virginia. These collective efforts will help to change the public memory of the university community.
The work of changing that narrative begins with uncovering, acknowledging, and telling this history. This volume is intended to help everyone understand this story more fully and to serve as a starting point from which additional research can be launched and other stories uncovered as the university and all of America continues to grapple with the legacy of slavery at America’s institutions of higher education.

NOTES


7. Isabella Gibbons (“Mrs. Isabella Gibbins”) letter, March 29, 1867, *The Freedmen's Record* 3, no. 6 (June 1867), quoted in Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 105. Gibbons was owned by Professor Francis Smith and worked as a cook from 1853 to 1863.


11. Students at UVA were typically wealthier than their counterparts at other universities, in part because the school was more expensive. See Jennings Wagoner Jr., “Honor and Dishonor at Mr. Jefferson's University: The Antebellum Years,” *History of Education Quarterly* (Summer 1986): 167–68.


14. A bill passed in 1818 specified an extensive selection process for state scholarship
recipients, but the program was not funded until 1845. See Meghan Ellwood, “A Scholarship for State Students,” http://juel.iath.virginia.edu/node/411.


16. Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life among the Lowly (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852). Quotations from The Liberator, June 8, 1855, and June 1, 1855.

17. Minutes of the Faculty of the University of Virginia, 1825–1856, September 12, 1835, http://juel.iath.virginia.edu/resources (hereafter cited as Faculty Minutes).

18. Faculty Minutes, April 28, 1834, http://juel.iath.virginia.edu/resources.


21. The efforts of these many people are detailed on the President’s Commission website at http://slavery.virginia.edu/a-tip-of-the-hat/.