



# Here Lies Darby Vassall: Rendering the obscured and concealed history of slavery at Christ Church Cambridge

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**Here Lies Darby Vassall:  
Rendering the obscured and concealed history of slavery at Christ Church Cambridge**

By

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master in Design Studies  
Critical Conservation**

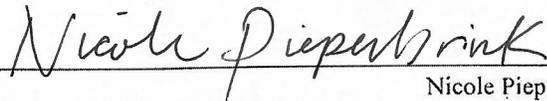
At the Harvard University Graduate School of Design

May, 2022

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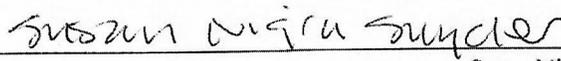
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## ABSTRACT

The material conditions of “historic” preservation and institutional presentation communicate a particular version of the past through, what the late historian and professor of geography, David Lowenthal, terms selective forgetting and selective recall. Common myths of white benevolence and exceptionalism (in the North) contribute to the perceived “invisibility” of slavery in New England and across the nation at sites similar to “historic” Christ Church Cambridge in Harvard Square. By *reading against* boundaries, materiality, and identity projections, this project situates the church within broader, interconnected landscapes of dispossession and extraction, making connections to places and people beyond the fiction of “historic” boundaries – in W. E. B. DuBois’ words – to the “foundation stone” (Black labor) of “Northern manufacture and commerce.” The goal of this project is to construct what bell hooks calls a “subversive historiography,” an alternative spatial narrative of place that allows us to revise and expand the storytelling of Christ Church Cambridge in its context. My work aims to render visible this (currently invisible) history through research and exploratory mediums of knowledge sharing and representation. A temporary art installation provides a platform for bringing the hidden past into view.

## SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

“...Darby, son of Henry Vassall’s negro coachman ‘Tony’ (1861)...” (Batchelder 1893, 68)<sup>1</sup>

This short description – occupying no more than one and a half lines of Samuel Batchelder’s 88-page book, *Christ Church, Cambridge: Some Account of Its History and Present Condition, Especially Prepared for Visitors* (1893) – leaps off the page. According to Batchelder, the church was founded in 1759 by members of the Church of England living in “Cambridge, Watertown, and places adjacent” who wanted a church closer to their homes (Batchelder 1893, 6–8),<sup>2</sup> and who wanted to provide a place of worship for Harvard students brought up in the Church of England. He wrote a White Anglo account of history, focusing on the people responsible for the founding and construction of the church, parishioners who attended and financially supported the church (and where they lived) (Ibid., 23–26), and those who gave material and financial gifts to adorn the space. But it, along with three other published histories<sup>3</sup> of

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<sup>1</sup> Full excerpt: “The Vassall Tomb beneath the church is marked by a long, low mound in the gravel floor. This mound is the arched top of the vault, which is sunk below the surface. It is constructed of brick, with the entrance, by a flight of stone steps, at the western end. It was built shortly after the completion of the church, by Henry Vassall, one of the original proprietors. When finally sealed in 1865 the tomb contained ten coffins, those of its owner, (died 1769), his wife (1800), their only daughter, wife of Dr. Charles Russell (1802), her daughter, Catharine Graves Russell (1847), **Darby, son of Henry Vassall’s negro coachman ‘Tony’ (1861)**, four coffins containing the bodies of children, all under two years of age (one coffin marked 1770), and one containing an unidentified man over 45 years of age. This man may have been Lieutenant Brown, one of the British prisoners of war, confined in Cambridge during the year 1778, who was shot by a sentinel for passing the lines, and ‘entombed in the Church at Cambridge with all military honors,’ according to a contemporary account. At all events, no signs of separate interments below the church have been found, though there is record of at least one such burial, that of Elizabeth Apthorp (died 1763), daughter of the first rector” (Batchelder 1893, 68–69).

<sup>2</sup> The Rector of King’s Chapel in Boston wrote the petition letter to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts for permission and provision (Batchelder 1893, 8). The architect, Peter Harrison (1716-1775), had designed King’s Chapel in Boston (Ibid., 12). In recent years, King’s Chapel has researched the history of slavery (“Slavery and King’s Chapel” n.d.) and responded with a research report (Charpentier 2019), interior signage, and a memorial project which is currently underway (“Memorial to Enslaved Persons” n.d.). There are many relational and monetary connections between these two institutions.

<sup>3</sup> *A Sermon on the Re-Opening of Christ Church, Cambridge, Mass., Preached on the Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity, November 22, 1857; With a Historical Notice of the Church* by Nicholas Hoppin (1858). *The Biography of a Church: A Brief History of Christ Church Cambridge, Massachusetts* by Gardiner Day (1951). *The Biography of a Church, Volume II: Voices from the Pews* by Christ Church, Cambridge (2012).

the church, fails to mention the origins of so much of the money used to fund church construction, maintenance, and growth. A brief mention of Darby's burial in the Vassall Tomb, located beneath the church, is the one indicator we have that the history of Christ Church Cambridge might involve more than meets the eye.<sup>4</sup>

Where is this tomb? Does it still exist? Can I see it?

### **1.1 In search of the Vassall Tomb: storytelling at Christ Church**

The pulsing rhythm of lawn sprinklers washes over a steady stream of cars, buses, and bodies animating Harvard Square. Their aerial pattern catches yellow light above a half-moon patch of saturated green grass, and backdrops a curved stone slab: *(Figure 1)*

CHRIST CHURCH  
OLDEST CHURCH BUILDING  
IN CAMBRIDGE.  
BUILT IN 1760.  
OCCUPIED BY  
CONTINENTAL TROOPS  
IN 1775.

I make my way towards the soft gray-painted wood edifice. Its red doors are open, and seemingly inviting. White tablets flank the entrance: *(Figures 2 and 3)*

CHRIST CHURCH was established in 1759  
to serve Cambridge's Anglican community,  
including students at Harvard College.

Peter Harrison, the prominent architect of his day,  
Designed this church, King's Chapel in Boston, and...

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<sup>4</sup> Hereafter, I will refer to Christ Church Cambridge as "Christ Church." For much more thorough accounts of Christ Church's history, refer to sources cited.

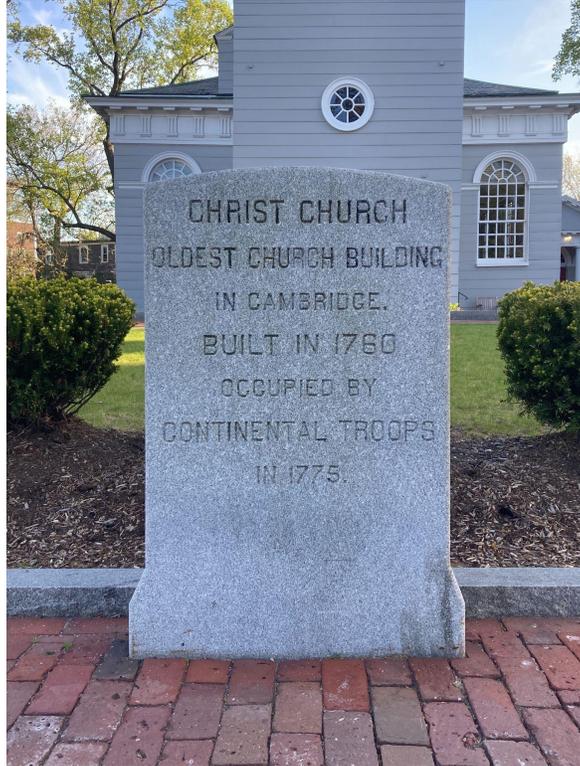


Figure 1. Historic marker outside Christ Church. Photograph taken by author, 2022.

I scan for names. *Will they mention slavery?*

...Gen. George and Martha Washington  
worshipped here 31 December 1775...

...The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., declaring  
“There comes a time when silence is betrayal,”  
spoke here in April 1967...

Negative. A small oval emblem sits underneath the right hand tablet, making sense of age in such a polished condition:

Cambridge Historical Commission  
Preservation Award  
2013

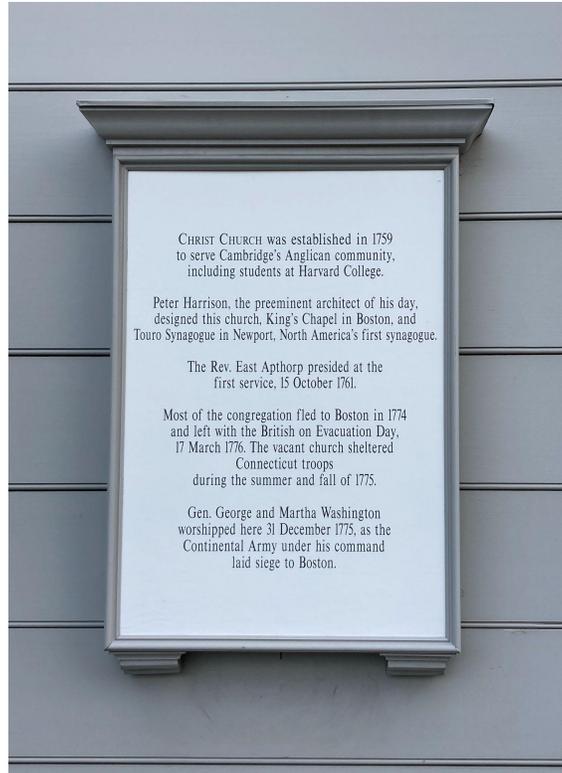


Figure 2. Left tablet affixed to facade of Christ Church. Photograph taken by author, 2021.

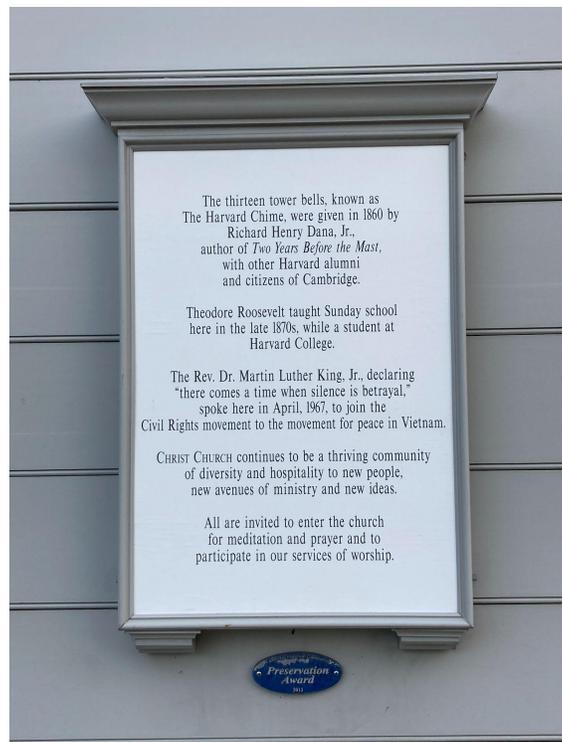


Figure 3. Right tablet affixed to facade of Christ Church. Photograph taken by author, 2021.

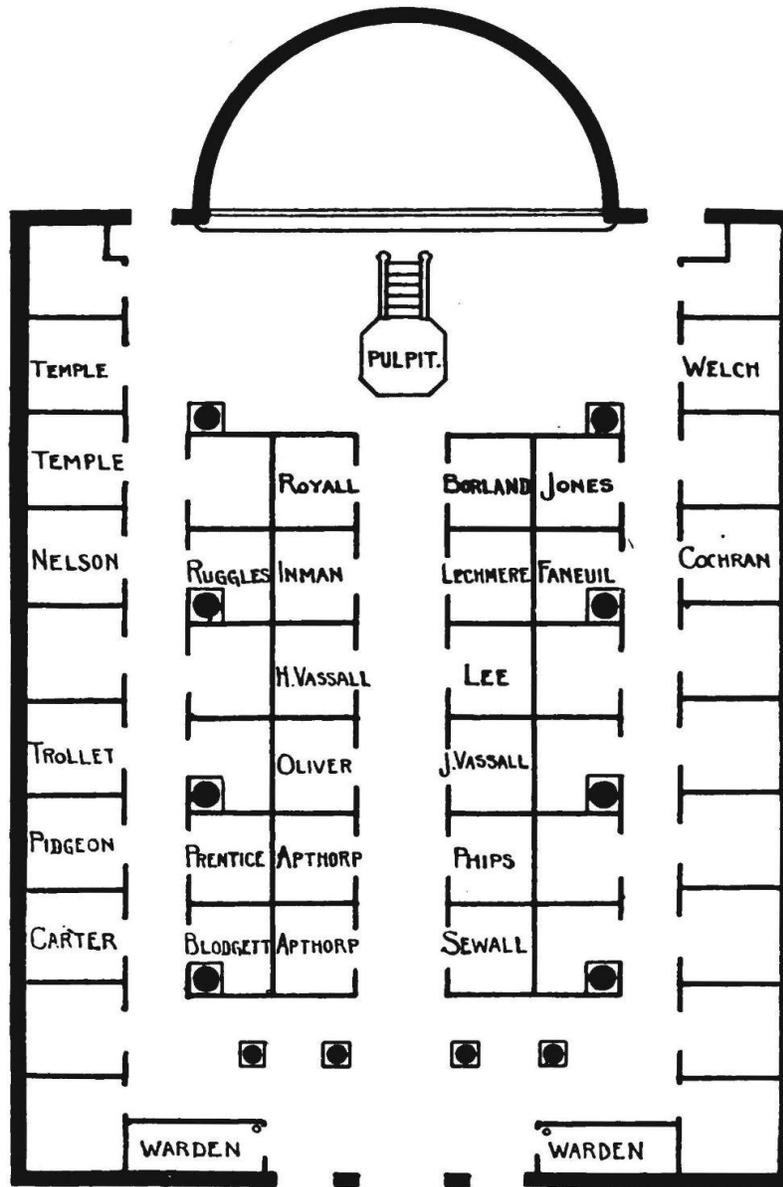
The threshold marks more than just a separation between public and private. Gently moving into the vestibule, I'm submerged in the quiet whisper of space set apart. My eyes quickly locate more signage to the left:

CHRIST CHURCH, CAMBRIDGE

HAS BEEN DESIGNATED A  
REGISTERED NATIONAL  
HISTORIC LANDMARK

UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE  
HISTORIC SITES ACT OF AUGUST 21, 1935  
THIS SITE POSSESSES EXCEPTIONAL VALUE  
IN COMMEMORATING AND ILLUSTRATING  
THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES ...

The pews don't have names. They are no longer box pews; their linear formation lacks correlation with Batchelder's reconstructed pew plan. (*Figure 4*)



The Tory Proprietors, circa 1770.

Prepared in conformity with the treasurer's accounts, on a conjectural numbering of the pews.

Figure 4. Reconstructed pew plan, circa 1770, by Samuel Francis Batchelder (1893).

Tall small-paned windows and warm chandeliers saturate the sanctuary with light. The window pattern is offset by large plaques adorning the walls, some only visible by a silhouette leaking through their neighboring gray shutters. Small rectangles dot the interior landscape, on pews, columns, a lectern, and a baptismal font. They display names of people – carved, etched, painted, appliqued. I count 18. Some names I recognize: Apthorp, Batchelder, Serjeant, Washington.<sup>5</sup> Research on each of these families finds that they benefitted in one way or another from the slave trade, through various means. As more American institutions have engaged with the underlying economic reality of slavery, I wonder if I would find any evidence or representation of this at Christ Church.

I exit the sanctuary to enter the Parish House next door. To the left, an eclectic bulletin board presents categorized announcements about “COMMUNITY EVENTS,” the “MUSIC PROGRAM,” the “THRIFT SHOP,” “PARISH LIFE,” and “MISSION.” A 16-foot linear historical timeline is directly in my line of sight. I get closer. “**1769** Henry Vassall, a church founder, buried in crypt under church.” I see nothing about Darby at the 1861 marker, although his funeral took place on the same day as the “Christ Church Centennial Anniversary” celebration on “Oct. 15.”<sup>6</sup> “**1967** April: The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. speaks in the parish house against the Vietnam War, declaring ‘there comes a time when silence is betrayal,’ thus joining the movements for Civil Rights and peace in Vietnam.” “**1970s** A committee of white parishioners raises \$100,000 and makes it available to a committee of black parishioners to fund various programs to

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<sup>5</sup> See “Slavery and King’s Chapel” report for information about Charles Apthorp (Charpentier 2019, 8–13). The Charles Ward Apthorp Papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society contain the financial papers of Charles’ son, as well as those of other Apthorp family members including his father’s firm Charles Apthorp & Son (Charles Ward Apthorp Papers 1727-1858). Further research into the financial details of these papers would be a worthwhile endeavor for Christ Church to better understand money flows from the many Apthorp family members who financially supported and attended the church. Samuel Batchelder II profited from the New England cotton industry (Dus 2009; Bishop 1868, 515). According to History Cambridge, Christ Church minister Winwood Serjeant and his wife Mary Browne Serjeant owned “at least one enslaved man; Mary’s parents in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, owned slaves as well” (Smolenski 2020). One of Winwood Serjeant’s personal letters from 1774 also reveals that he counseled his sister-in-law about managing her father’s estate after his death, including advice not to sell an enslaved person “for less than 50£ Sterling, he is certainly worth that” (“Serjeant Family Letters, 1769-1840: Scope and Content Note” 2007). Close examination of these letters may be beneficial for Christ Church to better understand money flows from the Serjeant family. See Mount Vernon’s website to read about the people George Washington enslaved (“Slavery” n.d.).

<sup>6</sup> See “Darby Vassall” n.d.

strengthen the role of the blacks in the community.” A group photo underneath is titled, “ca. 1972 The Committee of Blacks.”

The sole commemorative marker on the second floor of the Parish House displays an icon-like image of Martin Luther King Jr., complemented by a plaque, in the room where he spoke over five decades ago.

A descent below the main floor level will be necessary to locate the tomb. An “Authorized Personnel Only” sign is affixed to the basement door. The stark, cloistered hallway beyond it feels like a drastic visual adjustment. Discolored images line the discolored walls, some of them discernible, some seemingly arbitrary, and some faintly veiled by the red glow of an “EXIT” sign. I count 6 commemorative images of people, including enslavers like George Washington and Thomas Oliver. I also count 6 images and artworks depicting the building, the hum of mechanical whirring acting as white noise to my focus.

I step through a set of flat, black double doors into the basement.<sup>7</sup> Stacks of cardboard boxes and plastic bins containing anonymous items stand like guardrails alongside a grainy concrete clearing. Reflective silver ducting hangs low. Bending and folding in staccato intervals, I adjust my body to the shape of the ceiling as I follow the path, my attention taken by scrap wood; scattered construction and gardening supplies; and old pews, among other retired furniture. Like many basements, the space seems to function as a receptacle for miscellaneous objects. “*The Vassall Tomb beneath the church is marked by a long, low mound in the gravel floor. This mound is the arched top of the vault, which is sunk below the surface. It is constructed of brick...*”<sup>8</sup> The relief in front of me matches its description. I notice my body temperature as a subterranean chill suddenly becomes acute. It wraps itself around my bones.

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<sup>7</sup> I was able to visit the tomb on a private tour with the Parish Historian; it is not accessible to the public.

<sup>8</sup> See footnote 1 for full excerpt.

Circling the tomb, inspecting it from all angles, I'm searching for any sign that Darby is here. A dark, commanding, carved stone slab announces the presence of "HENRY VASSELL." (Figure 5) Crouching to the ground, which has transitioned into a powdery blanket of dirt, I see the same excerpt that I've read before from Batchelder's 1893 text.<sup>9</sup> One and a half lines on a single sheet of paper is all that the site can tell me about this person. (Figure 6)



*Figure 5.* Henry Vassall's headstone next to the Vassall Tomb. Photograph taken by author, 2022.



*Figure 6.* Back of the Vassall Tomb, showing framed excerpt from Batchelder's 1893 text. Photograph taken by author, 2022.

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<sup>9</sup> See footnote 1 for full excerpt.

## 1.2 One body – a system

The *spatial condition* at Christ Church is indicative of a *cultural condition*. The material quality of “historic”<sup>10</sup> preservation communicates a particular version of the past through what David Lowenthal called “selective forgetting” and “selective recall” (Lowenthal 1975, 21–28). Lowenthal identified two key dynamics within our relationship to the past: (1) denying it and (2) altering it. Regarding denial, Lowenthal stated that we “*selectively forget* disagreeable events and scenes” from our own past (Ibid., 21; emphasis added). He expanded on this a decade later by arguing that forgetting is essential to memory, as it “enables us to classify and bring chaos into order” (Lowenthal 1985, 205).

Regarding alteration, he posits that “The tangible past is altered mainly to make history conform with memory” and further that “memory transforms the past we have known into what we think it should have been” (Lowenthal 1975, 27–28). This seems to suggest that various elements of and compositions within material culture that are assumed to represent history, more accurately represent an edited account of the past. Remembering and forgetting work in tandem, producing narratives of stitched together parts – “*Selective recall* eliminates undesired scenes, highlights favored ones, and makes them tidy and suitable” (Ibid., 28; emphasis added).

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<sup>10</sup> My use of quotation marks is meant to suggest that historic designations are often imbued with selective memory and commemoration. Christ Church is listed as a National Historic Landmark and on the National Register of Historic Places, and is located within the Cambridge Common National Register Historic District and the Old Cambridge Historical District regulated by the Cambridge Historical Commission. National Historic Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings forms from 1967 attribute historical significance to the architect, Peter Harrison; spatial features like “five crystal chandeliers given in memory of the daughter of Woodrow Wilson;” and events, such as the occupation of American soldiers, and a funeral held in 1778 for “a young British officer who had been killed by a guard” (Snell 1967). The cover of a 1970s pamphlet about the Christ Church Building Preservation Fund, with the goal to raise \$275,000, describes the purpose as: “An emergency drive to preserve this historic church and national monument now threatened by structural decay” (Christ Church Cambridge, Massachusetts, n.d.). The pamphlet includes a chronology of “Historic Highlights,” mentioning the first Rector, East Apthorp; architect, Peter Harrison; a special service held for George and Martha Washington administered by Colonel Palfrey; the funeral and burial of a British officer, Lt. Brown; and Harvard alumni and students who contributed funds for new bells. These documents do not mention the slave trade or African Americans integral to the establishment and history of the church.

A critical point he offers in speaking to the problem of denial (which is the opposite of living in the past/nostalgia) is that the “inability to recall repressed memories enslaves us to outworn if not outlawed patterns of behavior” (Ibid., 21)<sup>11</sup> This suggests that *unearthing and confronting repressed realities from the past is essential to correcting harmful patterns and behaviors in the present and future.*

Monuments and architecture, both situated within the constructed world, can function similarly. “Historic” architecture is often composed of a series of commemorations. What we may perceive to be benevolent, inanimate objects in space are active components in maintaining systems of injustice through selective storytelling and narrative. Re-interpreting the meaning and function of these spaces, inserting changes in the landscape, and addressing systemic injustice that cannot be reformed solely through commemoration and public art, requires methods and practices informed by both criticality and hopeful action.

This thesis is more a call to engagement than an enlightenment project. The task of my work is to present the reality of this history’s existence, while encouraging viewers (actants)<sup>12</sup> to contend with its partiality. The intent is not to complete memory work, but to open it up by spurring on further research, investigation, questioning, exploring, and probing.

Darby’s presence and story act as an entry point to understanding. Who was Darby Vassall, and what does his burial tell us about Christ Church’s involvement with the slave trade?

As Dan Plekhov has said about his archaeology work at God’s Little Acre in Rhode Island, one of the oldest burial grounds for Africans and African Americans in the US, “The story is always more complex

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<sup>11</sup> Given the brutality of the slave trade, Lowenthal’s use of the term “enslave” in this context could benefit from reconsideration. One can wonder whether he would use a different word today.

<sup>12</sup> See section 5.2 for definition and application of this term.

than we think it is... We know the bigger picture of the slave trade and how inhumane it was. You learn even more when you focus on individual people and individual experiences” (“With Historians in Newport, Brown Archaeologists Preserve a Crucial Piece of African American History” 2020).

We do have information about Darby’s life. Local institutions and organizations – Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery, Longfellow House Washington's Headquarters, the Museum of African American History, and The Royall House and Slave Quarters – have done extensive research on his life and the lives of his family members.<sup>13</sup>

As mentioned prior, his father was Anthony (Tony) and his mother was Cuba – their lives alone connect external and local geographies. Tony was born in Spain or part of the Spanish Empire in the Americas and taken to Jamaica. There, Henry Vassall purchased Tony to be his coachman and brought him to Cambridge (Bell 2012, 32). Cuba was enslaved by both the Royall and Vassall families. Isaac Royall Sr. brought her to Medford from Antigua in 1737 along with 29 other enslaved people, including her family members (“Though Dwelling in a Land of Freedom” n.d.). In 1739, Isaac’s daughter Penelope inherited Cuba and 7 other enslaved people from him (“Primary Sources: Public Records” 2012, fig. Table 7.3). She “brought at least some of her slaves to Cambridge” when she married Henry in 1742 (Bell 2012, 33).

Tony and Cuba married and had at least 6 children (Bell 2012, 31–34). Their family was separated more than once. Sometime in the 1760s, Henry sold Cuba and some of her children across the road to his nephew John Vassall (Ibid., 33–34). When Darby was a young child, John gave him away to an occasional fellow parishioner, George Reed (Batchelder 1917, 74). A story from Darby’s childhood recounts that in 1775, he refused to work for George Washington without payment (Bell 2012, 38).

Although John Vassall abandoned his property during the Revolutionary War, Tony, Cuba, and their

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<sup>13</sup> For much more thorough accounts about Darby’s life and the Vassall family, refer to the online exhibition released in April 2022 about Darby, “We Claim/Reclaim Space” (Museum of African American History and Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery 2022b), as well as other sources cited.

children remained there. In 1782, Tony petitioned for, and was granted, an annual pension after John's property was seized by the state ("Though Dwelling in a Land of Freedom" n.d.). In 1786, Tony and Cuba became property owners in Cambridge, on "Shepard Street and Massachusetts Avenue, a site which becomes central to the establishment of the Black community in Cambridge known as 'Lewisville'" (Museum of African American History and Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery 2022a).

Darby owned property in Beacon Hill and was an involved member of his community. He co-founded the African Society, a mutual aid organization ("Though Dwelling in a Land of Freedom" n.d.; The African Society 1802). He advocated for education, signing a petition in 1812 "to the Massachusetts legislature calling for the creation of an all-black school" ("Darby Vassall" n.d.). He "acted as the second Vice President of a celebration in Florida honoring the anniversary of Haitian independence on August 23, 1825" and attended the New England Anti-Slavery Convention in 1844 and 1851 (Ibid.).

In spite of this information, Darby's presence at Christ Church remains essentially invisible. In a sermon delivered about Darby at Christ Church in October 2021, Alden Fossett – Kellogg Fellow at the Harvard Episcopal Chaplaincy – expressed this condition by referencing an article by Anthony Paul Farley, "Perfecting Slavery." Fossett notes, "...Farley writes of the 'Specters of Slavery,' highlighting the visibly invisible duality of the institution—a spectre: somehow both totally present and totally absent. A haunting..." (Fossett 2021, 3). Darby's story is one of the many lives of (local and distant) enslaved individuals embedded within the existence of Christ Church that remain silenced.

## SECTION 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

My research sits at the intersection of scholarship on the slave trade; racial capitalism; slavery and racism in the built environment and the church; history, heritage, and memory; the obfuscating function of conservation & preservation; narrative; and selective storytelling. I focus on texts looking at the tension between dominant and repressed narratives, and writers that attend to a subversion of historical status quo(s). A rise in American scholarship and institutions confronting the economic reality of slavery and its enduring legacies inform my investigations, methods, and intervention. Context and arguments from foundational texts are interspersed among my research and findings throughout the paper.

## SECTION 3. THE PROBLEM: HISTORY-ISH

### 3.1 Selective memory and storytelling

“Memory, like liberty, is a fragile thing” (Loftus 2013, 17:07). Elizabeth Loftus, Distinguished Professor of Psychological Science and Law at the University of California Irvine, studies human memory and challenges common misconceptions about the function of memory. She has garnered attention for her role in key court cases looking at sexual misconduct.<sup>14</sup> According to Loftus, memories are constructive and reconstructive. Rather than acting “like a recording device” where “You just record the information, then you call it up and play it back when you want to answer questions or identify images” (Ibid., 4:55), memory is actually editable.

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<sup>14</sup> The work of Elizabeth Loftus is controversial and contentious (Aviv 2021). Referencing her here is not a blanket endorsement of all of her opinions, stances, or choices. I include quotes from her 2013 TED talk, as I think they are helpful in understanding memory as a process shaped by various forces, rather than finite and infallible. Acknowledging this process is foundational for expanding the storytelling at Christ Church, as the story of its history has evolved in the past and can continue to evolve in the present and future.

David Lowenthal, on the other hand, distinguishes **memory** from **history** and suggests that memory is “indubitable,” while history is “contingent:”

Memory and history are processes of insight; each involves components of the other, and their boundaries are shadowy. Yet memory and history are normally and justifiably distinguished; memory is inescapable and prima-facie indubitable; history is contingent and empirically testable. (Lowenthal 1985, 187)

The term he uses to describe misrepresentations of history is **heritage**:

History seeks to convince by truth, and succumbs to falsehood. Heritage exaggerates and omits, candidly invents and frankly forgets, and thrives on ignorance and error. (Lowenthal 1998, 7)

Other writers use various terminology to make similar distinctions. Kirk Savage (2006) – Professor of the History of Art & Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh, and member of the Advisory Board at Monument Lab – explains the dichotomous **memory vs. history** relationship in light of writings by Maurice Halbwachs:

...history aims for a universal, objective truth severed from the psychology of social groups while ‘every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time.’ Thus our view of the past does not come primarily from professional historical scholarship but from a much more complicated and interwoven set of relationships to mass media, tourist sites, family tradition, and the spaces of our upbringing with all their regional, ethnic, and class diversity – to name just a few factors. Just as personal memory is now understood to be a highly selective, adaptive process of reconstructing the past, shaped by present needs and contexts, *so collective memory is a product of social groups and their ever evolving character and interests* (emphasis added).

According to Savage, the character and interests of a social group shape the evolutionary process of collectively recounting the past internally and externally. This suggests that power (its acquisition and maintenance) as an interest influences group memory.

Michael Hanchard (2008), Gustave C. Kummerle Professor of Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and director of the Marginalized Populations project, responds to Lowenthal's **memory vs. history** framework by highlighting their functional similarities – “What memory and history share, however, is a process of selection in determining what is important out of a range of possible incidents, phenomena, and occurrences... both require, whether implicitly or explicitly, an emphasis placed upon some events and not others, a criterion of selection” (Hanchard 2008, 51). Hanchard offers another distinction – **black memory vs. state memory** – further complexifying explanations about the remembered past by presenting different strains (in both formation and function) within memory.

In the case of black memory, as well as those of other groups with histories of subordination, popular memory often serves to sustain recollections that eventually make their way into an historical record. The popular memory of subordinated collectivities often belies what history, as written by dominant actors and their apologists, leaves out. (Ibid.)

Hanchard pushes back against Lowenthal's assertion about empirical testability, offering that collective memory serves an important function: “to remind those collectivities of the choices each generation must make when faced with the unbearable weight of racial and national oppression—accede or quit, fight or negotiate, just as their forbearers did. In the absence of a written history, memory may serve as a bulwark against the erasure, neglect, or elision of a memory as a potential source and opportunity for history” (Ibid., 52). This is a new set of criteria for evaluating memory that challenges a historical ethos of “objectivity” – a more inclusive and expansive approach that identifies the role of power dynamics in selecting, recounting, and preserving shared memory.

Hanchard also comments on forgetting, noting that it allows people groups to “marginalize traumatic or even joyous experiences” (Ibid., 51). However, he makes the case that forgetting is actually a form of acknowledgement – “This non- or anti-recollection is in fact a recognition of an event’s occurrence” (Ibid., 50). Nonetheless, he does not leave the consequences of such forgetting unaddressed. The absence of visual memory (specifically referring to “black iconography in foundational symbols in the United States”) results in an absence of two-fold reflection – “US African Americans would not see themselves reflected in the imagery of the nation; the white nation, in turn, would not reflect on the absence of black imagery until well into the late twentieth century” (Ibid., 58).

Michael Herzfeld (2015) – Ernest E. Monrad Research Professor of the Social Sciences in the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University – writes about nationalism and heritage, further speaking to the work and purposes of **state memory** and expanding on the relationship between memory and power. These two concepts are cohered through their shared purpose in the pursuit of transcendence – according to the late Benedict Anderson, former Aaron L. Binenkorb Professor of International Studies, Government & Asian Studies at Cornell University, nationalism is “an attempt to recuperate collective immortality from the mortal condition of individual humans” (Herzfeld 2015, 534). Herzfeld argues that **heritage** is “about the denial of mortality - less, perhaps, in the sense of refusing to admit its existence, than in that of overcoming its effects by recycling identity in perpetuity” (Ibid., 539). In practice, heritage resists decay and disappearance through the reproduction of identity through time (Ibid.). From his argument, it seems that heritage is inherently reactionary, an attempt to stave off the inevitable by inscribing material and place with narratives of ownership that will outlive the human lifespan. It also seems to be selective, imbalanced, and imbued with an us vs. them self-interest.

There are many theories and terms to describe how selective storytelling has taken place at Christ Church. It is evident from these various perspectives that what history and memory are and are not is contested ground, and how they are presented, shared, perceived, and believed is consequential. The past informs

our present, and will continue to influence the future. As Loftus argues, memory is fickle and unreliable. As a result, our re-telling and projections of memory are flawed. Lowenthal and Herzfeld point out that heritage stories are biased in favor of the creator group (and benefit those with power). In light of power dynamics, Hanchard’s writing emphasizes that the production of memory cannot be evaluated, measured, or understood from a one-sided lens or perspective. We should not assume that places and spaces claiming to preserve memory are capturing a complete picture of the past, but rather a selected and curated set of moments and experiences. These scholars encourage us to bring a critical eye and set of questions when considering matters of “history.” Through this criticality, I examine the standard presentation of “history” at Christ Church.

### 3.1.1 Standard history of Christ Church

Like many institutions, Christ Church today presents an edited account of the past. Although most parishioners don’t know the scope of involvement in and benefit from the slave trade, many of them have heard about the tomb, Darby’s life, and the Vassall family.<sup>15</sup> A master’s thesis written over 20 years ago – “Historic Structure Report of Christ Church-Cambridge, Massachusetts” – notes the origins of some of the founders’ wealth:

Most of the founding members of Christ Church, Cambridge were wealthy. Many of the original members of Christ Church gained their wealth from sugar plantations in the Caribbean that were run by the use of African slave and prison labor. England conquered Jamaica in 1655 and by the early decades of the eighteenth century it was one of England’s most financially productive holdings. By 1739 there were 429 sugar mills on the island that drove over 100,000 slaves to produce the refined product from the sugar cane. Henry Vassall, a building committee member,

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<sup>15</sup> Alden Fossett preached a sermon at Christ Church on October 30, 2021 about Darby Vassall and the Vassall family (Fossett 2021). He preached another sermon about Darby’s mother, Cuba, on March 20, 2022 (Fossett 2022). The Parish Historian has helped Sunday school teachers take their middle school students to see the tomb (Louise Ambler, email message to author, March 14, 2022).

was one of these plantation owners. Many of the members who did not own plantations gained their wealth from inheritance, shipping and from the slave trade. (Hays 2001, 11)

A number of more recent research efforts<sup>16</sup> have exposed this history with greater specificity. Although some of this history is generally known (to a degree), it remains imperceptible in both the physical (site, building) and virtual (website) presence of Christ Church.<sup>17</sup>

There is a focus on the Civil Rights era and the church's engagement with related efforts. The congregation takes pride in its reparations initiative, which was birthed from a response to The Black Manifesto, "a document put forward by James Forman and the Black Economic Development Conference (BEDC) in 1969" (Christ Church, Cambridge 2012, 73). An entire chapter in the fourth published history – "A Committee of Blacks and a Committee of Whites, 1967-1972" – is dedicated to this process (Ibid., 70–94). The subsequent chapter – "The Education and Desegregation Task Force, 1976-1978" – describes a two-year Adult Education Program on desegregation, featuring speakers from outside the Parish, and three recommendations created in response by the Task Force (Ibid., 95–99). However, the overwhelming emphasis in storytelling about this era, as well as anti-racism efforts beginning in the 1990s, centers around the response to present racism, discrimination, injustice, and inequality. There is an incomplete acknowledgement of the history that precedes this time period, or the historical context that created the conditions for a necessary Civil Rights movement and reparations effort.<sup>18</sup> What historical systems created the conditions in which justice, equality, and human dignity are not guaranteed? More recent

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<sup>16</sup> I return to these efforts and some of their findings in section 4.

<sup>17</sup> See footnote 45 about recent changes to language on the Christ Church website.

<sup>18</sup> Apart from a quoted passage pulled from The Black Manifesto that includes "For centuries we have been forced to live as colonized people inside the United States, victimized by the most vicious, racist system in the world. We have helped to build the most industrial country in the world" (Christ Church, Cambridge 2012, 73). These words and acknowledgements were not composed by the church itself.

conversations regarding reparations in the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts acknowledge the need for a better understanding of history, specifically the history of slavery.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.1.2 The paradox of preservation

“Conservation is all about killing things” – Elizabeth Kolbert’s (2014) journalism summarizes the paradox of preservation. New Zealand’s efforts to rescue their native bird population from the loathed stoats and ferrets are laced with irony, as selective protections and eradications are dependent on one’s reading of history – “...who even knows at this point what's native and what's not? Many species that people think of as a natural part of the landscape are really introductions that occurred before recent memory” (Kolbert 2014). Preserving the myth of a singular identity, in the context of Christ Church, has involved the omission or lack of attention to critical parts of their story. What lives on at Christ Church, in both the private and public realm, is the presentation of a white, colonial narrative that selectively omits embedded extractions of human lives, geographies, and resources. As Hanchard points out, however, while the maintenance of a dominant narrative obscures and conceals repressed narratives, it does not fully erase them.

### **3.2 Obscuring (particular) histories**

A rise in scholarship focusing on historically marginalized, repressed, and excluded narratives is foundational to my inquiry. The spread of geographies and architectural typologies in the following examples provide further grounding in the built environment for theoretical writing and arguments from the previous section. These case studies and descriptive texts illustrate (1) how history as selective storytelling manifests in the constructed world and (2) the negative consequences of leaving imbalanced

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<sup>19</sup> “A Call for Repentance and Reparations” from the Massachusetts Episcopal Diocesan Convention in 2020 opens with “**Resolved**, that the Trustees of Donations and the congregations and institutions of the Diocese of Massachusetts... in the name of repentance, reconciliation, and accountability to our siblings of color in our Diocese -- are invited prayerfully and purposefully to explore their historic involvement in and present wealth derived from the forced labor of enslaved people...” (“A Call for Repentance and Reparations” 2020, 1) and acknowledges that “Isaac Royall Jr, a member of Christ Church, Cambridge and resident of Medford, owned at least sixty slaves” (Ibid., 4).

narratives unaddressed. These scholars speak to multimodal obfuscation in both creation of form and its treatment through time. Questions, analyses, and language from the following texts inform my inquiry at Christ Church.

### *Georgetown in Washington, DC*

In 1971 Michael deHaven Newsom, former Professor at Howard University School of Law, wrote about the exclusionary effects of historic preservation in Georgetown, what he termed the “Georgetown syndrome” (Newsom 1971, 423–24). Black residents were pushed out of their neighborhoods and communities by preservationists and developers who destroyed the Black elements of Georgetown’s history and ‘sanitized’ the memory of the past for wealthy white in-movers, resulting in “a perversion and distortion of history” (Ibid., 424). By exposing the consequences of tampering with historical accuracy through material preservation in this context, Newsom challenges the notion of preservation as “historic” (Ibid.).<sup>20</sup>

### *Faubourg Marigny in New Orleans, Louisiana*

In “Neighborhood Spaces,” Rashuana Johnson (2016) – Associate Professor of History at the University of Chicago – writes about the history of Faubourg Marigny in New Orleans, a heterogenous neighborhood where diversity “permeated its individual households, many of which consisted of some permutation of biological family members and renters, free people and slaves” (Johnson 2016, 93). In 1810, the majority of residents (about 70%) were people of African descent, free and enslaved – “854 free people of color and 511 enslaved persons” (Ibid.). Some of Marigny’s households were headed by free women of color (Ibid., 94). While Johnson explains how the character of life in Faubourg Marigny was shaped by convergences and clashes of various ethnic and socioeconomic experiences, she includes a photo of a

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<sup>20</sup> Newsom’s use of quotation marks around “historic preservation” informs my use of quotations around “history” and “historic” in this project. The full quote reads: “There is, however, another more philosophical objection to the Georgetown syndrome. It is not clear that it properly qualifies as ‘historic preservation’ at all. The true history of Georgetown—until the preservationists’ interest in it—was an integrated history. The black elements in that history have now been destroyed, resulting in a perversion and distortion of history” (Ibid., 424).

Faubourg Marigny historical marker that reads “As Americans settled up-river, immigrants and free persons of color settled in Faubourg Marigny.” The marker “makes no mention of enslaved residents in that neighborhood's history” (Ibid., 100).

### *Blandford Cemetery in Petersburg, Virginia*

Clint Smith, staff writer at *The Atlantic* and author of #1 *New York Times* bestseller *How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America* (2021), contends with storytelling about slavery at a number of different locations in his book. During his visit to Blandford Cemetery in Petersburg, Virginia (a mass grave of 30,000 Confederate soldiers), the tour guide focused mainly on the beauty of a refurbished church next to the cemetery with stained glass windows, designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany, that commemorate Confederate soldiers from 13 states (C. Smith 2021, 119–22). The guide admits to Smith that the narrative of the tours are geared towards a predominantly white audience (Ibid., 123). Another Blandford employee suggests, “To think you can walk in there and... just enjoy this little Anglican church that is restored to be this beautiful chapel. I think you could take the Civil War aspect totally out of it and enjoy the beauty" (Ibid., 125). Smith swiftly offers the counterpoint that for him, as a Black American, the church structure – its design and story – cannot be disentangled from the rest of history.

### *New York City, New York*

Smith also visited a number of spots in New York City whose history challenges myths of Northern white benevolence, each time carefully pausing to reflect on the ironic dichotomy between perception and reality. His reflections converge past and present, offering a new way of seeing, perceiving, and “reading”<sup>21</sup> the surroundings. After learning about the Four Continents situated in front of the United States Customs House (sculptures depicting Asia, America, Europe, and Africa), Smith ponders, “How

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<sup>21</sup> See section 4 for explorations on “reading.”

many times had I walked past these statues without ever considering anything other than their elegance? I certainly had never considered how the priorities of genocide, colonization, slavery, and exploitation had been literally carved into these stones and proudly displayed” (Ibid., 214).

While walking through Central Park, Smith imagined the families, homes, and church music of Seneca Village that once occupied an area that was condemned for the building of the park – “an independent Black community that existed from 1825 to 1857” (Ibid., 232) – that animated the space before their forced eviction in 1857 (Ibid., 233). After observing the buzz of movement and spatial occupation in the park – birds, dog walkers, parents with strollers, cyclists, playing children – he notes:

I came across the Great Lawn, a fifty-five-acre clearing where, in the summers, people picnicked, played baseball, watched concerts, threw Frisbees. I thought about how this space only existed because several generations ago hundreds of Black people were violently forced from their homes (Ibid., 234).

Smith’s visit to the Statue of Liberty reveals an often untold story about the differences between the original and implemented design, and the meaning of these shifts. A park ranger explains that although the Frenchman who conceived of the statue (Édouard René de Laboulaye) held abolitionist sentiments – and intended to celebrate the end of slavery in the US with a pair of broken shackles in Lady Liberty’s left hand – celebrating emancipation so explicitly following abolition would have made gathering funding from wealthy Americans very difficult (Ibid., 237). Instead she holds a tablet, while the shackles “had become small pieces of broken chains, less conspicuously, at her feet and partially hidden beneath her robe” (Ibid., 236). He points out that the shackles are not actually visible to visitors, that sighting them would require an aerial view (perhaps from a helicopter) (Ibid., 238). This renders the original (believed to be) intent of supporting abolition essentially invisible.

Smith's writings on New York speak to the "ish"-ness of historical representation at these sites. "History" is composed of half-truths, convoluted truths, what I would imagine David Lowenthal to describe as "heritage."<sup>22</sup>

The pretense of cultural pluralism told a story that was only half true. New York economically benefited from slavery, and the physical history of enslavement—the blood, the bodies, and the buildings constructed by them—was deeply entrenched in the soil of this city (Ibid., 234).

Smith's Underground Railroad tour guide aptly expressed the consequential nature of re-contextualizing siloed presentations of "history": "This is not Black history... this is world history" (Ibid., 208).

#### *Old Slave Mart Museum in Charleston, South Carolina*

Stephanie Yuhl (2013) – W. Arthur Garrity, Sr. Professor in Human Nature, Ethics and Society in the History Department at College of the Holy Cross – writes about a lack of attention towards the internal, domestic slave trade in the US and argues that "remnants of this vital history are largely *hidden in plain sight* on the American commemorative landscape" (Yuhl 2013, 593–94; emphasis added). The evolution of building usage, ownership, and historical storytelling at Charleston, South Carolina's Old Slave Mart Museum (OSMM) exhibits this pattern of omission and absence. "Situated in the center of a thriving tourist town otherwise known for its impressive stock of elaborate planters' mansions and seen as a rather romantic destination landscape, the OSMM is a rare and preserved original structure where enslaved human beings were regularly sold in the years leading up to the Civil War" (Ibid., 595). However, it wasn't until 2002 that the proposed interpretation of the building's history would center around its role as "a robust internal slave-trading Center" (Ibid., 619), and it was not until 2007 that visitors would encounter an exhibit to teach them about the difference between the transatlantic and domestic slave trades; how many slaves auctioned at this site were American-born rather than African-born; and the

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<sup>22</sup> Refer to earlier reference of Lowenthal's history vs. heritage distinction.

tripartite structure of transactions involving “the enslaved person, the trader, and the buyer” (Ibid., 621). Before arriving at this “full confrontation with the brutal reality of the domestic slave trade and its exploitative, capitalist roots,” the presentation of history at OSMM was characterized by “Washingtonianism” and a “hybrid progressive/paternalistic stance” (Ibid., 624).

### *Christ Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts*

Historical consciousness at Christ Church has involved name recognition for white colonial families deemed important in the history (i.e. Apthorp, Vassall, Serjeant, Washington, etc.), without an understanding of their ties to the slave trade.<sup>23</sup> Just as a shift at OSMM “follows the path of new historiography on the internal slave trade” (Ibid., 624), how can different perspective-taking and storytelling at Christ Church exhibit a new historiography in the New England/Northern commemorative landscape? What strategies and implementations could shift the centerpoint of historical narrative?

### **3.3 The consequences of selectivity, omission, and revision**

I have addressed a number of issues regarding history, memory, and the built environment, both theoretically and practically. I now turn my attention to why this matters, why we should care, and why thinking critically about our response is important. I situate these points in relation to the North American church, and Christ Church.

Both “The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song” (2021) – a four-hour PBS series created by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Alphonse Fletcher University Professor and Director of the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard University – and *White Evangelical Racism: The*

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<sup>23</sup> A couple of parishioners have mentioned anecdotally, via personal communication, that while congregants are familiar with the name Apthorp (East Apthorp was the first Rector), not many are familiar with the history of the Apthorp family or Charles’ merchant and slave trading activity (Ted Hammett and Pamela Ross, email messages to author, March 14, 2022; Leslie Bliss, email message to author, March 15, 2022). His image is sanitized in Christ Church histories – Charles Apthorp is described by Hoppin as a “merchant” (Hoppin 1858, 29), by Batchelder as “a well-known Boston merchant” (Batchelder 1893, 10), and by Day as “a prosperous Boston merchant” (Day 1951, 4).

*Politics of Morality in America* (2021) – by Anthea Butler, Geraldine R. Segal Professor in American Social Thought and Chair of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania – speak about how white enslavers manipulated the Bible to maintain control. They leaned on passages about servanthood and obedience to “reinforce the right to hold slaves” (Butler 2021, 18). They withheld from those they enslaved certain parts of the Bible that included content about freedom and deliverance from bondage, “So the enslaved wouldn’t be infected by their liberating message” (Holman, Harris, and Bryson 2021, 18:00).

There was even a slave Bible produced in England that omitted passages about freedom, which was used in the Caribbean by slaves who could read. Since reading was prohibited for slaves in the United States, preachers simply omitted talking about scriptures that emphasized freedom. (Butler 2021, 18)

However, enslaved Africans developed their own understandings and interpretations through private meetings. They identified strongly with stories from Exodus and with a God who sided with the oppressed (Butler 2021, 20–21; Holman, Harris, and Bryson 2021, 17:00). A historical legacy of selective omission exists in the North American church.

Frederick Douglass speaks to this critical power and manipulation tactic employed by white enslavers – withholding language and education from the enslaved. In his 1845 personal memoir, Douglass recounts his experiences as an enslaved person and his pursuit of freedom. He describes learning to read as “the pathway from slavery to freedom” (Douglass 1845, 18) and explains that “...to make a contented slave, it is necessary to make a thoughtless one... He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery; he must be made to feel that slavery is right...” (Ibid., 29-30). His writing is strongly critical of the North American Christian church and its wielding of scripture to justify the institution of slavery. He makes a clear distinction between “the Christianity of this land” and “the Christianity of Christ” (Ibid., 34), emphasizing with illustrative language the hypocrisy among church leaders and parishioners. He

illuminates the contradictions between beliefs (theology) and practices (theopraxy)<sup>24</sup> of Christianity in America.

Isabel Wilkerson (2020) – Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and bestselling author of *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* and *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* – offers the analogy of an old house to explain the deep, insidious roots of caste in the United States. This provides a helpful visual for understanding why this matters in the present, why it must be addressed, and why it is our responsibility to do it:

We in this country are like homeowners who inherited a house on a piece of land that is beautiful on the outside but whose soil is unstable loam and rock, heaving and contracting over generations, cracks patched but the deeper ruptures waved away for decades, centuries even. Many people may rightly say: ‘I had nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked Indigenous people, never owned slaves.’ And yes. Not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures in the foundation. We are the heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now. And any further deterioration is, in fact, on our hands. Unaddressed, the ruptures and diagonal cracks will not fix themselves. The toxins will not go away but rather will spread, leach and mutate, as they already have. (Wilkerson 2020)

However, waking up to the reality of a broken house does not necessarily translate into corrective or reparative action. Intentionality about a response to new knowledge is just as important as the knowledge itself.

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<sup>24</sup> I’m applying these terms to Douglass’ distinction based on writing by Tiffany Owens about theology and theopraxy in the context of urban design and charity (Owens 2021).

### 3.3.1 Selective memory at Christ Church

It is important to note that my research, and that of others aforementioned, can never fully correct or complete edited narratives of the past. If anything, what the interwoven fragments I present here (and respond to in section 5) demonstrate is how little knowledge we have about the history of slavery. Much of this is due to violent silences and erasures in the archive. It is critical to acknowledge how archival gaps influence our ability to understand and contend with the interconnected past and present.

For example, there is uncertainty surrounding the unidentified children in the Vassall Tomb – “Darby, son of Henry Vassall's negro coachman ‘Tony’ (1861), *four coffins containing the bodies of children, all under two years of age* (one coffin marked 1770)” (Batchelder 1893, 68; emphasis added).<sup>25</sup> The statement Darby received from Catherine Russell, Henry Vassall’s granddaughter, giving him permission to be buried in the tomb reads:

I have promised Darby Vassall that *he and his family* shall be placed in my grandfather’s tomb under the Church in Cambridge, built by Henry Vassal [sic] & owned by me, his grand daughter, Catherine Graves Russell; in said tomb all my family now are & there I expect to be placed myself. Darby Vassal’s family consists of two grandchildren and one daughter. Given him this paper by Catherine Graves Russell, this day Apr. 12th 1843. (Bell 2012, 41; emphasis added)

Various researchers have speculated about whether the children are Darby’s:

The pass allowed Darby *and his family* to be buried in the single tomb under Christ Church in Cambridge—the tomb of Henry Vassall. (“Though Dwelling in a Land of Freedom” n.d.; emphasis added)

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<sup>25</sup> See footnote 1 for full excerpt.

Darby died in 1861 at the age of 91 and was buried in the tomb. *So were several of his children,* all of whom preceded him in death. (Long 2018; emphasis added)

Records show that a number of Darby's children preceded him in death (Bell 2012, 39). However, Bell states that "Darby Vassall's daughter and grandchildren were not interred in the Vassall tomb before it was closed" (Ibid., 41). This leaves unanswered questions about who the unidentified children are.

Similarly, we lack clarity about the people interred in the adjacent Old Burying (Burial) Ground, which sits between First Parish in Cambridge Unitarian Universalist and Christ Church. We only know about a portion of the graves and burials, including those of enslaved individuals – "Today, many of the 1,218 known graves are still visible among the grass, trees, and shrubs that dot the two-acre site... But it is likely that hundreds more were buried there, since spaces were continuously reused during the colonial era" (Neal 2015). There are two headstones that tell us about the presence of enslaved women, Cicely and Jane (Ibid.). It is known that two formerly enslaved soldiers of the Continental Army are buried there, but their graves are unmarked and their locations dubious (Long 2018; Bossi 2018). Although foregrounding these literally and figuratively repressed histories (burials concealed by both earth and storytelling) brings them into public consciousness, it also reveals the incompleteness of our understanding.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Further research is required to better understand which Christ Church members are interred in the Old Burying Ground, and where. This information might provide clues regarding the whereabouts of enslaved individuals. This research could begin by cross-referencing *Epitaphs from the Old Burying Ground in Cambridge* by William Thaddeus Harris (1845) with material in the Christ Church Cambridge Archives – "Christ Church Record of Graves in Old Burying Ground at Harvard Square Cambridge" by Elizabeth Farnum (n.d.), "Plan of the Old Burial Ground at Harvard Square Cambridge, Massachusetts" by Richard B. Anderson (2000), and the "City of Cambridge, Engineering Dept., Plan No. 5312" by L.M. Hastings (1825). A faculty-led archaeological research project supported by the Presidential Initiative on Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery aims to search for unidentified enslaved individuals in the Old Burying Ground (Lans, Ur, and Blair 2021).

A line item on page 74 in Christ Church's *Parish Record Book, 1759-1878* from January 1761 reads "Paid Moor.....4 [pounds]." <sup>27</sup> (Figure 7) "Drawn from the Spanish name for North Africans, 'Moor' was a common term for African slaves." (Beckert and Stevens 2011, 9). We don't know anything about this person's life – their name, family, or occupation. They are reduced to a label and a number. Were they enslaved, or had they secured their freedom? What did they do to receive this money? The ledger should be considered as a critical tool in the constructed landscape of control; it graphically, linguistically, and numerically "reduced an enormous system of traffic in human commodities to a concise chronicle of quantitative 'facts'" (Smallwood 2007, 98). Jennifer Morgan describes ledger data as ontologically spatial, as "*prisons of meaning* enslaved people struggled against" (Morgan 2021, 21; emphasis added). Unlike other churches in Greater Boston (see section 4.2.2), <sup>28</sup> there are no baptismal records of enslaved people. Batchelder speculated that enslaved people could have occupied unpurchased pews, given that Christ Church doesn't have galleries (Batchelder 1917, 63), but there is no mention of enslaved people attending church in the Christ Church archives. <sup>29</sup> A better understanding about the enslaved and the slave trade comes from outside the bounds of the church, not from within.

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<sup>27</sup> According to the structure of the account book and other logged payments surrounding this one, it seems to be a church expense.

<sup>28</sup> For example, First Church in Cambridge Congregational, UCC, contains records of Tony Vassall's death in 1811, and Cuba Vassall's baptism and death in 1812 (Kidder 2011, 22–25).

<sup>29</sup> According to the Parish Historian (Louise Ambler, email message to author, April 4, 2022), and confirmed by what I found in my limited research.

74. D<sup>r</sup> Brought forwards

			£ 479.15.6 $\frac{1}{4}$
	To Cash p <sup>d</sup> Hurd for Engraving	5. 6. 8	
	p <sup>d</sup> Wyeth for Bricks	6. 1. 4	
	p <sup>d</sup> Dixon for Moving the Pound	1. 6. 8	12. 14. 8
Dec <sup>r</sup>	To Cash paid Phillips for water		1. 6. 8
1761 Jan <sup>y</sup>	To Cash paid Steadman for Liquor, 12s	12	
	paid Moor	4.	4. 12
Febr <sup>y</sup>	To Cash paid Bradford Cartage Boards	16. 9 $\frac{3}{4}$	
	paid Knox 1 Trip to Cambridge	1.	1. 16. 9 $\frac{3}{4}$
March	To John Hicks Carting Stones		32. 3. 8
	To Joseph Winslows Bill		5. 9. 8 $\frac{3}{4}$
	To James Gardner truckage nails & Bell	2. 8	
	To Joseph Scotts Bill	1. 14. 5 $\frac{3}{4}$	1. 17. 1 $\frac{3}{4}$
	To Joseph Jackson truckage Glass		2. 10
	To Cash p <sup>d</sup> Downe for Brads d. Devoster		1. 13. 4
April	To paid M <sup>r</sup> Apthorp for order of the Committee, the sundry subscriptions rec <sup>d</sup> of Contra for which have taken his note of hand		224. 6. 8
	To 10 m 20 Nails	14. 8	7. 6. 8
	To Peter Harrison drawing the Plan	45.	
	To Cash paid Greenwood Crafting & Pillars to Cambridge	3. 18. 5	56. 5. 1
May	To Cash paid Robey for a Crate Glass		3. 14. 8
			£ 825. 18. 9 $\frac{1}{2}$

Figure 7. Page 47 from Parish Record Book, 1759-1878. The reference to "paid Moor" is on line six.

88M-31. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Returning to the importance of response, it is necessary to consider *how* we acknowledge such absences. “Too quickly art is used to cover the cracks and fissures caused by ingrained systemic issues” (TK Smith 2021). TK Smith – curator, writer, and cultural historian – offers an urgent warning against a salient issue, the conflation of representation in the monument landscape with power. He argues that “the narratives of our histories and cultures continue to be negotiated by white discomfort, even in the face of our continued systemic murders” (Ibid.) and illustrates how erecting figures of Black people in the commemorative landscape – i.e. Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth – do not serve as a marker of social change and do not make public spaces any safer for Black people. “A monument depicting Sojourner Truth as having a seat at the table does not translate to her having a seat at the table” (Ibid.) – new monuments to Black people do not address systemic violence and injustice. Spatial alterations and markers acknowledging the existence of injustice *require* response and action, or else they can serve to maintain the status quo.

Similarly to Smith, Richard White (2020) – Margaret Byrne Professor of American History, Emeritus at Stanford University – argues that “it is far easier to topple a monument or change a name than to eradicate racism or counter its long legacy.” By looking at the “invisibility” of Drake’s cross in San Francisco, he touches on the pervasiveness of white supremacy imbued in the commemorative landscape. What the cross represents are one-sided readings and tellings of historical events. He leaves us with a key takeaway for thinking about and examining the “historic” built environment – “The construction and demolition of monuments are history, but monuments themselves are not history. They are useful windows on history. They disclose stories we would now like to disavow, but if we look carefully, we can also find what the monuments were intended to hide. In the name of remembering, we don’t want to forget” (White 2020).

I apply the criticality of these writers in my methods and analysis. A close reading of multiscalar, multidimensional conditions is required to inform response and action through an intervention.

## SECTION 4. METHODS OF ANALYSIS: “READING” AGAINST

### 4.1 A counter understanding

The concept of *reading against* is inspired by Jennifer Morgan’s – Professor of Social & Cultural Analysis & History and Chair of the Department of Social & Cultural Analysis at New York University – method of reading against the archive and Tiffany Lethabo King’s – Associate Professor of Women, Gender & Sexuality at the University of Virginia – method of reading against the map. *Reading against* offers a counter understanding by searching for what is excluded as well as included. I explore an adaptation of these counter methods to apply in my research of Christ Church.

*Reckoning with Slavery* (Morgan 2021) focuses on the lived experiences of those who “have most regularly and consistently fallen outside the purview of the archive” (Ibid., 7) – enslaved African women – in the early modern Black Atlantic (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). In the introduction, “Refusing Demography,” Morgan outlines her research method. She approaches archival data “as a space of collusion with the politics of erasure” (Ibid., 10-11) and explains that “the archival silences around the lived experiences of enslaved women at the birth of racial capitalism are themselves the technologies that rendered those women as outside history, feeling, and intellect” (Ibid., 6). This early acknowledgement of the archive’s violence and function to render enslaved women as “illegible” (Ibid., 5) is foundational for establishing an interdisciplinary approach that looks beyond the archive. She also argues: “Demography performs subtle and normalizing work. It hides prejudice under the disinterest of numbers... In other words, we use numbers without awareness of how they come to be” (Ibid., 43). While Morgan is speaking to an absence within “scholarship on the demographics of the slave trade” (Ibid.), I find this point to be somewhat expansive and would like to explore its convergences with the built environment.

If we turn to architecture through this logic, *reading against* its selective narrative requires expanding the scope of evidence in order to interpret it. In many cases what we now refer to as “historic” architecture, as with data, is an incomplete kit of parts that was never created with the intention of telling or remembering the story of enslaved people. These designations are retroactively superimposed, and the “historic” landscape is rife with inequity in what has selectively been preserved, destroyed, or overlooked.<sup>30</sup>

Just as Morgan looks beyond data, what would it mean to look beyond architecture itself to tell a more complete story about it? Can we approach “historic” architecture the way Jennifer Morgan approaches the archive, taking as our starting point its limitations, selectivity, and violence, rather than – as Newsom (1971) points out – falsely assuming that architecture encapsulates a neutral, authoritarian account of the past?<sup>31</sup> If we were to do this, what would we see, find, understand, and believe?

Tiffany Lethabo King (2019) interprets William Gerard de Brahm’s “1757 Map of the Coast of South Carolina and Parts of Georgia” through a countercartographic (King 2019, 86) Black geographical reading practice (Ibid., 75) that “interrupts a single narrative of British triumph over the landscape” (Ibid., 85), by uncovering Black fugitivity and “livingness” (Ibid., 76, quoting McKittrick 2016, 3) and exposing the incomplete project of mapping “conquest, settlement, and self-actualization” (King 2019, 76) in White cartography. Reading the map alongside Eliza Lucas Pinckney’s anxious letters reveals “the ways that Black and Indigenous resistance to conquest impeded the project of writing and mapping the human as a settled, and therefore finished, project” (Ibid.). If the map was meant to represent “the British/European subject as a rational, interior self of the mind who exercised dominion over irrational and sensual beings such as Black and Indigenous others existing at the margins of humanity” (Ibid.), King’s method

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<sup>30</sup> Melissa Blair’s (2021) and Everett Fly’s work (2021) speaks to this issue.

<sup>31</sup> I don’t intend to make unfair generalizations. This is not to suggest that all citizens view historically designated buildings, sites, and districts through this lens. My critique rests on perceptions of common patterns within the tourism industry, presenting commodified offerings of places and their “history;” citizen relationships to “historic” surroundings; and narrative and storytelling to passive bystanders in space through naming, signage, and commemoration.

illuminates an alternate story equally embedded in de Brahm's representational choices and techniques by analyzing property lines and the legend of property owners and their respective territories (Ibid., 88-89), the cartouche (Ibid., 82-83), the shoreline (Ibid., 77-78, 85), the key (Ibid., 90), roads (Ibid.), and "Native anaspace" (Ibid., 93-97).

I interpret these two methods of reading beyond, around, and between as *reading against*, given that they require modes of seeing – "noticing" (Ibid., 76, quoting McKittrick 2016, 4) – and analyzing counter to the intentions of the trader, cataloguer, or cartographer. *Reading against* requires unsettling and reconfiguring, and entering "with a clear understanding of the political intentions that bolstered its construction" (Morgan 2021, 54). Vincent Brown – Charles Warren Professor of American History and Professor of African and African American Studies at Harvard University – suggests that there are three different ways of thinking about sources: (1) as a clear, direct reflection – a transparent way of reading what is being described (2) as a representation of the logic of the people who produced the source – the source says something about the producers, and (3) as demonstrating a confrontation between a desire to represent the world as we want it vs. the way it is – the source is in dialogue with a world that could never be ordered the way the source would like it to be.<sup>32</sup> In treating architecture (and institutional presentation of its "history" and meaning) as a primary source, my question seeks to move beyond the readily accessible dominant narratives within mode 1 towards uncovering repressed narratives within modes 2 and 3.

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<sup>32</sup> Vincent Brown, in discussion with course History 1908: Racial Capitalism and the Black Radical Tradition at the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, September 22, 2021.

## 4.2 “Reading” against: boundaries

### 4.2.1 Modes of re-reading: counter-mapping & counter-memory

This section explores the concept of *reading against* through different methods in different contexts, providing theoretical and case study foundations for challenging singular interpretations of space and conventional methods of remembering.

Professor Emeritus of Architecture at University of California Berkeley and Professor and Chair of Art History at University of California, Los Angeles, Dell Upton (1984) argues that there was a drastically different experience of landscape in 18th-century Virginia plantation life between white and Black populations. They held two different perceptions of the same space. He begins his analysis by pointing out that present-day conditions and appearances of preserved “slave dwellings” – a poorly documented building typology, unlike planter mansions – are misleading (Upton 1984, 59–60). Surviving structures, which incurred changes in the 19th century, present themselves as bigger and nicer than they actually were in the 18th century. By looking at these dwellings within the context of (white) plantation design, Upton speaks to the seemingly invisible Black landscape shaped by circulation paths of the enslaved, and their creative use and manipulation of constrained, monitored space. Because of their imposed position outside of white society, enslaved individuals were able to circumvent the “articulated processional landscape” – ideological, hierarchical planning and construction centered around the planter, which all white individuals (high, middle, and low-class) were subject to following (Ibid., 66). Upton concludes that the gentry landscape was “...neither uniform nor entirely dominated by the gentry. The meaning of the landscape could be read in more than one way” (Ibid., 71). The landscape of the master was a dynamic network evoking connection and movement, while that of the enslaved was static, consisting of discrete places and immovable barriers (Ibid., 69). Upton provides a template for reading landscapes of slavery in multiple ways.

Building on Upton's argument, Rebecca Ginsburg (2010) – Associate Professor in the Departments of Education Policy, Organization and Leadership; Landscape Architecture; and African American Studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and Director of the Education Justice Project – explains that there is “a difference between the planters’ perception of their surroundings and that of enslaved workers” (Ginsburg 2010, 52). Ginsburg writes about the Black landscape, “a largely secret and disguised world compared to the planter landscape of display and vistas” (Ibid., 54). The term Black landscape refers to a way of knowing land, a socially constructed geography that resisted imposed order by the white planter class and was imperceptible to them. The creation of such a landscape involved attention to different environmental details (Ibid., 56). This different way of seeing made it possible for enslaved individuals to evade sales to other locations, separations from family members, and punishments, and to attempt escapes from slavery altogether. They disproved the illusion of “white omniscience and omnipotence” through participation in a “shared, hidden landscape” that resisted white control (Ibid., 62-63).

Katherine McKittrick (2011) – Associate Professor of Gender Studies in the Department of Geography and Planning at Queen's University – challenges traditional frames of analyzing Blackness, place, and violence in North America that focus on dichotomies of with/without, us/them, and inside/outside which “can reify racial-colonial categories and, consequently, discursively overtax the suffering black body” (McKittrick 2011, 948). She offers an alternative frame of analysis for understanding “a black sense of place” – which considers the composition of violent spaces as “entanglements of racial encounter” (Ibid., 949) – that promotes an “ethical analytics of race based not on suffering, but on human life” (Ibid., 948) by looking at three conditions: plantations, urbicide, and prisons. She makes the case that “anti-colonial practices and narratives” can be found within sites and histories of violence (Ibid., 950).

Regarding counter-memory, James E. Young (1999) – Distinguished Professor Emeritus and Founding Director of the Institute for Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies at the University of Massachusetts

Amherst – writes about the complex project of memorializing the Holocaust in Germany. He puts forth that “only an unfinished memorial process can guarantee the life of memory. For it may be the finished monument that completes memory itself, puts a cap on memory work, and draws a bottom line underneath an era that must *always haunt Germany*” (Young 1999; emphasis added). Young seems to suggest that haunting is essential to sustaining memory work regarding historical violence, tragedy, and trauma. Without haunting, we may render and carry an inaccurate sense of the past and, therefore, increase the probability of repeating it in different forms. Tactfully weaving together various perspectives on the topic, he notes that some writers have “argued that rather than preserving public memory, the monument displaces it altogether, supplanting a community’s memory work with its own material form... as if once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember” (Ibid.). His essay encourages us to move beyond discussions around aesthetics – typology, shape, and material – guiding us to question, rather, how the presence of form itself influences productive and unproductive thinking.

To conclude, Young makes the case that thought-provoking negative space does a better job of stimulating memory work than positive space material forms (that can enable fixed assumptions and relational stagnancy with the past):

In the end, the counter-monument reminds us that the best German memorial to the fascist era and its victims may not be a single memorial at all—but simply the never-to-be-resolved debate over which kind of memory to preserve, how to do it, in whose name, and to what end. That is, what are the consequences of such memory? (Ibid.)

In light of this, how can a (physical) response to the desire and/or need for memory preservation and memorialization serve as a means rather than an end? How can physical markers open up conversation, dialogue, and debate rather than closing it down? Sustained interaction has the potential to provide continual insight into gaps of knowledge, understanding, and empathy.

The late bell hooks (1995) – feminist scholar, social activist, and Distinguished Professor in Residence at Berea College – writes about the value of shaping, influencing, and manipulating one’s own space, which cuts across divisions of socioeconomic status, class, and race. She points out the danger of equating “a concern with beauty, the design and arrangement of space” with class privilege (hooks 1995, 149–50). We read about the vernacular architecture of poor, working-class, Black families which exemplify their expressions of agency in architecture. One example she offers is the extension of living space into exterior yards, beyond the walls of shacks in rural areas (Ibid., 149). hooks critiques studies of Black experience which continually decentralize the perspective of poor and working-class individuals as a neocolonial practice (Ibid., 151). She advocates instead for a “subversive historiography” which “connects oppositional practices from the past with forms of resistance in the present, thus creating spaces of possibility where the future can be imagined differently” (Ibid.).

What does it mean to construct a “subversive historiography” of Christ Church? What do anti-colonial practices and narratives look like in Cambridge, Massachusetts? How can inquiry, analysis, and response take shape at Christ Church in a way that will not “replicate racial violence” (McKittrick 2011, 950)?

#### 4.2.2 One church – a system

*“...places, in fact, are always constructed out of articulations of social relations (trading connections, the unequal links of colonialism, thoughts of home) which are not only internal to that locale but which link them to elsewhere. Their 'local uniqueness' is always already a product of wider contacts; the local is always already a product in part of 'global' forces, where global in this context refers not necessarily to the planetary scale, but to the geographical beyond, the world beyond the place itself.”*

(Massey 1995, 183)

I have chosen to focus on Christ Church due to its historical ties with the institution where I study (Harvard), and its proximity to campus. However, Christ Church is not a standalone case. Research from more than the last decade provides information about the involvement of many Christ Church founders, parishioners, and donors in the slave trade, and from this a network surfaces of cross-institutional affiliations and connections. At a local and regional scale, stitching together various research efforts challenges presentations of bounded “historic” space and individual institutional histories.

A number of research efforts have detailed the relationships of churches in Greater Boston and their ties to slavery, including:

- **First Church in Cambridge Congregational, UCC and First Parish in Cambridge Unitarian Universalist** (Kidder 2011; Neal 2015; Sullivan 2021)<sup>33</sup>
- **Trinity Church in Boston** (Soussou et al. 2014)
- **First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Arlington, MA** (Taraz Shriver 2016; 2017)
- **King’s Chapel in Boston** (Charpentier 2019)
- **Old North Church in Boston** (MacQuarrie 2019; Millard 2019)
- **First Parish in Needham Unitarian Universalist** (Scudera 2019)

What follows is a list of other churches that have not released reports,<sup>34</sup> but secondary sources make it clear that they are likely to have been enmeshed in the same interconnected landscape of power-building through familial and financial relations, including:<sup>35</sup>

- **First Parish in Lexington:** Thomas Hancock, a wealthy merchant from a family of enslavers and a business partner of Charles Apthorp (Hancock Family Papers 1664-1854), “Upon his death...

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<sup>33</sup> These churches share history prior to a Unitarian and Congregationalist split in the 1800s (“First Church Timeline” n.d.).

<sup>34</sup> To my knowledge.

<sup>35</sup> My research on the following sites is *preliminary*. Further research is required to better understand these histories and to draw potential connections with the local network of complicit institutions.

left £20 to his father's former church, specifying it be used to make 'two silver cups for the communion table'" ("Hancock Church Silver in 'Sowing the Seeds of Liberty'" 2010).

- **First Congregational Church of Hanover:** Some of the founders – Joseph Stockbridge, Elijah Cushing, and Thomas Josselyn ("FCC Hanover - The First 250 Years" n.d., 1) – were enslavers (Dwellely and Simmons 1911, 181). Both Stockbridge and Josselyn gifted communion cups for the communion table, four and two respectively, in 1786 (Barry 1853, 60).
- **St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Marblehead:** According to a 1924 published history, "In 1724 there were, according to the report of the Rector, between seventy and eighty families in the Parish, besides several negro slaves, who generally attended service with their masters" (*St. Michael's Church, Marblehead, Mass: 1714-1924* 1924, 14). One of the original benefactors, Captain Arthur Savage (Ibid., 7), owned pews at Old North Church and was an enslaver ("This Old Pew: #23 and #38 - Capt. Arthur Savage" 2016). According to the church website, "The chandelier was given to St. Michael's in 1732 by John Elbridge, Esq., Collector of the Port of Bristol, England" ("Our Story" n.d.). This may be the same John Elbridge who owned an estate in St. Andrew, Jamaica ("John Elbridge or Eldridge" n.d.).
- **First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church in Beverly:** Some of the Proprietors of the Beverly Cotton Manufactory – George Cabot, Joshua Fisher, and Israel Thorndike – were involved in the early history of the church (Thayer 1867). "Merchants such as the Cabots had prospered from their privateering during the Revolution and had resumed trade with Europe and the West and East Indies on a large scale. Such family firms as... Israel Thorndike, John and Andrew Cabot, and George Cabot... were doing a thriving import-export business. These men occupied comfortable homes along the town's main street, served together in town and state affairs, and

naturally worked together when it came to financing a cotton mill” (Lovett 1952, 220). Sourcing cotton was made possible by enslaved labor in various geographies.<sup>36</sup>

- **Trinity Church in Waltham:** Boston Manufacturing Company was involved in the establishment of Trinity Church, providing land (Armstrong 2004, 2) and potentially funds for construction as well (Dan 2012). Church membership was composed largely of people associated with the company (Armstrong 2004; Dan 2012). Boston Manufacturing Company was founded by Francis Cabot Lowell (Green n.d.), who relied on and profited from Southern cotton (Amenyo, Nyambose, and Mizrahi 2020).<sup>37</sup>

Research findings outside the church building typology further expose the mirage of superimposed “historic” edges and containers. Research by the Cambridge Historical Commission connects Cambridge churches (their founders and parishioners) to the development of the city (Sullivan 2018; 2021). “Harvard and Slavery” (Beckert and Stevens 2011) demonstrates connections between Harvard and Christ Church parishioners involved in Antigua slave plantation agriculture – Isaac Royall Jr., Law School benefactor (Ibid., 11),<sup>38</sup> and Thomas Oliver, Harvard graduate (Ibid., 25) – as well as the enslaving Reverend of First Parish in Cambridge – William Brattle, Harvard graduate (Ibid., 8). Caitlin Galante-DeAngelis Hopkins’ (2021) research on “The Sugar Planters of Brattle Street” looks at the network of wealthy, intermarried

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<sup>36</sup> “In his letter to Hamilton (September 6, 1791) George Cabot states: We have yet had no experience of the cotton of the Southern States; but it appeared early to be essential to our interest to use cotton of the longest fibre and the best cleaned. That of Cayenne, Surinam, and Demerara, has been preferred, though at a price two or three pence higher than the cotton of the islands. In proportion as our workers are awkward and unskilful is the necessity of furnishing the best materials. Bad materials would be wasted altogether” (Lovett 1952, 225).

<sup>37</sup> “Lowell impressed... representatives of southern planting interests, with the idea that ‘by the establishment of the cotton manufacture in the United States, the southern planter would gradually increase his market. He would furnish the raw material for all those American fabrics which should take the place of manufactures imported from India, or partly made in England from India cotton. He would thus out of his own produce, be enabled to pay for all the supplies which he required from the north” (Mailloux 1957, 111).

<sup>38</sup> The land Harvard College received from Isaac Royall Jr. upon his death was sold and the funds were used to establish Harvard’s first professorship in law (“The Royall Bequest and Harvard Law School” n.d.). In 2016, Harvard Law School abandoned the design of its official seal, which was based on the Royall family coat of arms (Hartocollis 2016). In 2019, the Antigua Prime Minister requested reparations from Harvard (Hassan 2019).

sugar planter families on Brattle Street – “Tory Row” – in Cambridge (within one mile of Christ Church). She makes connections between Harvard, a number of residential properties (see below), direct enslavement, rum distilling, and Caribbean sugar plantations in Jamaica and Antigua. Residents of all of these properties were subscribers and/or parishioners at Christ Church:

- **Henry Vassall House:** Henry Vassall & Penelope Royall
- **Longfellow House Washington's Headquarters:** John Vassall & Elizabeth Oliver (Royall family)
- **Lechmere-Sewall-Riedesel House:** Richard Lechmere
- **Hooper-Lee-Nichols House:** Joseph Lee & Rebecca Phips/Phipps
- **Ruggles-Fayerweather House:** George Ruggles & Susanna Vassall
- **Elmwood (Oliver-Gerry-Lowell House):** Thomas Oliver (Royall family) & Elizabeth Vassall

Hopkins’ argument is that “these houses were built with Caribbean sugar wealth... they got the money from the plantations, they brought it to New England, and they spent it here” (Galante-DeAngelis Hopkins 2021, 32:15). She includes a quote from William Vassall (Henry’s brother) in 1784 to support her case:

I expended in sd [sic] States, during my residence in them, near Fifty thousand pounds Sterling,  
*Every farthing of which* I received from my Estate in Jamaica. (Ibid.; emphasis added)

This collection of scholarship provides a foundation for looking at the extension of their wealth to places of worship as well. Self-guided tours created by History Cambridge stitch together the history of slavery at various sites, providing a more accurate impression of interconnected histories (Long 2018; Smolenski 2020). The Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery Walking Tour, released in tandem with their 2022 report, features Christ Church as the second stop. Their narrative explains how the Vassall and Royall families generated wealth from enslaved labor and sugar planting, and spatializes their wealth in the

neighborhood. They also speak to Darby’s agency and activism throughout his life, spatializing his impact (“Walking Tour” n.d.).

Looking beyond silences in the archive and the built environment towards extractions allows us to see how the trafficking of enslaved people locally and externally contributed significantly to the construction of the church. This approach pushes back against fictional layers of “historic” boundedness – building, site, district, and superimposed tourist paths (i.e. The Freedom Trail, trolley rides, etc.) – by drawing connections between the smallest unit (building) and “invisible” external geographies well beyond the bounds of Cambridge, Greater Boston, and the Northeast. This approach emphasizes the “articulations of social relations” embedded in the fabric of Christ Christ that, as Massey suggests, connect it to “elsewhere” (Massey 1995, 183).

### **4.3 “Reading” against: materiality**

#### **4.3.1 Expanding the built environment**

The theory of racial capitalism provides a foundation for *reading against* selective identity narratives that material conditions and their ascribed meanings foreground.<sup>39</sup> The racial capitalism framework expands a (my) traditional notion of the “built environment” beyond architecture, to consider land, resources, and labor, as well as systems of extraction, management, and enforcement that manipulate these “tools” or components to produce “power disparities” (Park 2021, 29). Is it possible to shift an institutional and cultural focus on material conditions – their history, restoration, and preservation – towards “invisible”

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<sup>39</sup> Nancy Leong defines racial capital as “the economic and social value derived from an individual’s racial identity, whether by that individual, by other individuals, or by institutions” (Leong 2013, 2190). In the introduction of *Black Marxism: the Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, Cedric Robinson writes, “The development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force, then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism. I have used the term ‘racial capitalism’ to refer to this development and to the subsequent structure as a historical agency” (Robinson 1983, 2).

materialities that define the historical formation of Christ Church instead? The following writings offer a theoretical foundation for this inquiry and provide templates for re-reading.

W.E.B Du Bois (1935) – American sociologist, historian, civil rights activist, author, and co-founder of the NAACP – succinctly captures (and for my purposes, summarizes) the scale and breadth of interconnectivity between micro and macro that becomes evident through the racial capitalism framework:

That dark and vast sea of human labor in China and India, the South Seas and all Africa; in the West Indies and Central America and in the United States—that great majority of mankind, on whose bent and broken backs rest today the founding stones of modern industry—shares a common destiny; it is despised and rejected by race and color; paid a wage below the level of decent living; driven, beaten, prisoned and enslaved in all but name; spawning the world’s raw material and luxury—cotton, wool, coffee, tea, cocoa, palm oil, fibers, spices, rubber, silks, lumber, copper, gold, diamonds, leather—how shall we end the list and where? All these are gathered up at prices of the low, manufactured, transformed and transported at fabulous gain; and the resultant wealth is distributed and displayed and made the basis of world power and universal dominion and armed arrogance in London and Paris, Berlin and Rome, New York and Rio de Janeiro. (Du Bois 1935, 15–16)

Stephanie Smallwood’s – Associate Professor of History at the University of Washington – *Saltwater Slavery* (2007), that reaches across the Atlantic, does this in a number of ways. The first chapter opens with a chronology of the encounter between Portuguese mariners and the Gold Coast, a process that solidified the presence of gold in the European cartographic imagination (Smallwood 2007, 10–12). Ascribing new (external) monetary value to the extraction of gold contributed to a system that allowed for increased trade and further extraction (including of people). Over time the demand for labor (human capital) paralleled the desire and market for gold, creating systems that operated in tandem (Ibid., 18-19).

This defined the transition from a “Gold Coast” to what Smallwood describes as a “slave coast” – “the Gold Coast became one of the leading suppliers of African slaves to other Atlantic markets in the first half of the eighteenth century, as captives outstripped gold after 1700 to become the region’s prime export commodity” (Ibid., 32). Capital and labor were no longer distinct but inhabited the same body through slavery.<sup>40</sup>

Another important extracted resource contributing to this transition is corn (maize). Smallwood follows the process of extraction, beginning with an introduction of the American cultigen by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century (Ibid., 13). In the seventeenth century it emerged as a staple crop along the Gold Coast (Ibid., 14). In the late seventeenth - early eighteenth century, corn assumed a new identity as the only food provided to enslaved people. Preferred for its economy, it was part of the scientific enterprise that turned captives into commodities (Ibid., 43). The meals of the enslaved “reflected a calculation balancing the cost of the slaves’ maintenance against their purchase price” (Ibid., 43-44).<sup>41</sup>

Their diet became increasingly more precarious as the number of captives exceeded the availability of provisions, forcing them to “subsist on exceedingly small rations” (Ibid., 47) This extractive chain culminated with corn ultimately becoming the cause of death among many of the enslaved at Cape Coast Castle (along with other carceral factors and technologies), as the soft stone grinding implements used to process the corn were leaving behind pieces that made captives sick (Ibid., 49-50). Corn was manipulated into a means of controlling starvation and conflating life and death with profit and loss, as a mechanism in

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<sup>40</sup> In Cedric Robinson’s words, “It was a particular historical development for world capitalism that expropriated the labor of African workers as primitive accumulation. American slavery was a *subsystem* of world capitalism” (Robinson 1983, 200).

<sup>41</sup> “Meant not to support health but rather simply to ensure subsistence, the diet on which captives tried to survive provided, at best, a consistent intake of nutritionally empty calories. At Cape Coast Castle and the other English factories, slaves generally received a daily allotment of corn dressed with malagetta pepper and palm oil. African women prepared the grain following local custom. First, it was ground into a coarse meal, by means of a millstone known locally as a cankey stone; then it was mixed with water, shaped into ‘large round cakes, the size of two or three fists,’ and boiled to a dense consistency. The resulting breadlike porridge was also called cankey” (Ibid., 44).

the engine of racial capitalism. These processes transformed resources (gold, corn, and humans/labor) into tools for expansion, growth, and wealth accumulation within landscapes of control – environment building.

In *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944), Eric Williams – historian and first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago – provides a picture of interconnectivity from a different perspective by looking at the growth of Great British seaport towns fueled by triangular trade. For example, “It was the slave and sugar trades which *made* Bristol the second city of England for the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century” (Williams 1944, 61; emphasis added). Such phrasing re-interprets space and its meaning. His writing demonstrates that following money, and following material, can uncover new stories about place (its history and meaning) and/or disrupt the status quo of dominant and repressed narratives.

‘There is not,’ wrote a local annalist, ‘a brick in the city but what is cemented with the blood of a slave. Sumptuous mansions, luxurious living, liveried menials, were the produce of the wealth made from the sufferings and groans of the slaves bought and sold by the Bristol merchants...’ (Ibid., 61)

It was a common saying that several of the principal streets of Liverpool had been marked out by the chains, and the walls of the houses cemented by the blood, of the African slaves, and one street was nicknamed ‘Negro Row.’ (Ibid., 63)

Williams wields shipping records, data, and accounting to indict those who profited from the system of slavery and constructed environments deceptively removed from geographies of extraction. He challenges controlled boundaries and exposes them for the fiction that they are.

Could we read the materiality of Christ Church as being composed of, for example, sugar, molasses and rum, or cotton?<sup>42</sup> Are there other/more material resources we are missing that served as economic building blocks for the preserved structure that stands today?

#### **4.4 “Reading” against: identity projections**

##### 4.4.1 Myth making (and undoing) in the North

Jennifer Anderson (2021) – Associate Professor of History at Stony Brook University – outlines three myths about slavery in the North – (1) it did not exist or it was negligible, (2) it was short-lived and had little economic impact, and (3) it was benign and harmless. The following are two texts that counter these myths and emphasize the role of Northerners in creating and contributing to pervasive unjust systems.

K-Sue Park (2021) – Associate Professor of Law at Georgetown Law – writes about the seventeenth century, disrupting naturalized foreclosure practices and exposing the relationship between racialization and innovation “to develop crucial elements of the land market and make this market central to economic growth—as it remains now” (Park 2021, 29). Identifying debt creation as a tactic used to dispossess Natives of their land emphasizes the reality that we cannot perceive, interpret, or read land and property ownership in a race-neutral way. Colonists transferred their debt burdens to America, their endeavors financed by the Crown, and they engaged “in racial violence to satisfy them” (Ibid., 30). Seeing land as capital was an imposed system, not a value that Natives shared. Park writes about this dynamic in Massachusetts:

Plymouth Colony began in a ‘mortgaged condition’ due to its obligations to the Company’s various investors; the resources that colonists extracted during the first years were earmarked for repayment to them. The pressure that these arrangements placed on colonists to make settlements

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<sup>42</sup> Refer to examples provided from “The Sugar Planters of Brattle Street” (Galante-DeAngelis Hopkins 2021) regarding sugar production. Richard Lechmere made money distilling rum, utilizing sugar products like molasses (Ibid.). As previously stated, Samuel Batchelder II generated wealth from the cotton industry (Dus 2009; Bishop 1868, 515).

not only self-sustaining but profitable first incentivized colonists to shift their debt burdens both to one another and to Native peoples... colonists channeled their use of force through transactions that did violence both by their terms and in their consequences, such as pursuing ‘agreements’ to purchase land that were characterized by deception about the terms and fundamentally different viewpoints about what could be alienated through such a transaction. (Ibid., 30-31)

The violence of land dispossession precedes architecture, and the legacy of extraction and racism as fuel for capital accumulation carries through to our present-day practices of property management (Ibid., 35-36). This, again, suggests the importance of applying a racial capitalism framework to an ecosystem beyond the unit of a building, to look at obscured narratives embedded in land as well and consider them as part of the constructed world.

Du Bois (1935) opens *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* by directly addressing Northern complicity in (and dependency on) the system of slavery – “Black labor became the foundation stone not only of the Southern social structure, but of Northern manufacture and commerce, of the English factory system, of European commerce, of buying and selling on a world-wide scale” (Du Bois 1935, 5). He continues to implicate the North throughout the book, tempering the usual presentation of abolition and philanthropy.

The first issue presented is the lack of attention paid towards white Southern workers, “especially the semi-skilled and unskilled worker” (Ibid., 21) by Abolitionists in the mid nineteenth century. “The labor movement ignored them and the abolitionists ignored them; and above all, they were ignored by Northern capitalists and Southern planters. They were in many respects almost a forgotten mass of men” (Ibid., 26). The only future that poor whites could envisage was the “life of the great Southern planter” (Ibid., 27). Rather than joining forces with Black labor to form a united movement “against the exploiters” (Ibid.), “five million non-slaveholding poor white farmers and laborers sent their manhood by the thousands to

fight and die for a system that had degraded them equally with the black slave” (Ibid., 29). This chronology and argument renders the North partly responsible for the “new slavery” that would emerge after the Civil War (Ibid., 30).

Focusing on a moral argument makes it easy to leave slavery behind. The duration of family names (and associated wealth and/or commemoration) alongside human-preserved material conditions show connections to the current day, and force us to think about how our environments are enmeshed with the past. Considering that “historic” architecture is supposedly always informing us about the past, it is critical to acknowledge that every way of seeing is also a way of *not* seeing.<sup>43</sup> This echoes the importance of “noticing” as a practice, shifting one’s vantage point from positive space (the data, the map, the architecture) to negative space (beyond, around, and between).<sup>44</sup>

#### 4.4.2 Following the money

The largely untold history of slavery embedded at Christ Church is, to borrow Stephanie Yuhl’s (2013) term, “hidden in plain sight.” The built environment at Christ Church actively functions as a selective narrative tool and a storytelling device.<sup>45</sup> Researching the history of slavery involves both digging into the archive to search for new material, as well as reinterpreting known material and “reading” it in a different way.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> My notes from discussion in course History 1908: Racial Capitalism and the Black Radical Tradition at the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, September 15, 2021.

<sup>44</sup> The positive vs. negative space dichotomy is not meant to suggest important vs. unimportant, but refers to dominant vs. repressed/obscured narratives.

<sup>45</sup> My research focuses on storytelling in the built environment, but the church’s digital presence should be considered as part of their narrative (i.e. church website, social media accounts, and Youtube channel). Since working with members of the Christ Church Racial Justice Group to develop this project, they have added a “Legacies of Slavery at Christ Church Cambridge” statement in two places on their website (“About: History of CCC” n.d.; “Mission: Opportunities to Serve” n.d.).

<sup>46</sup> Refer to earlier explanations about the use and meaning of the word “reading” in this paper.

**Dominant** past and present identity narratives include:

- Loyalists – an emphasis on the political and religious leanings of the founders<sup>47</sup>
- Abolitionists – Richard Henry Dana Jr., an abolitionist lawyer and celebrity author of *Two Years Before the Mast*, is written about and commemorated for his donation of the tower bell<sup>48</sup>
- Civil Rights activists – an emphasis on the Civil Rights era, Martin Luther King Jr.’s visit, and a reparations effort in the 70s

**Repressed** past and present identity narratives include:

- The origins of money that funded construction and growth of the church – different modes of generating wealth from the slave trade
- Accounts of the enslaved – the names and stories of people in Boston and elsewhere enslaved by founders & parishioners
- Interconnected geographies and histories beyond the bounds of the church walls and property lines

I reference primary and secondary sources, alongside information gathered by aforementioned research efforts, to foreground repressed narratives. The “Video Transcript” in the Appendix contains financial details from my research. As previously stated, much more research is required to investigate every name that appears in archival documents, published church histories, and onsite commemoration.

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<sup>47</sup> See Hoppin 1858; Batchelder 1893; and Day 1951.

<sup>48</sup> See “Richard Henry Dana Jr.” n.d. For a brief overview of his life. His donation of the bell is listed on the right-hand exterior tablet affixed to church facade (see *Figure 3*), on the history timeline in the Parish House at the 1860 marker, and on the church website (“About: History of CCC” n.d.). It is also mentioned in three of the published church histories (Hoppin 1858, 70; Batchelder 1893, 80; Day 1951, 48).

## SECTION 5. THE INTERVENTION

### 5.1 Antecedents

I have argued that the reality of slavery is largely invisible on the Christ Church Cambridge site, despite the amount of information that entities in Greater Boston, the city of Cambridge, Harvard, and some members of the church already know. This leads me to investigate how the integral story of slavery can be remembered and shared in a more truthful way that:

1. encourages the congregation (and the public) to contend with uncomfortable realities about the history of the site, neighborhood, and city
2. ignites sustained movement towards action and change around selective historic storytelling and interconnected patterns of systemic injustice

It is important to acknowledge various efforts made by local churches and institutions to address this topic, while simultaneously noting some of their limitations.<sup>49</sup> The aforementioned reports and research efforts provide readers and learners with an expanded history. However, their limitation is that they require a reader to come in contact with them and read them. Their siloed nature can also reinforce a sense of false boundedness, within the confined mediums of text and parchment. The Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery Walking Tour is one precedent of an initiative that spatializes a textual history of slavery beyond the walls of an institution (“Walking Tour” n.d.). As a free walking tour that can be accessed online or through an app, it also dissolves potential financial barriers presented by paid site visits and walking tours.

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<sup>49</sup> This is not meant to argue against research and intervention methods to make known and visible the history of slavery, but to maintain a generative criticality about how these efforts can be improved and/or expanded upon and to inform the nature of my intervention.

Both King’s Chapel and Old North Church have made efforts to install interior signage sharing some of the history of slavery onsite. This provides visitors, again, with an expanded historical narrative. The limitation of signage, however, is that it can provide information without necessarily grabbing attention or demanding engagement.

Harvard has installed two plaques commemorating enslaved people – one outside the Wadsworth House in 2016, naming Titus, Venus, Bilhah, and Juba (Pazzanese 2016), and one outside the Law School in 2017, honoring “the enslaved whose labor created wealth that made possible the founding of Harvard Law School” (Mineo 2017). Reminiscent of TK Smith’s argument, plaques in the landscape are not necessarily indicators of social change nor are they inherently encouraging or inspiring it. These plaques are inconspicuous and easily blend into their surroundings. Functionally, plaques “protect rather than contest.”<sup>50</sup> While institutions like Harvard (and Christ Church Cambridge) can buy representation, structural and cultural transformation is much more costly.

In light of these limitations, I aim to propose an intervention that challenges the status quo of historical storytelling in a spatial way, and engages both the congregation and public in active learning and (hopefully) response. The following sections include a theoretical framework for approaching my intervention, a few precedents, and my proposal.

## **5.2 Memory care**

If memory – as Elizabeth Loftus suggests – is fragile, then it requires great care. I would like to explore the concept of *memory care* in light of Makoto Fujimura’s (2017) writing on and descriptions of “culture care.” He describes the need to shift away from “the cramped thinking of a culture of scarcity” towards stewardship, human concern, and responsibility (Fujimura 2017, 23).

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<sup>50</sup> Blake Mitchell (MDes ‘21, Harvard University Graduate School of Design) in discussion with the author, February 26, 2022.

As a practice of sustained engagement, *memory care* addresses our role as citizens of the present to care about and care for absence created by selective historical records and storytelling. *Memory care* calls for a transference of responsibility in the remembering process, from object(s) to person. Monument<sup>51</sup> viewers no longer position themselves as passive bystanders to an external history as they are invited, encouraged, and/or required to partake in commemoration as engaged actants.<sup>52</sup>

### **5.3 Future(s): modes of response (thought and visual precedents)**

Krzysztof Wodiczko – designer; public artist; and Professor in Residence of Art, Design and the Public Domain at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University – served as my thesis advisor. His background, work, expertise, and insight guided me through my process of creating a site re-interpretation piece.

Before speaking about my own design proposal, I would like to give attention to different arguments for, perspectives about, and precedents of how to address the past in the present to shape new futures. How can physical spatial interventions and practice-based activations change our understanding about, relationships with, and responses to “historic” environments?

Ahmed Ansari (2018) – Assistant Professor and Director of the PhD program in Technology, Culture & Society at New York University – presents two programs for decolonizing design and their various goals. Two of the goals stand out as relevant to, and helpful for, my exploration:

1. “...the articulation of the way that asymmetrical (colonial) power relations and logics of coloniality assert themselves through technologies and techniques, or, as we can call it, through artifice.”

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<sup>51</sup> Although my project looks at a building and site, I use this term here per Monument Lab’s definition of the word: “a statement of power and presence in public” (“About: Organization Bio” n.d.).

<sup>52</sup> “(in literary theory) a person, creature, or object playing any of a set of active roles in a narrative” (“Definition of Actant in English” n.d.).

2. “...the pedagogical aim of bringing the works of different discourses on issues in culture, modernity, and globalisation, from critical thinkers with anti/post/decolonial agendas, into design discourse, as well as disseminating this politics and the knowledge it draws from into design education and practice.”

In his introduction to *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times*, Soong-Chan Rah (2015) – Robert Boyd Munger Professor of Evangelism in the School of Mission and Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary – argues that “...absence doesn’t make the heart grow fonder. Absence makes the heart forget” as he describes Walter Brueggemann’s distinction between two dichotomous theologies – those of the “have-nots” and the “haves” (Rah 2015, 22). “The ‘have nots’ develop a theology of suffering and survival” as they are acutely aware of the precariousness they experience (Ibid.). On the other hand, “the ‘haves’ develop a theology of celebration” (Ibid.) as they “seek constancy and sustainability” rather than pursuing deliverance (Ibid., 23). Rah emphasizes the necessity of lament, equally as important as praise. Through lament, “the status quo is not to be celebrated but instead must be challenged” (Ibid.).

“What are the untold histories that buildings and landscapes hold?” (McInnis 2019, 744) Jarvis McInnis (2019) – Cordelia and William Laverack Family Assistant Professor of English at Duke University – poses this question and analyzes artworks that aim to uncover, reveal, and make known untold spatial narratives. One of these pieces is Kara Walker’s 2014 exhibit installed at the Domino Sugar Factory in Brooklyn, New York, titled: *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby, an Homage to the unpaid and overworked Artisans who have refined our Sweet tastes from the cane fields to the Kitchens of the New World on the Occasion of the demolition of the Domino Sugar Refining Plant*. He writes, “A Subtlety suggests that the US North is far more proximate to the US South than is typically acknowledged” (Ibid., 752) and that the work serves “as a sort of northern plantation tour, a respatialization that shifts the locus of slavery from the plantation to the factory, thus exposing the genealogical and economic ties between them.” (Ibid.) McInnis notes the important roles that scale and proportion play in the artwork. The central

figure – “a 75.5-foot-long, 35.5-foot-tall, and 26-foot-wide sphinx coated in 40 tons of refined white sugar,” “towered over spectators as an indictment of sugar’s centrality to New World slavery” (Ibid.). In addition to size, the material used (including statues of small children around the space, composed of dark molasses) emphasized consumption – spectators visually consuming the artwork represented consumption of the black body.

Many of Wodiczko’s public projections serve as a precedent for my proposal (Wodiczko 2021 – see “El Centro Cultural Projection (Part II),” “The Admiral Farragut Monument Projection,” “The Abraham Lincoln Monument Projection,” “The New Mechelenians,” “Bunker Hill Monument Projection,” among others). Through visuals and sound, Wodiczko inscribes architecture and monuments with new meaning. The topics he focuses on challenge viewers with alternate perspectives and probing questions. The scale and volume at which he works command public attention and engagement, even for a few moments of pause.

These thinkers and artists provide grounding for my intervention proposal, which is situated at a historically powerful, wealthy, and white religious institution. My work aims to embody decolonial practices that challenge the status quo, inspire *intro and extrospection* by adapting and remixing the spiritual postures and language of the faith tradition, and employ mediums and methods that occupy space and speak to both the institution and the public.

#### **5.4 Proposal(s)**

My design intervention is part of a larger package of proposals prepared by members of the congregation. The package contains both short- and long-term initiatives, with various intentions and purposes – commemoration, education and discussion, and action. (*Figure 8*)

**Possible “Interventions/Engagements” to Discuss with Nicole Piepenbrink**

Draft—CCC Racial Justice Group History Subgroup – February 16, 2022

- Physical changes
  - Markers/plaques: outside (public facing) e.g. new/revised plaques flanking front door of church; plaque/marker in burying ground (would need City involvement/approval); inside e.g. additional plaque for Darby Vassall in group by door to sacristy
  - Archives exhibit
  - Art installation
- Revisions/additions to online and published parish histories
- Educational programs/Adult forum series
- Commemorative events – e.g. Anniversary (“Founders”) Sunday, MLK Day, Day MLK spoke at CCC (April 23, 1967); Black History month
- Community service
- Financial giving, “reparations”
  - Donations to racial justice organizations, causes—e.g. scholarship funds for HBCUs at CRLS/HBCUs themselves
  - Offer space to Black organizations
  - Research original and current cost of CCC building (and proportion that came from slaveholders and/or people who profited from slave trade – give to affordable housing projects for African Americans in Cambridge/Boston

*Figure 8.* List of proposals created by the History Subcommittee of Christ Church’s Racial Justice Group, 2022.

I propose an audiovisual exterior installation to bring a consciousness of and understanding about the hidden, inaccessible, largely unknown tomb to the public realm. Positioned in the intermediary space between public and private – the grassy area between the facade of the church and the sidewalk – this structure capitalizes on visible, accessible, highly trafficked space to assert visibility and make connections between private (church parish) and public historical reckoning. Its purpose is to serve as an entry point for education, dialogue, further research, and hopefully purposeful action.

An 11-ft tall, roughly 40-ft long curved, white panel is positioned at the edge of the grass in front of the curb. The panel follows the shape of the lawn and fits seamlessly into the site; the curve emulates the arc

of the tomb and the rounded apertures on the facade. It serves as a projection screen for a nearly eleven minute looped video. The scale of the screen and projection are meant to take up significant space and attract attention from passersby on surrounding streets and sidewalks. As a medium, the projection unearths a concealed space and shares it with people who would otherwise not be able to see it. Projection also communicates distance from and abstraction of stories of enslaved individuals that we can only know in part. The projector is positioned on the lawn, behind the bushes.

The video begins with a timed sequence that progressively opens up the image of the tomb until it fills the entire screen (built as a loop, the video ends with a reverse of this sequence). The cropped shape is meant to emulate two things:

1. The shape of the entry door: the curved panel covers up the physical entry door and the projected video provides viewers with a metaphorical re-entry into the church and a re-orientation to its history.
2. The shape of a tombstone: the opening lines of narrative emulate an epitaph because there isn't a tombstone or commemorative marker for Darby; the sonic and visual elements together work to bring attention to this reality.

Various vocal and percussion layers weave in and out behind a single voice narrating the script.

Crescendos and diminuendos communicate emphasis, build tension, and encourage moments of pause.

The sonic language of Christian liturgy and prayer is employed to transfer the sacredness of sanctuary behavior to the basement, and to stir a probing contemplation among listeners. In the video, people enter the scene and gather around the tomb one-by-one, following a processional sequence. They offer their respect to Darby and the many people he represents through their postures of care and prayer.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See earlier description of “memory care.” This is the phrase I asked participants to hold in their mind while moving through the scene and filming the video. I posed two questions to them: What does it mean for us to treat Darby’s memory with care? What does care look and act like?

Banners announcing the project title, dates, and times are affixed to the preexisting banner stand on the site used for Christ Church’s public communication. A context statement and QR code connecting to a project website provide viewers with more information and invites them to respond and/or get involved with ongoing efforts. Printed pamphlets with a written audio transcript provide viewers with an alternative or complement to the auditory experience. See the Appendix for a site map, diagram, and rendering; banner and print mockups; and an audio transcript.

The installation is meant to stay up for 2-4 weeks during the month of October 2022, overlapping with the date of Darby’s death (Oct. 12). The program structure of an opening event is yet to be designed and organized. The goal for this event is to collaborate with residents and organizations in Cambridge outside of Christ Church, across racial, institutional, and religious lines.

## **SECTION 6. CONCLUSIONS**

My research shows that Christ Church Cambridge emerged from the same financial, political, cultural, and social ecosystem as Harvard College and the houses around it. The religious nature of the institution did not drastically set it apart from a slavery-dependent society and ideology. The history of slavery reveals cross-border extractions. Justice cannot be achieved while truth continues to be suppressed. As an institution that values the interconnected past and present – “Our history continues to inform our present, even as we change and grow to better address our future” (“About: History of CCC” n.d.) – embracing this research and engaging in efforts to continue it will help them live into their values.

Further research is required to uncover the many more economic ties to slavery than I include in my intervention. This is critical not only for filling in gaps in historical understanding and storytelling, but to inform reparations efforts that the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts hopes to pursue. Christ Church, among surrounding institutions, cannot understand the economic realities of generational wealth built on slavery, and therefore cannot respond in an informed way, without knowing this history.

The intervention I propose is insufficient on its own to enact cultural and structural change. It does not remove disparities or dissolve injustice. Like the aforementioned antecedents, it too has limitations. As a public art piece, its purpose is to engage the mind, body, and heart of viewers through education, contemplation, and an invitation to further research and engagement. I cannot know for sure how this installation will shape the church or surrounding community. This project would benefit from post-ethnography, involving interviews and conversations with:

1. leaders, committees, and individual parishioners of Christ Church about how new and continued research is informing internal education, spiritual practice, and community-oriented initiatives,
2. surrounding multiracial churches, organizations, and communities about structural issues and challenges, and desired reform, and
3. living descendants and descendant communities (including in external geographies – i.e. Jamaica and Antigua) regarding concerns, priorities, needs, desires, and demands in the present and future.

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# APPENDIX

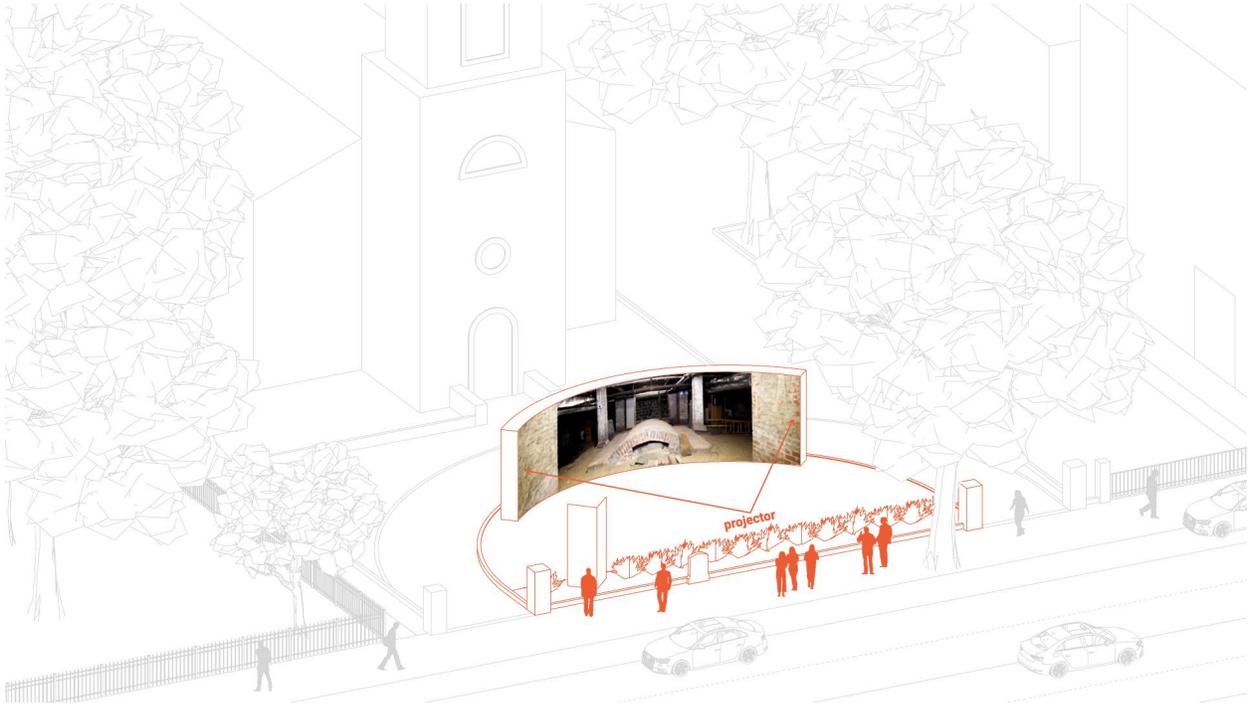
## Site Map



Location of Christ Church Cambridge. 2022. *Google Earth*. [earth.google.com/web/](http://earth.google.com/web/).

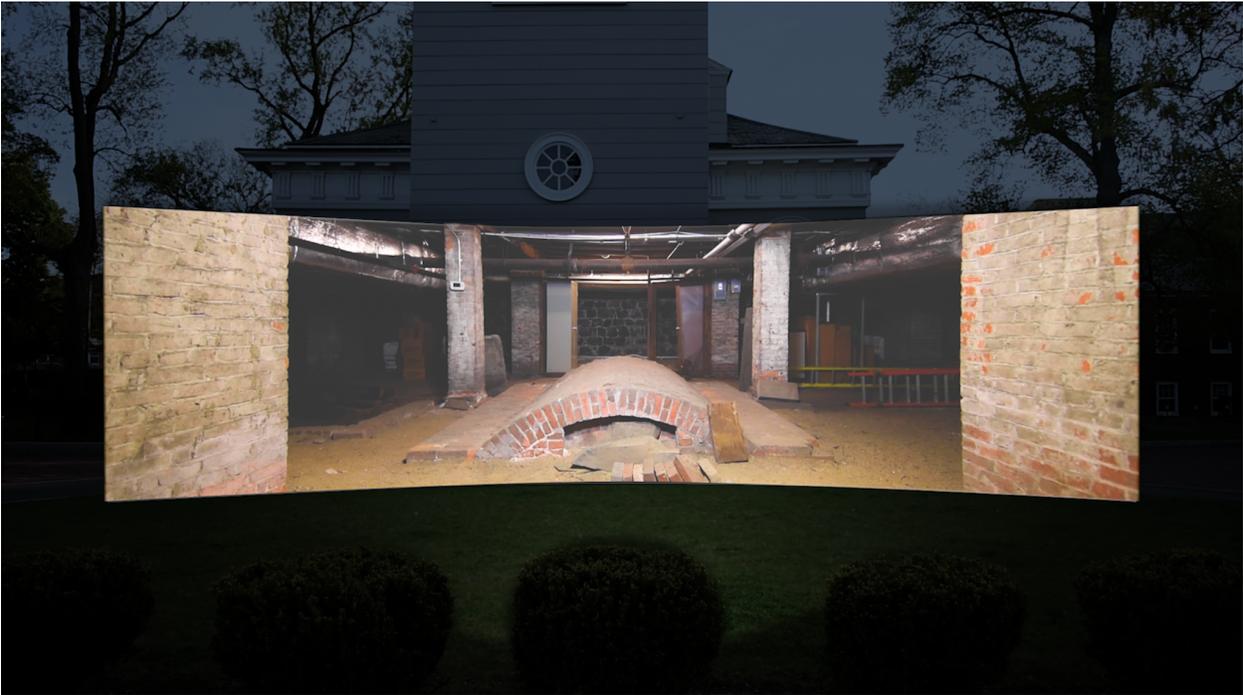
NORTH ↑

**Site Diagram**



Representational diagram; not to scale. Created by author, 2022.

**Site Rendering**



View from the sidewalk. Created by author, 2022.

**Banners**



Sample mockup of informational banners (dates, times, QR code, and context statements are placeholders).  
Created by author, 2022.

# Pamphlet

## HERE LIES DARBY VASSALL

Oct. 7-9pm  
12-26 daily

Please visit the project website to see more about Darby's life and his activism; join us in dialogue; read an audio transcript with references; learn about the research; find additional resources; and get involved with ongoing work to understand, reckon with, and respond to the history of slavery at Christ Church Cambridge.



**Here lies Darby Vassall.**  
Born May 15, 1769. Died October 12, 1861.  
Son of Tony and Cuba. A brother, husband, and father.  
Co-founder of the African Society. Property owner in Beacon Hill.  
Activist for abolition, equality, and education.

*"Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid."*

*"The Vassall Tomb beneath the church is marked by a long, low mound... the arched top of the vault, which is sunk below the surface... It was built shortly after the completion of the church, by Henry Vassall, one of the original proprietors."*

According to Darby, Henry was "a very wicked man. It was a common remark that he was **'the Devil.'**"

*"Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid."*

Henry's father, Leonard, was the owner of a sugar plantation in Jamaica. The value of his estate in 1738 was £9,967.5 (Jamaican currency). Approximately 75% of that was the value of 131 **enslaved people**. Leonard willed £3,000 (Jamaican currency) to Henry in 1757. Henry purchased Tony Darby's father, in Jamaica to be his coachman and brought him to Cambridge.

In 1759, Henry pledged £88 towards the construction of the church. In 1762, he paid £13.6.8 for a church pew.

An inventory of Henry's property after his death in 1769 measures Tony's worth as equivalent to a church pew – £13.6.8.

*"Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid."*

Henry was married to Penelope Royal.

In 1726 she inherited 8 enslaved people from her father, Isaac Royal Sr. Cuba, Darby's mother, was one of them. Isaac Sr. brought her to Medford from Antigua in 1737 along with 27 other enslaved people, including her family members.

Tony and Cuba married and had at least 6 children. Their family was separated more than once. Sometime in the 1760s, Henry sold Cuba and some of her children across **Brattle Street** to his nephew, John Vassall.

When Darby was a young child, John gave him away to an occasional fellow parishioner, George Reed.

*"Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid."*

John – who was a graduate of Harvard like his father, Henry's brother – inherited his father's estate in Jamaica. The value of the estate in 1748 was £74,322.5 (Jamaican currency). Approximately 67% of that was the value of 1,167 **enslaved people**.

In 1750, John pledged £130 towards the construction of the church. In 1762, he paid £13.6.8 for a church pew.

*"Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid."*

Penelope's brother, Isaac Royal, Jr., inherited 18 **enslaved people** in Massachusetts from their father, as well as sugar plantation land and an unknown number of **enslaved people** in Antigua.

In 1762, Isaac paid £13.6.8 for a church pew.

Upon his death in 1781, he gave hundreds of acres of land to Harvard College.

*"Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid."*

A Royal family member and husband of John's sister, Thomas Oliver, inherited plantations in Antigua.

During a 1763 trip to the island, he spent £1000 on **slaves, silver, and pictures**.

Two years after his death, the total number of people enslaved on his Antigua property was 206.

In 1759, Thomas pledged £50 towards the construction of the church. In 1762, he paid £13.6.8 for a church pew.

In 1852, his heirs claimed £1984.16.10 for losing 137 **enslaved people** as their property after emancipation in the British colonies.

The house he built in 1767 is where Harvard presidents live today.

*"Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid."*

Henry Vassall's former house was purchased by Samuel Batchelder II in 1841.

Samuel generated wealth from the New England cotton industry, which ran on cotton produced by enslaved people in the American South.

The Batchelder family invested in the church.

Samuel's son, Samuel III, donated \$10,000 in 1885 "to the Wardens of Christ Church Cambridge", "to be added to... the Warden's Fund".

In 1888 Christ Church was included as a **beneficiary** in his Will.

One of the Samuels gave a Sunday School room to the church in 1868.

*"Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid."*

These Christ Church subscribers and parishioners, along with many others, lived in and around Cambridge while depending on and profiting from **slavery**. The labor of enslaved Africans **financed** their investments, which supported the construction and growth of this and many other New England churches and institutions.

After the end of slavery in Massachusetts in 1783, Darby was involved in the **activism and advocacy** for New England's Black community. He was a lifelong member of Brattle Street Church and maintained a

connection to Christ Church in his adult life. We do not know why he chose to be buried here, we only know that he chose this place.

Do you wonder for the dead?  
Will those who have died stand up and give you thanks?  
Will your loving-kindness be declared in the grave?  
Your faithfulness in the land of destruction?  
Will your wonders be known in the dark?  
Or your righteousness in the country where all is forgotten?

*"Grant eternal rest to your beloved Darby Vassall, O God, and let light perpetual shine upon him." Grant eternal rest to his parents, Tony and Cuba, to his siblings, James, Donanda, Flora, Cyrus, and Catherine, to all those enslaved whose labor helped create this place, to those who fought for freedom and equity for all members of their communities. Amen.*

This project was made possible by the time, energy, contributions, and talent of many collaborators, including:

**VIDEO PARTICIPANTS**  
Louise Anselmi | Christ Church Parish Historian  
David Brannan | Racial Justice Group Co-Chairman  
Jeff Brown | Christ Church parishioner  
Webb Brown | Christ Church parishioner and Racial Justice Group member  
Alden Fossett | The Episcopal Chaplaincy at Harvard Allergy Fellow  
Ted Hammett | Christ Church parishioner Racial Justice Group Co-Chairman  
Dennis Lloyd | Darby's descendant, Slave Legacy History Coalition Co-Founder  
Ezra Lloyd | Darby's descendant, Slave Legacy History Coalition Co-Founder  
Beverly Parks-Lloyd | Advisor on the Daughters of the King Diocesan Assembly Board of Atlanta  
Polly Malcolm | Christ Church parishioner  
Paula Paris | Cambridge Black History Project  
Sharon Furtess Shuman | Christ Church parishioner  
Wendy Squares | Christ Church Diocesan Delegate

**AUDIO PARTICIPANTS**  
Timothy Joseph | Narrator  
Emmanuel Okhamahele | vocals  
Erica Okhamahele | vocals  
Evan Pippenbink | producer, percussion, vocals  
Nicole Pippenbink | composer/producer, vocals  
Alexa Vitellucci | vocals  
Michael Vitellucci | percussion, vocals

This project, created through a collaboration between Nicole Pippenbink and Christ Church Cambridge, was supported by a student grant from the Presidential Institute on Harvard & the legacy of Slavery.

Sample mockup of a printed pamphlet to provide a visual aid for installation viewers (dates, times, QR code, and context statements are placeholders). Created by author, 2022.

## Video Transcript

Here lies Darby Vassall.

Born May 15, 1769.<sup>54</sup> Died October 12, 1861.<sup>55</sup>

Son of Tony and Cuba. A brother, husband, and father.

Co-founder of the African Society.<sup>56</sup> Property owner in Beacon Hill.<sup>57</sup>

Activist for abolition, equality, and education.<sup>58</sup>

*“Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid.”<sup>59</sup>*

“The Vassall Tomb beneath the church is marked by a long, low mound... the arched top of the vault, which is sunk below the surface... It was built shortly after the completion of the church, by Henry Vassall, one of the original proprietors.”<sup>60</sup>

According to Darby, Henry was “a very wicked man... it was a common remark that he was ‘the Devil.’”<sup>61</sup>

*“Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid.”*

Henry’s father, Leonard, was the owner of a sugar plantation in Jamaica.<sup>62</sup>

The value of his estate in 1738 was £9,907.5 (Jamaican currency).

Approximately 73% of that was the value of 131 enslaved people.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Batchelder 1917, 74; Bell 2012, 34; Hoppin Collection Materials on Christ Church, 1790-1861, n.d.; Museum of African American History and Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery 2022a.

<sup>55</sup> *The Liberator* 1861.

<sup>56</sup> “Though Dwelling in a Land of Freedom” n.d.; The African Society 1802.

<sup>57</sup> Bell 2012, 39.

<sup>58</sup> “Darby Vassall” n.d.

<sup>59</sup> Adapted from “The Holy Eucharist: Rite Two” (“The (Online) Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the Episcopal Church,” n.d., 355).

<sup>60</sup> Batchelder 1893, 68. A copy of the excerpt about “The Vassall Tomb” from Samuel Francis Batchelder’s 1893 history of Christ Church is framed and positioned at the back of the tomb. It mentions that “Darby, son of Henry Vassall’s negro coachman ‘Tony’ (1861)” is buried in the tomb (Ibid.). This is the only physical marker on site that mentions, alludes to, or acknowledges the history of slavery.

<sup>61</sup> Hoppin Collection Materials on Christ Church, 1790-1861. These words were recorded by the Reverend Nicholas Hoppin who interviewed Darby sometime in the 1850s.

<sup>62</sup> Hurwitz 2015.

<sup>63</sup> “Leonard Vassall” n.d. “£7260 currency was the value of enslaved people.”

Leonard willed £3,000 (Jamaican currency) to Henry in 1737.<sup>64</sup>

Henry purchased Tony, Darby's father, in Jamaica to be his coachman and brought him to Cambridge.<sup>65</sup>

In 1759, Henry pledged £80<sup>66</sup> towards the construction of the church.<sup>67</sup>

In 1762, he paid £13.6.8<sup>68</sup> for a church pew.<sup>69</sup>

An inventory of Henry's property after his death in 1769 measures Tony's worth as equivalent to a church pew – £13.6.8.<sup>70</sup>

*“Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid.”*

Henry was married to Penelope Royall.

In 1739 she inherited 8 enslaved people from her father, Isaac Royall Sr.<sup>71</sup>

Cuba, Darby's mother, was one of them. Isaac Sr. brought her to Medford from Antigua in 1737 along with 27 other enslaved people, including her family members.<sup>72</sup>

Tony and Cuba married and had at least 6 children.<sup>73</sup>

Their family was separated more than once. Sometime in the 1760s, Henry sold Cuba and some of her children across Brattle Street to his nephew, John Vassall.<sup>74</sup>

When Darby was a young child, John gave him away to an occasional fellow parishioner, George Reed.<sup>75</sup>

*“Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid.”*

John – who was a graduate of Harvard like his father,<sup>76</sup> Henry's brother – inherited his father's estate in Jamaica.

The value of the estate in 1748 was £74,322.5 (Jamaican currency).

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<sup>64</sup> “Last Will and Testament of Leonard Vassall. Boston, 10 Jun 1737.” 1737; Batchelder 1917, 36.

<sup>65</sup> Batchelder 1917, 62; Bell 2012, 32.

<sup>66</sup> A laborer in Massachusetts earned 11 shillings and 3 pence per day in 1759 (Wright 1882, 46). 80 pounds was approximately 6 months of a laborer's wages (numbers calculated with the “Pounds, Shillings and Pence Calculator” n.d.).

<sup>67</sup> *Parish Record Book, 1759-1878*, 7.

<sup>68</sup> In 1762, a laborer in Massachusetts earned 8 shillings per day (Wright 1882, 47). 13 pounds 6 shillings and 8 pence is more than 1 month of a laborer's wages (numbers calculated with the “Pounds, Shillings and Pence Calculator” n.d.).

<sup>69</sup> *Parish Record Book, 1759-1878*, 42.

<sup>70</sup> Batchelder 1917, 82.

<sup>71</sup> “Primary Sources: Public Records” 2012, fig. Table 7.3.

<sup>72</sup> “Though Dwelling in a Land of Freedom” n.d. **Correction 5/17/22:** according to the website, this should read “29 other enslaved people.”

<sup>73</sup> Bell 2012, 31-34.

<sup>74</sup> Bell 2012, 33-34.

<sup>75</sup> Batchelder 1917, 74.

<sup>76</sup> Shipton and Sibley 1937, 233; 1962, 502; “The John Vassal Tankard” n.d.

Approximately 67% of that was the value of 1,167 enslaved people.<sup>77</sup>

In 1759, John pledged £130 towards the construction of the church.<sup>78</sup>

In 1762, he paid £13.6.8 for a church pew.<sup>79</sup>

*“Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid.”*

Penelope’s brother, Isaac Royall Jr., inherited 18 enslaved people in Massachusetts from their father,<sup>80</sup> as well as sugar plantation land and an unknown number of enslaved people in Antigua.<sup>81</sup>

In 1762, Isaac paid £13.6.8 for a church pew.<sup>82</sup>

Upon his death in 1781, he gave hundreds of acres of land to Harvard College.<sup>83 84</sup>

*“Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid.”*

A Royall family member and husband of John’s sister, Thomas Oliver, inherited plantations in Antigua.<sup>85</sup>

During a 1763 trip to the island, he spent “£900 on slaves, silver, and pictures.”<sup>86</sup>

Two years after his death, the total number of people enslaved on his Antigua property was 206.<sup>87</sup>

In 1759, Thomas pledged £50 towards the construction of the church.<sup>88</sup>

In 1762, he paid £13.6.8 for a church pew.<sup>89</sup>

In 1835, his heirs claimed £1984.16.10 for losing 137 enslaved people as their property after emancipation in the British colonies.<sup>90</sup>

The house he built in 1767 is where Harvard presidents live today.<sup>91</sup>

*“Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid.”*

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<sup>77</sup> “John Vassall I” n.d. “£49,709.25 currency was the value of enslaved people.”

<sup>78</sup> *Parish Record Book, 1759-1878, 7.*

<sup>79</sup> *Parish Record Book, 1759-1878, 61.*

<sup>80</sup> “Primary Sources: Public Records” 2012.

<sup>81</sup> Beckert and Stevens 2011, 11.

<sup>82</sup> *Parish Record Book, 1759-1878, 45.*

<sup>83</sup> “Extract from the Will of Isaac Royall, 1778” 1778; “The Royall Bequest and Harvard Law School” n.d.

<sup>84</sup> In 2016, Harvard Law School abandoned the design of its official seal, which was based on the Royall family coat of arms (Hartocollis 2016). In 2019, the Antiguan Prime Minister requested reparations from Harvard (Hassan 2019).

<sup>85</sup> Beckert and Stevens 2011, 25.

<sup>86</sup> Batchelder 1917, 27.

<sup>87</sup> “Friar’s Hill: Antigua” n.d.

<sup>88</sup> *Parish Record Book, 1759-1878, 7.*

<sup>89</sup> *Parish Record Book, 1759-1878, 42.*

<sup>90</sup> “Antigua 37 (Friar’s Hill): Claim Details, Associated Individuals and Estates” n.d.

<sup>91</sup> Beckert and Stevens 2011, 25.

Henry Vassall's former house was purchased by Samuel Batchelder II in 1841.<sup>92 93</sup>

Samuel generated wealth from the New England cotton industry, which ran on cotton produced by enslaved people in the American South.<sup>94</sup>

The Batchelder family invested in the church.

Samuel's son, Samuel III, donated \$10,000 in 1885 "to the Wardens of Christ Church Cambridge"... "to be added to... the Warden's Fund."<sup>95</sup>

In 1888 Christ Church was included as a beneficiary in his Will.<sup>96</sup>

One of the Samuels gave a Sunday School room to the church in 1868.<sup>97</sup>

*"Almighty God... from you no secrets are hid."*

These Christ Church subscribers and parishioners, along with many others, lived in and around Cambridge while depending on and profiting from slavery. The labor of enslaved Africans financed their investments, which supported the construction and growth of this and many other New England churches and institutions.<sup>98</sup>

After the end of slavery in Massachusetts in 1783, Darby was involved in the activism of and advocacy for New England's Black community. He was a lifelong member of Brattle Street Church and maintained a connection to Christ Church in his adult life.<sup>99</sup> We do not know why he chose to be buried here; we only know that he chose this place.<sup>100</sup>

Do you work wonders for the dead?

will those who have died stand up and give you thanks?

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<sup>92</sup> Dus 2009; *The Cambridge Tribune* 1923.

<sup>93</sup> Samuel II lived there until his death in 1879 (Dus 2009). Ownership of the property stayed within the Batchelder family into the 1900s (Hail n.d.). *Ten Hills Farm: The Forgotten History of Slavery in the North* mentions multiple times that Samuel Francis Batchelder (Samuel III's son), who wrote the aforementioned 1893 history of the church (see footnote 60), lived and wrote at Henry Vassall's former house (Manegold 2009, 181, 187–88, 193).

<sup>94</sup> Dus 2009. Bishop 1868, 515. See also *Empire of Cotton: a Global History* by Sven Beckert (2014).

<sup>95</sup> Batchelder Family Collection, Series III: Folder 27.

<sup>96</sup> Batchelder Family Collection, Series IV: Folder 37.

<sup>97</sup> Day 1951, 90.

<sup>98</sup> In 2021, Alden Fossett stated in a sermon that, "The Vassalls were also a founding family of Christ Church. Their income, and their investment in this very building, was underwritten by the labor of enslaved Africans" (Fossett 2021, 1).

<sup>99</sup> The Reverend Nicholas Hoppin interviewed him sometime in the 1850s (see footnote 61).

<sup>100</sup> See presentation by some of Darby's living descendants, Dennis and Egypt Lloyd, for their speculations about his choice – because he "loved the Lord" and because he preferred to be buried in a church instead of an open field (Lloyd and Lloyd 2022).

Will your loving-kindness be declared in the grave?

your faithfulness in the land of destruction?

Will your wonders be known in the dark?

or your righteousness in the country where all is forgotten?<sup>101</sup>

“Grant eternal rest to your beloved Darby Vassall, O God, and let light perpetual shine upon him.”<sup>102</sup>

Grant eternal rest to his parents, Tony and Cuba; to his siblings, James,<sup>103</sup> Dorrenda,<sup>104</sup> Flora, Cyrus, and Catherine;<sup>105</sup> to all those enslaved whose labor helped create this place; to those who fought for freedom and equity for all members of their communities. Amen.

Please visit the project website to see more about Darby’s life and his activism, join us in dialogue, read an audio transcript with references, and learn about the research.<sup>106</sup>

*Here Lies Darby Vassall* builds on Christ Church’s commitment to racial justice. This research is an effort to learn and acknowledge our involvement with slavery, as part of a larger movement to explore its legacies by the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, Harvard University, and local institutions, including:

Cambridge Historical Commission

First Church in Cambridge

History Cambridge

King’s Chapel

Longfellow House Washington's Headquarters

Museum of African American History

Old North Church

The Royall House and Slave Quarters

Trinity Church Boston

This project was supported by a student grant from the Presidential Initiative on Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Psalm 88:11-13, *The Holy Bible*, NRSV (“The (Online) Book of Common Prayer,” n.d., 712–13).

<sup>102</sup> Fossett 2021, 4.

<sup>103</sup> “or Jemmy” (Bell 2012, 340).

<sup>104</sup> “or Darinda” (Ibid.).

<sup>105</sup> (Ibid.).

<sup>106</sup> The URL to the future project website will go here.

<sup>107</sup> **Addition 5/17/22:** I also received funding from the Master in Design Studies, Critical Conservation program at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design.