

Newscaster 0:00

Breaking overnight undergrad students at Georgetown University have voted to add a small fee.

To these code Georgetown University students are considering a fee that benefits the descendants of enslaved people sold to pay off the school's debt.

Results overnight show students at Georgetown University support paying reparations to help atone for the school's past. Now, students are taking it one step further. Students at ... Georgetown University voting on whether they should be at

LM 0:37

the Georgetown student vote made international news in 2019. But the university's history of owning enslaved people wasn't a new discovery. It wasn't a case of long lost documents being brought to light. Instead, Matthew Quallen says it was a matter of timing of the publication of some articles in the student newspaper, the emergence of Black Lives Matter and the readiness of students to listen to a story that had always been there. Matthew Quallen was an undergraduate when he wrote a series of articles for Georgetown Hoya drawing heavily on the archives that helped kick off the debate on campus. Welcome to another episode of overdue. I'm Lina Moe, and I'm recording in New York City and online with my co host Thai Jones. Today we talk to Matthew about some of the documents he discovered in the course of writing those articles. One was a letter sent from a plantation cabin on florissant Farm outside St. Louis. The letter contained the request of an enslaved person to purchase his freedom. The Maryland Jesuits had sent him and his family to St. Louis to help found a university there. The man and his family were enslaved, and the letter originated from virtually the same spot. 150 years later, a movement would arise following the killing of Michael Brown on Florida Avenue. Matthew Quallen graduated from Yale Law this past spring and has studied how archives have undergirded recent important legal decisions. In 2020, the Supreme Court ruled in McGirt v. Oklahoma, that the historic treaties the US government made with the Cherokee Nation were never invalidated, making a huge part of Oklahoma potentially still part of a tribal reservation. The historical documents underlying this decision were rediscovered only in the sense that they were being paid attention to in new ways. And we talk with Matthew about the kinds of social change and activism that allow archival arguments to speak to new possibilities today.

TJ 2:54

One thing that really interests us about this particular question about the universities and slavery movement more generally is because it has such a stark connection between archival research and social movements seems really special and an amazing opportunity to think about the political relevance of archives and research in a very

immediate way.

Well, we are really pleased today to be sitting with Matthew Quallen, remotely over Zencaster and talking about his role and his experiences as an undergraduate at Georgetown University, in the very early moments of the Georgetown, and slavery and representative justice movement. Matthew, I'd love for you to just tell us when you arrived at Georgetown, and what your vision was for your undergraduate life, and whether or not this role that you adopted was totally unexpected, or part of how you saw yourself going into college?

MQ 3:59

Yeah, absolutely. And thank you for having me again. But I arrived in Georgetown in 2012. And I did not expect any any of what happened or what I became involved with, or what did I ended up doing. So that was probably a mistake. I had done some local history work in my hometown and really enjoyed it. But it had never struck me that this was something important and I would I would carry with me. Instead, I actually, I actually applied to be an international political economy major. And I thought that's, you know, that was going to take up all my time, you know, that I was going to go be an economist at some international institution in DC. But the university has an extremely onerous set of core requirements, including quite a few in history. And I had I had met most of the econ requirements in high school because I thought that's what I was going to do. So I got to Georgetown and I started taking all these history classes, and I was I was really enjoying myself. I think there are sort of two things that that brought me to this sort of maybe three, actually, at least one of them is that I was I was looking for something to do the summer after my freshman year. And so I went home and I worked for a local museum. It's a place called the Stanley Whitman house at the time, the director was a woman named Lisa and she was absolutely fabulous. And she was sort of in, in the business of trying to do some subaltern history in Farmington, Connecticut, my sort of Puritan steeple town, founded in 1642, that I come from. And she had a set of volunteers, each of whom she asked to do different tasks. And mine was to go into the probate records of the town of Farmington is fortunate in that it never had a records fire, unlike almost all of these other really old towns. And so you could go and you could read the probate records right from the beginning of the town. And my job was to find evidence of slave ownership in the colonial town. Because, of course, Connecticut abolished slavery before many other parts of the nation. But that doesn't mean that there, there wasn't this long history before that. So that that really got me hooked to sort of finding finding evidence in in a place that I had very much been taught was, was abolitionist was progressive was was all of these, you know, wonderful, reconstructed things. And to see, oh, you know, there's this, there's this really serious blot. And it's, it's important because the story that we tell is really different and doesn't recognize that and sort of lets our lets our town pat itself on the

back. So that was that was sort of one one stream of realizing that, you know, actually, I was I was interested in sort of interrogating the history of the places that I associated myself. The second was that I came out as gay. And I, I think I found myself increasingly frustrated with Georgetown in that respect, you know, in Georgetown is among Catholic schools, I don't I don't want to bad mouth, the school. It's, it's a great place to be out and to be queer. But that's not really its history. LGBT students had really struggled. In the early 2000s. There were there were a series of beatings of terrible targeted attacks, there was this enormous student movement. And there had been this protracted lawsuit in the 1980s and 90s. The university had sort of neglected its students with HIV and AIDS. And so I had these sorts of streams of reasons to be to be skeptical and to be interested in history of the place. Add To all of that, this this man named John Glavin, who's a professor of English at Georgetown, and you might call him sort of like the the Dean of the Faculty, at least in the sense that he, he knows everything. And he's been on the faculty for an extremely long time. And he ran this program called Carroll fellows. So this is this is the third and I swear the final stream. And at the end of each of these sort of introductory classes that he ran it that lasted for two semesters. He would do a historical tour of the university. And he very forthrightly says at one point, he says, oh and the darkest moment in the university's history came in 1838, when the university sold 272 slaves.

That was striking to me, as I assume it was to everybody. But it was particularly striking because I sort of counted myself, alright, I held myself out is, as someone who is interested in these sorts of things, and I hadn't heard about this, and we weren't talking about this. So that's that's sort of, that's the mindset that I came to Georgetown in. And I think those are sorts of the the events and the people that really led to it changing.

TJ 9:03

The connections between universities and in the history of enslavement are not-- they're not surprising on the, on the surface of them, since these were old institutions that existed in in the age of slavery, but they hit hard because of how we think about universities and about how we take so much of their history into our own sense of ourselves in so far as we choose the place that we feel represents us. And maybe we have, we don't have all the choices in the world, but but those choices are so laden with your sense of self and listening to talk about getting to Georgetown. And being aware of these recent failings, it seemed important to you to make to make Georgetown better. And that was part of your, your driving purpose when you arrived when you came back for your second year.

MQ 9:54

At the point that I arrived at Georgetown, the story about this, this sale and the university's involvement in slavery was in a strange

position is, you know, I arrived in 2012. There had been a Bicentennial history of the university in 1989. And that history had talked with a reasonable degree of detail about Jesuit slaveholding. And in the years that followed, there was even there was a course in the American Studies Department, there was some attention paid to this issue. But it kind of fizzled out to the point that, you know, a student wrote, what was another expos a article in 2007. So at the point that I arrived, is this wasn't a secret. People had done a fair amount of historical work. But it also was in no way part of the conversation. In that there were these two prominent buildings, one of which was about to become a student residence, right students were going to have to live in in a building name for the man who was really the architect of the sale of these 272 people. And that that was I think, what bugged me in particular, was that it seemed that at that particular time, the university should have been aware and should have been paying attention to the fact that it had a chance to do something about these names, and it had a plausible moment to consider it, which was that the building is being reopened, rechristened put to a new purpose.

In terms of in terms of going into the archive, and, and where that sort of impulse came from. I think part of it was that in, in all of the local history I had done, I had always been particularly interested. And the queer history, I think, makes this especially clear in talking to people who have involved and, and the idea that that people write, having characters in your story, makes it more compelling, relatable helps you to understand the human stakes. And that's especially dramatic. When you have 272 people who in in all of the published sources were more or less anonymous. I also became aware just by looking at the work that had been done, that it was clear that there was a big archive on this at the Maryland Jesuits, which is the Maryland Jesuits in terms of their jurisdiction, actually, it was most of the country and for strange historical reasons, and that they had a very extensive archive, it was housed at Georgetown special collections, and that it clearly included boxes and boxes from the period of the sale that discussed it extensively. So I wanted to review those documents. It wasn't hard to do as a student at the school. And I had I had, as I mentioned, done some of this work before.

LM 12:48

So you done some work in the Farmington archives and this, this must have made you more comfortable as an undergraduate going in and requesting boxes and kind of knowing what to look for. But I still wonder what gave you a sense that, that this would be an effective form of argumentation for an article to make in the student newspaper?

MQ 13:18

Yeah, I realized that's kind of a strange thing to do. But I think I think the way that the archives speak through the article is not it's

not in the sense that sort of self conscious about them being archives, what I what I was really looking for is things like names, details, stories, to understand sort of the way in which this sale actually transpired. And because the details that that come out of the archives, at least in that first article, are ultimately all about the sale. They're the names and ages, people who were sold, particularly children. I think I highlighted in the article there, the actions of Thomas Mulledy, there's sort of the fear and fright that accompany that day in 1838, that when these people were literally rounded up and sold down the river, and that the things that impressed people enough to record them in writing, particularly given that this was the shape of this archive, a lot of it was fairly, you know, there were letters, so a lot of it was fairly epistolary, there were there were diaries, there were there were the types of sources that you would expect to have emotional content. It wasn't just account books and ledgers and the sorts of things that you might use to, to reconstruct, to reconstruct a story where you're going to have to do a lot of imagination work, I think these were archives that were capable of speaking on their own.

LM 14:48

Well, and I think both parts of the archive seem to have been important, the account books have been important for concretizing the financial importance to Georgetown, of the sale of enslaved people and profiting from the labor of enslaved people. But the the other ways in which the archive speak, have lent themselves to such powerful stories. And well, I wanted to know how much you quote from the archives. In your first article, you actually quote the lady himself, who reflected that he was somewhat aware that the sale would tarnish his legacy and and yet, went ahead with it anyway. And you also quote, a contemporary Jesuit who decried the sale. And then in a 2015 article, tracing the diaspora of enslaved people from Georgetown, to St. Louis, you give a detailed picture of one particular journey, a group of Jesuits and enslaved people who traveled 800 miles overland, to found what would become St. Louis University. And I'm wondering what specific documents you drew on to learn the details of this, because it is a very rich and harrowing portrait, describing the wagons that they traveled in the plantation cabin that one family lived in when they arrived in their daily routines. It's very, it's very visceral. And it also documents the important, the important national stretch of the Jesuits and slavery. So can you talk about some of the specific documents you drew on to write that piece?

MQ 16:40

Yeah, absolutely. And that was, I thought that was a really important piece. And as far as I think it's, it's the story, the story of what happened in 1838 is, is so remarkable, and and so dramatic and sort of so obviously compelling, that it's it's really difficult to talk about a lot of the rest of the story at Georgetown, which which is really important as is this is one thread, which is that across the 1830s

people in Maryland and Virginia, were very much in the business of selling slaves to the deep south. But when it comes to the Diaspora story at the document that really set it off, is is one of the ones that you referenced at this this plantation cabin, it St. Louis University.

I had been to a to a conference at SLU, and one of their one of their main campus buildings was I want to say it's Father Verhagen, who is the who is being addressed in this letter and one of their main campus building sustained for this man. He's one of the Presidents from the founding period of the university. And in the middle of the Maryland jazz archives, there was this astonishing letter. And it is, it is signed and written in the name of one of the Jesuit owned slaves. I don't know if he if he wrote it himself, or if it was prepared by, you know, a Jesuit who was attempted to be his advocate. So there was this sort of mystery about the possibility of internal conflict that came with it. But it's this astonishing, plaintive, desperate document, where he says to Father Verhagen, my wife and I are going to freeze to death in this cabin, if you don't improve our, our living situation over the course of the winter. And I believe he also he wants to buy his freedom, he proposes a scheme, he says I can, I can get access to the money I can, I can buy my way out of this, this terrible situation. I don't know what happened to him, only one half of the letter lives in the archive. But that was it was just sort of this this document that was it was too striking not to investigate further.

An important piece of this as well. And part of the reason that I wanted to work with that document and tell a little bit of that story, is the national context, which is that, you know, as as we know, now, sort of the, the really critical, critical moment in our current dialogue about racial justice is that it's the murder of George Floyd in the trial of direct shot. But then it was, it was the death of Michael Brown. And, of course, the death of Michael Brown took place in Ferguson, Missouri, which is a suburb, northwest of St. Louis, actually, right about the place where SLU was founded, slow is now in the city, but it wasn't then. And the Jesuit plantation that supported SLU was a place called Florissant Farm. And as you may know, Florissant Avenue is where almost all of these protests took place in in the Michael Brown moment. So on the one hand, I wanted to work with these documents, because they had such a deep connection to the present that Jesuit slaves had had not just been taken from Maryland and Georgetown, to the deep south, but also had been taken to Ferguson and Florissant and to St. Louis.

But, but so so that was, that was sort of one of the key documents that I worked with. And there were a number of others describing individual sales within the Jesuit archives, you know, you would talk about five people 20 people all kinds of of moments in which enslaved people were sold were or were sent to Jesuit institutions across the country, as well as just to enslavers to raise money for the

university. Now, not all of this is sort of straight from the Jesuit archives. To a fair degree, when I when I tried to understand what that journey would have been like, I there were there were documents that described it in sort of very bare detail. And so I was I was just able to draw on the fact that there's enormous historical scholarship around the issue of slavery in the United States. And what that article really reconstructs is, well, I know, I know that these people took this journey. I know a few details about it from the archives, how can how can we fill it in with the scholarship? And the scholarship tells you about these, the roads that people were forced to march over the sorts of conditions that would that would accompany slaves who were marched across the country. And so it's a it's a fusion, I suppose.

LM 21:35

I wanted to ask you, what was the reaction to your articles on campus? Did students immediately find it-- Yeah, I guess, how much reaction was there on campus? Did you see it grow? as, as you published, I guess, how many did you publish five or six articles? Were there other events that kind of helped the momentum for reparative justice get going? I mean, I guess the sort of the, the dream of a, like, social justice informed piece of public writing is that you will write this article and people will see the importance of the argument that you're making, and just immediately take it up and start moving forward. Yeah, what did what what did you see happen? And can you trace the kind of growing momentum that was happening on campus?

MQ 22:33

Yeah, absolutely. I can I can tell a piece of that story. And I'm sure I'm glad you're talking to other people who are undergrads as well, because an important part of this story is that, like Georgetown really does have a strong tradition of student activism. And they're all Students who very successfully managed to mobilize themselves. And I don't think that was, you know, I, I published this article and and two weeks later, you know, people are pounding the pavement. I think I think people did realize in response to the article I know, I know that students read it. I heard from students who were upset about it, I know that it made its way into the university administration. And I know that, in part in response to the article, that administrators were thinking about the fact that they were going to need to, to do something about this question, right, that they were going to need to resolve not necessarily in in the way that that I advocated for it, but that this had sort of entered the conversation.

But the timeline here is, is important, because I think I published that article, the fall of 2014, is the first article saying the name should be changed, the renovation was ongoing for a significant period of time as University construction often is. And by the summer of 2015, as the buildings were preparing to be opened that fall, and students were going to move into them. there hadn't been a university

move to talk about the names to open the possibility of renaming. So there was no immediate mobilized reaction other than students and administrators sort of seeing that this was coming down the pipeline entering the conversation, I can't tell you exactly what sort of other student activism sort of accelerated the timetable. I think, I think sort of what became the critical focal point is that at the end of the summer, the president's office announced that it was going to be forming a working group on slavery, memory and reconciliation. And that that point there was sort of there was sort of a body or a process that I think really crystallized student attention and that I think, invited the ability to make demands. And so I think now now, there was also a process that it could attach to. I also think the heat was turning up nationwide, that the Black Lives Matter movement was was gathering steam, students were increasingly plugged into this. And so I think the frustration that that students felt, not only it's sort of a fact that the university seemed to be moving a little slow, but also that, that these conversations, we're now plugged into national conversations really helped gather steam. And I, of course, wrote more articles. This is a it was a really complicated story, I got something like, like 1000 words every two weeks. And that's not that's that's not what you need to talk about the relationship between a university that was founded in the 1780s and supported by slavery and racism in the United States. That's, that's just not how that sort of a story gets told, at least not not in the fullness that it deserves.

LM 25:51

Did you have any immediate reaction sort of among your peers or in the classroom? Like any sort of more, more personal reaction in your circle of peers?

MQ 26:04

You know, I think Yale hadn't done Calhoun, a lot of universities were not engaged in this sort of work or these processes yet. So I think this was in a moment where there was an awful lot of skepticism. And I think Georgetown has a fairly conservative past, you know, alumni base, readership of the student newspaper online can actually be, you know, I got I got a lot of nasty comments on these articles, not not sent to my email, but they had the comment section turned on. They did, they did. In fact, I think there was one that has stood out to me for some period of time. He said, somebody commented, Matthew is far more racist than the people he condemns. And I sort of said, Well, you know, I, it's one thing to think that but the people were talking about her are slaveholders and slave trade. So people, there was there was a negative reaction. There were a lot of students who I didn't really hear, you know, sort of personal reflections. And I imagine that this probably, is the sort of conversation that was happening more deeply within the activist community. I think the role that I played was relatively circumscribed and specific, which is that I told stories, I laid out arguments, I sort of pointed to elements of

history that I think very much offered ammunition legitimacy, direction to social movements, but I can't pretend that that you know, I was at I was at the helm of those things. So I think that other students will be able to reflect on on things like that more specifically. But I did I did hear from a number of students just sort of who saw the article were surprised who were interested, shortly after it was published in a point where I can say, yeah, people read this one.

LM 27:52

Well, it's just such an interesting moment where you're right that it was it was somewhat people talk about generations being compressed now so that four years makes a generation. And this the sort of middle ground of conversation around reparations has changed so much in the last 10 years. And I do think that having this conversation on Georgetown's campus, Georgetown is not a particularly radical place, and to see it go from something that was a kind of open secret, people knew about it, but it wasn't talked about. And that is one of the mysteries that it existed there. It was there it was even digitized. So why, why did it explode into this national and international story? We have sort of asked various people involved about their reflections as to why this moment in time was the moment when the archive went from something that was used in American studies classes to something that's written about in the International Herald Tribune. And I think that you're sort of getting at that, with the timing of history and how, how the shooting of Michael Brown, how the activism in Ferguson, how BLM seems like it created a context for this archive to be ignited. And to move conversations forward. Can you just talk a little bit about, I guess, how it felt to be in, in the midst of what feels like visible social change, social change usually happens like so slowly that you don't get to see it. But at Georgetown, it feels like it was accelerated so that you could see the discussions happening that had maybe been building through scholarship through efforts to deal with archive for 100 years, but had just never really bubbled to the surface.

MQ 29:52

Yeah, I mean, it was it was completely astonishing, I think, I think I think the answer has to be, you know, the Black Lives Matter movement and the place of race in our national dialogue. I really, I don't I don't think there's, there's another movement that was having that sort of impact on on the national psyche at that time, in a way that was related to, to what had the capacity to happen in Georgetown. But I think, I think the most astonishing moment, and the transformation, and this is just in my time, which count, obviously, between the first time that we talked and now you had the Jesuits putting up \$100 million for this, you know, for the slightly vague effort but but it's, it's, it's an astonishing sum of money. It's, it's, it's amazing that this is actually materializing into what seems like sort of a

first of its kind effort.

But to the way that things transformed was was really incredible to watch. I think I found myself in in some respect, going from the vanguard to sort of going to the inside of the institution, I was I was a member of the working group. And I remember that we thought we were moving reasonably quickly, we, internally, self consciously, we thought of ourselves, you know, like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which famously has to spend all the money within a certain number of years after Bill and Melinda Gates pass away, right, they understand that their, their mission is not forever, they they have to do their job, and that at some point, it has to end. And so we I think thought that we're going to take one school year to do this. And that's, that's lightning speed in university time. And by November, there were student protests on on Red Square, it's called, which is this big, big brick Plaza where a lot of student activism is centered. You know, there were, there was an occupation of the president's office of the university. And, you know, the president's chief of staff was coming to us and saying, Can we have a decision on the name? That was at least for me, that was a really remarkable thing was to see the movement had had moved with with such speed had gathered such force and was convicted of its ideas that he had, I sort of felt like man, I'm one of the slowpokes here.

Now, I think one one force that I'd really like to comment on sort of being unleashed here. That is really incredible. And and that also speaks tremendously to what sort of power is actually latent archives, is the descendants. I think that was, that was something that that we really didn't see coming. I didn't see coming. I don't think the working group saw it coming. I remember Adam Rothman who says, wonderful professor, a professor of history and a member of the working group had identified, you know, one or two people. Maybe how halfway through the year that he thought could be descendants of the 272 people who were resold, as it turned out, there was a lawyer who had hired genealogists and had started to sort of build this infrastructure for identifying descendants. That was only possible because of real quirks of this archive. One, there was extensive documentation of the sale. We knew everybody's names and ages, when they were sold in 1838. Two, that there was not so much time before the census started counting formerly enslaved people that you could pick up with sort of the ordinary tools of genealogy, because most most people have a really hard time at tracing their genealogy once you hit people who were enslaved, because they weren't counted, they weren't reckoned they were written about, like other people.

And the real quirk of the Jesuit archive was actually Catholicism. You know, I mentioned I mentioned that, or I wrote about in you. You mentioned earlier, the contracts that the provisos the idea that people needed to be able to continue to practice in the Catholic faith, and that this was very important to the Jesuits. Well, a lot of

those providers were broken. And to a great degree, this wasn't honored. But something that that did, at least predate the sale. And that allowed sort of a construction of an understanding of who is related family units of the building blocks of genealogy was actually all of the sacramental records. There were records of baptisms, of communions, of marriages, funerals. And so the archive was really what, you know, very particular things about this archive, to a large degree are what made unleashing this descendant community, which now numbers in the 1000s, or at least, which now has been recognized to include 1000s of people, I suppose it always numbered in the 1000s 10s of 1000s, maybe more. It's just not possible if you don't if you don't have the records. And so in this way, it's it's kind of funny that I think the archive, I know there was tension between the descendant community and special collections and things like that, just because special collections has rules about you got to request things in advance, right? They're, they're not stored on site. In the case of the Jesuit archives, I think, at least for a while they were they were actually still owned by the Jesuits. And so you needed to get permission to use them. And these, this costs a lot of friction with people who would show up at Georgetown and would say, I'm descended from these people who were enslaved by the Jesuits who ran this university. And I want to see the documents, right, I want to, I want to use these archives as a tool of self realization. So there, there still was that tension, I think, between archives professionals in sort of academics who are used to working with archives in a particular way, and the public who is not used to having to access materials that way. But at the same time, you now see what what the Jesuits have had to do what the university has had to do reckon with and to negotiate with, to recognize to come into conversation with this community, that can only be brought into being because we have the archive. So it has this really amazing, I think, latent power that is maybe more obvious in the context of lineage, which is always at least metaphorically operating through the concept of lineage.

LM 36:34

What were some of the suggestions that the working group made that most excited you that you were most in support of?

MQ 36:44

Oh, it was kind of it was an interesting document. The working group issued a report over the summer after after it's sort of 10 month existence. And it's interesting, because, of course, the the report ended with recommendations, some of which had already been implemented, right, we catalogued recommendations that had been done like like renaming the buildings, we made recommendations that were I think we're, we're flawed in some ways, but we're at the time quite radical, like offering, you know, offering special admission status to descendants, you know, recommending the creation of scholarships, memorialization efforts. So you know, I still don't think there's a memorial, the university has not implemented all of our

recommendations. And I think we felt constrained in some ways as sort of an arm of the university. As we're, you know, we couldn't recommend things that we didn't think the university could do in a way that activists can demand things whether or not the university is willing to implement them. And and that way I think they can shift the needle and push the conversation a lot further and harder than a working group could, I think the recommendation of of actually of admission status, which has this real, this real paucity in retrospect. But at the time, it was actually really radical. I think that Ta-Nehisi Coates actually commented, and he said, You know, this isn't, this isn't really what we're talking about, but this is, this is a type of reparations. And that that's, that's a really, that's a new thing for an American University to try. So I think that was really exciting. But I think we were always aware that our role was not to end the conversation. Right? Most of the report is not, here are our recommendations at the report is something like, like 120 pages, and of that, probably 80% is, here's what we did. And here's the history. It's, it's, it's supposed to be laying the groundwork for movements that are going to take over, because I think we recognize that we were sort of an ad hoc group of people from within the university, who were representative in some ways, but not others, for instance, right, that descendants were not represented on our group. But they're obviously extremely important constituency in terms of what the university has to think about and what it has to do.

LM 39:11

I know you weren't on campus when the voting around the activity fee happened. But I'm curious what your perception was about how consensus was built around that? Because it was a remarkable number of Georgetown students, who both showed up to vote and voted in favor of it. What can you say about the development of this movement? And then also, what do you think is preventing it from being enacted?

MQ 39:41

Yeah, I mean, it was, it was by no means a close vote, which is really incredible. I think, I think if that vote had been held, you know, in 2000, even in the spring of 2016, right, as as I was leaving, I'm not sure it would have passed, it, at least would have been razor thin. If it had happened in 2012, when I had arrived, people would have said, What are you talking about? Right now? They either wouldn't have shown up or they would have voted no. So it's, it's an incredible transformation in an extremely short period of time. And what you're pointing at is, is these sorts of many streams that that come together to make these things work. You know, I think I, my function was largely to get information out there, to tell a story from the archives, that could be persuasive. And that was that was true, and was supported by evidence. Right. So I think, for instance, the the relationship between slavery and the financing of the university, the fact that from the beginning, right, there's Jesuit documents in the 1780s, that suggest at the point of them, having enslaved people is to

be able to support the operations of the university and the province etc, and so on. And so, you know, on the one hand, you need the information, but on the other hand, as, as we discussed, that information was lying fallow for so many years, right in the 80s, in 2007, this big piece, I think, in The Georgetown Voice. So it's, it's, it's really, it's really got to be the case that it's the social movements that are that are changing the culture, and that are making it so that so that these sorts of archival arguments can appeal to new possibilities.

I think there's there's actually something that I've been working on. And in my own time, there was this incredible case at the Supreme Court last year. It's called McGirt versus Oklahoma. And the outcome of the case was recognizing that probably about half of Oklahoma is an extinguished tribal reservation. Now, what's what's weird about the case is that all the history that it relies on took place between 1830 and 1905. Right. Why was this case decided in 2020? The history was known in the sense that it was in an archive, that it was maybe in a publication somewhere that it was accessible. But large numbers of people had to work for a very long time in order to change the culture so that the history could be taken seriously, and so that it's persuasive value could actually be recognized as related to potential outcomes in a dialogue. So I would I would, just thinking about those kind of first principles, lay the credit at the feet of student activists. I would also lay at the feet of national activists, because it's reasonably clear that just as just as the conversation in Georgetown was transforming in the context of the early Black Lives Matter movement and the murder of Michael Brown, it surely has to be the case that it's transforming further in the context of that sort of mature movement and I think a much deeper national reckoning.

The second half of your question, though, is, why hasn't the student activity fee then been implemented? It's obvious that the the university's sort of governing bodies are uncomfortable with this proposal. It's a situation where like, yes, students, students are the vanguard here and the governing bodies are very conservative in their I think sort of that the short lifespan of students allows them to really transform in their time at a university, I think I think they've just come up against institutions that are that are much more stable, and that are probably quite a few years behind in terms of endorsing this sort of a transformation. I don't I don't know as much as I should about the makeup of those governing bodies. But I assume that you know, they're, they're probably older, whiter, wealthier, more male, more conservative than the the current student body.

LM 43:53

So now you're studying the law. And with your mention of the case in Oklahoma, I believe the Cherokee Nation, you've highlighted the intersection between the law and archives. And just to end, I wonder what you will take forward from the movement for reparative justice at

Georgetown, your work in the archive, your parsing of these very legalistic documents, which treat people as assets, and your current path finishing law school and, and looking forward?

MQ 44:28

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it was it was a pretty overwhelming experience. And I think maybe the easiest answer is that I've continued to do fairly similar work in other places. So at a Yale where I'm a law student, now, I did a fair amount of research on on that law schools ties to the Confederacy. And you know, lo and behold, they're, they're deeper than people realized. You know, there were many students from the deep south, there were many students who became involved in the Confederacy, who were participants in the secession conventions across the country, who became generals in the Confederate Army, who owned slaves, who were planters. So I think I think part of the answer is that, you know, it's a reminder that the, the national story is always much more complicated. And also that it truly is a national story. You know, I think Washington DC and Alexandria, Virginia, in particular, was actually one of the slave trading capitals of the United States. It was, along with New Orleans and Mobile, I think it was actually the largest slave trading port in for a number of decades in the United States, which is not really how people think of Washington DC. They don't think of it as sort of former cradle of Atlantic slavery, but but it is. And so, I guess a piece of this is that these conversations really are national, that no one really has their their hands clean in this enterprise that, that a place like Yale demonstrates that there was enormous interchange between the North and the South, even after slavery moved south, right, that sure, New England merchants were often abolitionists, but they were also really successful at spinning Southern cotton and selling it to the world. And so it's, it's certainly a reminder of sort of the complexity and sort of national nature of all this. But to get a little more to the point that I think you're driving at with respect to some of the comments I've made about history and law and the relationship between past and present. I think the the view that I'm coming around to, is that history is it's it's things that happen in the past, but it's also the way that the present is acting on the past and vice versa. It's one thing to find things in the archives, it's one thing for them to be written down. But it's totally another thing for those things to be capable of speaking in a given culture or persuasive. So someone like me can write about what happened in 1838 can write about, you know, the sale of enslaved people from, from Washington to St. Louis, can write about all of these these terrible things that happen. You know, an enterprising young lawyer can point out that in the 1850s, there were treaties signed with the with the Cherokee, guaranteeing them land in Oklahoma, you know, for for time immemorial. But until you have activists on the ground until you have a culture that's ready to hear those stories and to work them into a way that's going to be persuasive and he's going to be important right to take seriously the relationship between that past

and this present, it's it's not surprising that the archives are going to lie fallow, but that's also their power. They'll last a long time. If we have to wait a long time for the right culture, the right social movement, the archives will still be there.

LM 48:01

Thank you so much, Matthew, for your time today.

MQ 48:06

Yeah, thank you for having me again.

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