Meeting the Challenge of Honoring Clemson University's Invisible Black Founders

Rhondda Robinson Thomas

She was 15.

As I began researching the history of slavery and its legacies at Clemson University thirteen years ago, I discovered that Black people had been employed by the institution as common laborers since shortly after its inception in 1889, but few records of their work exist in the school's archives. While painstakingly piecing together their stories, I learned that the history of Black labor actually began with enslaved people who lived and worked on John C. Calhoun's Fort Hill Plantation on which Clemson was built. Then, during Reconstruction, freed men and women worked as sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and domestics for Clemson's founder Thomas Green Clemson, Calhoun's son-in-law, on Fort Hill. Later, Clemson trustees leased a predominately Black state convict workforce to clear the land and help build the higher education institution for white males. Finally, or perhaps not finally, given the composition of our campus staff, Black laborers like fifteen-year-old May Milliner were employed to work for the well-being of white people on Clemson land.

I found Milliner in February 2020 after receiving an email from the great-grandson of one of the convicted laborers who helped build Clemson. He had read an article about my research and wanted to know if I had any information about his ancestor, John Hambrick, who he had found among the prisoners listed in the 1900 US census for Clemson Agricultural College of South Carolina. I immediately checked the census and discovered the names of twenty-five prisoners, twenty-two Black and three white, inscribed in the population record for the college.[1] Hambrick was one of the few white prisoners that Clemson trustees leased between 1890 and 1915. I sent his great-grandson details from demographic and court records I'd discovered in the South Carolina Department

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[1] Entry for John Hambrick, Clemson, South Carolina, US Census, 1900.

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of Archives and History, records a former Clemson University historian had told me did not exist.[2]

When I examined the page where Hambrick's name appeared, however, I noticed it was the end of the census record for Clemson. The names of students were inscribed at the top of the page. Curious as to who else might be included, I began working my way backwards through the census, through seven pages of the names of white male Clemson students, until I came to a page that featured campus residents. I scanned the race column, and the letter "B" occasionally appeared for households of Black laborers who lived next door to white Clemson faculty, administrators, and staff. A few, like May Milliner, were live-in servants. Whereas white teenagers her age who lived in the Clemson College community were described as being "at school," Milliner was classified as a "nurse" hired by Clemson chemistry professor Joseph V. Lewis and his wife Margaret, likely to care for their two-year-old daughter Eleanor.[3] Milliner and other Black laborers in the 1900 census for Clemson College are people Lynn Rainville describes as "invisible founders," African Americans who deserve a central place in institutional histories.[4]

Although the establishment of Clemson College on the Fort Hill Plantation marked a dramatic transition in the purpose and population of the land, one component remained constant: the centrality of Black labor for the prosperity of white people. Yet Black people like May Milliner who have labored on Clemson land—particularly enslaved persons, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, convict laborers, and wage workers—have been omitted from or marginalized in the university's public history. When I began to research and document Black Clemson history, little did I realize this endeavor would become the primary reason I would choose to stay at a land-grant higher education institution that has never fully acknowledged its indebtedness to Black laborers for its existence and success.

As my research at Clemson has developed, I have come to the understanding that efforts to document Black Clemson history have emerged like a series of silos: the disconnected efforts of faculty, staff, students, and consultants that yielded an incomplete and incorrect narrative. I experienced the profound sense of disconnect of this fractured methodology the first time I came to campus. On that hot, humid, sunny summer day in August 2007, my new colleague informed me that the white-columned, green-shuttered, plantation-looking house he had led me to in the middle of campus was the home of ardent proslavery and influential US statesman John C. Calhoun. At that time, information about Clemson's origins wasn't readily accessible on its website. Why hadn't anyone told me about this history before my first day at Clemson? My family had left South Carolina when I was two years old,

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[2] *Records of the S.C. Department of Corrections, Central Correctional Institution, Central Register of Prisoners, 1892–1899* (S 132001 Volume 4), South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.

[3] Entry for May Milliner, Clemson, South Carolina, US Census, 1900.

[4] Lynn Rainville, *Invisible Founders: How Two Centuries of African American Families Transformed a Plantation into a College* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), x.

John C. Calhoun's and Thomas Green Clemson's Fort Hill Plantation house that sits in the middle of the Clemson University campus. (Photo courtesy of the author)

and I had never expected to return to my home state. The job at Clemson is the only reason I'd come back. Had I made the right decision? I was stunned to learn I'd be working on the site of the historic plantation where enslaved people had toiled for the Calhoun family for forty years.

That fall when my students visited the Calhouns' "historic house," as Clemson often describes the structure, as part of my early American Literature course, they didn't hear anything about slavery. When I took a tour of the house alone shortly thereafter and asked why not, my guide informed me that the subject of slavery was deemed too "controversial" to share with visitors. This approach applied to other "controversial" aspects of Clemson history, too. At that time, Clemson extolled its founder Thomas Green Clemson, who had bequeathed Fort Hill to South Carolina for the establishment of a "high seminary of learning," as a diplomat and federal government appointee, but rarely described him as an enslaver and Confederate veteran.[5] A public policy think tank was named for US Senator Strom Thurmond, but little was said about his roles as a defender of segregation and Dixiecrat presidential candidate.[6] The university's most iconic building, Tillman Hall, was named for original Clemson successor trustee and influential New South-era politician Benjamin R. Tillman, but few publicly characterized him as a self-described white supremacist who advocated the lynching and disenfranchisement of African Americans.[7] Eight buildings were named for Confederate officers who had become Clemson faculty or administrators, but this information was omitted from recently installed historical markers.[8] I was not only working on a historic plantation, I had accepted a job at a university that was a shrine to slaveholders, white supremacists, and segregationists.

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[5] "The Will of Thomas Green Clemson," Clemson University webpage, https://www.clemson.edu/about/history/tgc-will.html.

By the end of my first semester at Clemson, I accepted an offer for a tenure-track assistant professor position. My department chair soon advised me not to allow my Black Clemson research to define me or consume my time. If I wanted to continue researching Black lives and labor at Clemson, I would need to complete the requirements for tenure. That included publishing a scholarly book and journal articles and presenting conference papers in my field of study, mentoring and advising students, earning good scores on course evaluations, and fulfilling service obligations for the department, college, university, and community. I embraced a dual research track of early African American literature and Black Clemson history, effectively doubling my scholarship obligations as a junior faculty member.

Initially, I learned about Susan and Old Sawney, the two enslaved persons that Clemson regularly referenced in its public history. The Calhouns gave Susan to their daughter Anna as a wedding present when Anna married Thomas Green Clemson in 1838. Old Sawney was often described as John C. Calhoun's "favorite slave." In the early twenty-first century, Clemson was still playing favorites. I discovered more was known about enslaved persons in the university's history during a tour of Fort Hill when Will Hiott, director of the Department of Historic Properties, casually mentioned several inventories of enslaved people that were kept in Clemson University Libraries' Special Collections & Archives. *We have names?* After the tour, I rushed to the archives and soon held the schedule of fifty slaves that was included in the 1854 deed for the sale of the Fort Hill Plantation from Floride Calhoun to her son Andrew four years after her husband, John C. Calhoun, died.[9] Old Sawney and his family were listed first, but Susan's name wasn't on the list. I whispered each name on the deed aloud, vowing to share them with the world.

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[6] The Strom Thurmond Institute for Government and Public Affairs closed permanently a few years ago due to fundraising challenges and the burden of Thurmond's legacy as a segregationist and Dixiecrat presidential candidate who fathered a biracial daughter.

[7] "Tillman Hall," ClemsonWiki website, https://clemsonwiki.com/wiki/Tillman_Hall.

[8] For more information about some of the structures named for Confederate veterans, see *Building Legacies: Clemson Campus Namesakes*, Clemson University Libraries, https://www.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=7a4b63694a374180a86faf6d2a3aac65.

[9] Schedule of Slaves, The Deed to the Fort Hill Farm, folder 25, box 1, Thomas Green Clemson Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Clemson University Libraries, Clemson, South Carolina (hereafter Thomas Green Clemson Papers).

Examining the schedule of slaves compelled me to continue searching for African Americans in Clemson history. I kept finding "invisible founders" in every era of the university's and the nation's development. During Reconstruction, freed men and women labored on Fort Hill as sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and domestics. During the Nadir, the post-Reconstruction period that marked America's lowest point in race relations, a predominately African American convict workforce cleared and farmed the land and erected Clemson's earliest buildings.[10] During the Jim Crow era, African Americans were employed as construction workers, cooks, servants, farm hands, laundry workers, domestics, as well as cooperative extension service agents for Clemson College. *Black people built and maintained Clemson—why weren't we talking about and honoring them?* Like Saidiya Hartman, who has made a commitment to tell the stories of enslaved people, "I was determined to fill in the blank spaces of the historical record and to represent the lives of those deemed unworthy of remembering."[11] For most of the Black laborers in Clemson history, a name or a job classification is all we have.

Because Clemson did not exhibit a sustained interest in examining and sharing its Black history, I arranged for the release of information about convict labor in a front page story in the *Greenville News*—during the same semester my tenure portfolio was being reviewed.[12] Some of my Black colleagues advised me against doing so, fearing I would not earn tenure or lose my job. I decided to go public to honor the labor of thirteen-year-old Wade Foster, a convicted laborer whom Clemson trustees leased to build their college in the early 1890s. Foster was born in Spartanburg, South Carolina, just like me. When the judge asked him if he had anything to say regarding his conviction for stealing six dollars' worth of boy's clothing, a toy drum, and a pillowcase, the boy said nothing. He was sentenced to six months in the state penitentiary with hard labor and leased to work at Clemson a few months after his incarceration began. I would share Wade Foster's story. I would call Wade Foster's name. Clemson didn't issue an official response to the article. But some Clemson students began accusing me of releasing historical information that tarnished the university's brand as a progressive higher education institution.

I earned tenure in the spring of 2014, exceeding the requirements, which gave me the freedom to set my research agenda. The following fall, I met James Bostic Jr., the first African American to earn a PhD from Clemson in 1972 and a generous contributor to Clemson's academic and athletic programs. After hearing my presentation about the convicted men and boys who built Clemson, he and his wife Edith donated $50,000 to my research project, and he convinced Clemson provost

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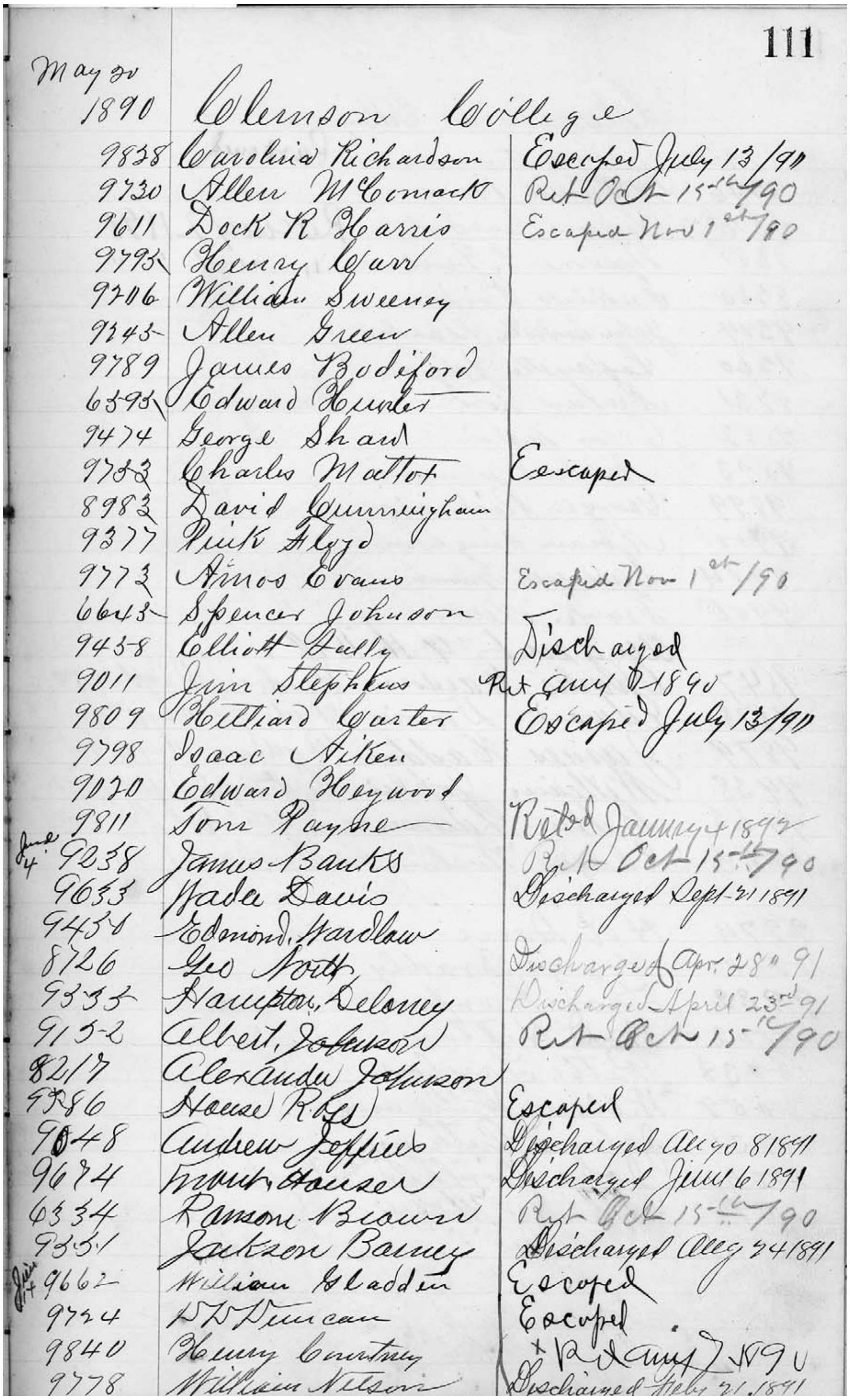
[10] See Rayford Whittingham Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: the Nadir, 1877–1901* (New York: Dial Press, 1954).

[11] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 16.

[12] Lyn Riddle, "Research Honors the Lives of Convicts who Built Clemson," *Greenville News*, April 15, 2014.



		111
May 20 1890	Clemson College	
9838	Carolina Richardson	Escaped July 13/91
9730	Allen McCormack	Ret Oct 15th/90
9611	Dock R Harris	Escaped Nov 1st/90
9793	Henry Carr	
9706	William Sweeney	
9345	Allen Green	
9789	James Bodiford	
6593	Edward Hunter	
9474	George Shaw	
9783	Charles Mattox	Escaped
8983	David Cunningham	
9377	Pink Floyd	
9773	Amos Evans	Escaped Nov 1st/90
6643	Spencer Johnson	
9458	Elliott Sally	Discharged
9011	Jim Stephens	Ret Aug 8 1890
9809	Hilliard Carter	Escaped July 13/91
9798	Isaac Aiken	
9020	Edward Heyward	
9811	Tom Payne	Ret'd January 4 1892
June 4 9238	James Banks	Ret Oct 15th/90
9633	Wade Davis	Discharged Sept 21 1891
9458	Edmond Wardlaw	
8726	Geo North	Discharged Apr. 28" 91
9335	Hampton Deloney	Discharged April 23rd 91
9152	Albert Johnson	Ret Oct 15th/90
8217	Alexander Johnson	
9386	House Ross	Escaped
9048	Andrew Jeffries	Discharged Aug 8 1891
9674	Monk Houser	Discharged June 6 1891
6334	Ramson Brown	Ret Oct 15th/90
9351	Jackson Barney	Discharged Aug 24 1891
June 14 9662	William Gladden	Escaped
9724	W W Duncan	Escaped
9840	Henry Courtney	x Ret Aug 7 1890
9778	William Nelson	Discharged Feby 21 1891

First page from register listing names of mostly Black convicted men and boys whom Clemson trustees leased from the state of South Carolina to help build their college. (Public record from South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, SC)

Bob Jones to match their gift.[13] Within two years, they doubled their contributions. Bostic's interest in my project led to increased support from Clemson, including a project manager, Marjorie Campbell, regular meetings with administrators, grant writing assistance from the Clemson Foundation, and a collaboration with Clemson Athletics Creative Media team to help develop a social media strategy. I also hired several student research assistants, Sarah Adams, Katy Coon, Marissa Davis, Edith Dunlap, Brendan McNeely, and Samuel Wilkes, and my department assigned Emily Boyter as the graduate research assistant for the project. And I began traveling to conferences, symposiums, and historical sites like Monticello and the Whitney Plantation, which enabled me to build a national network of scholars, local historians, and community activists who understood, affirmed, and believed in my work.

With the help of research assistants and the support of my department, college, and the university, my work soon became known as the Call My Name: African Americans in Clemson University History Project.[14] I created an Adobe Spark project launch site (www.callmyname.org), to introduce the public to Clemson's seven generations of African Americans: 1) free Africans and enslaved people of African descent, 2) sharecroppers and tenant farmers, 3) convict laborers, 4) wage workers and cooperative extension service employees, 5) musicians, 6) students, faculty, staff, and administrators, and 7) twenty-first century activism. My research assistants create daily stories about these generations for the Call My Name digital archive housed in our Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts. I've also developed Call My Name walking and bus tours during which I peel back the layers of campus history, revealing places such as Hardin Hall, the first classroom building built by mostly Black incarcerated boys and men and named for Mark Hardin, Clemson's first chemistry professor and a Confederate officer. I work with a growing number of students, faculty, staff, and local community members who are demanding significant changes in Clemson's public history.[15] A National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Creating Humanities Communities grant facilitated the development of the Call My Name Coalition, a collaboration between Call My Name and four community partners: the Bertha Lee Strickland Cultural Museum and Lunney Museum of Seneca, South Carolina, the Clemson Area African

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[13] Jeannie Davis, "Professor will use Grant to Document African American Lives in Clemson University History," *The Newsstand*, Clemson University, February 16, 2015, https://newsstand.clemson.edu/mediarelations/professor-will-use-grant-to-document-african-american-lives-in-clemson-history/.

[14] See Karen Land, "The Power of Calling a Name," *ClemsonWorld,* Fall 2019, https://clemson.world/callinganame/.

[15] For examples of Clemson student activism, see A. D. Carson's *See The Stripes* campaign, https://aydeethegreat.com/see-the-stripes/, and Clemson honors students' Reclaim and Rename movement, https://www.reclaimandrename.com. For examples of faculty research, see Susanna Ashton, "Texts of Our Institutional Lives: Don't You Mean 'Slaves,' Not 'Servants'?: Literary and Institutional Texts for an Interdisciplinary Classroom," *College English* 69, vol. 2 (November 2006): 156–72 and Vernon Orville Burton, "Dining with Harvey Gantt: Myths and Realities of 'Integration with Dignity,'" in *Matthew J. Perry: the Man, His Times, and His Legacy*, ed. W. Lewis Burke and Belinda Gergel (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 183–220.

American Museum, the Pendleton Foundation for Black History and Culture, and Clemson's Humanities Hub. Together we record, represent, and solicit the experiences of generations of African American life in Upstate South Carolina.

As the scope of my project increased, I began to wonder if I was doing too much. At the 2015 National Council on Public History Conference, during the Q&A after my presentation about Call My Name, an attendee asked about institutional support for my project and advised me not to allow Clemson to use me to complete its public history work. Her query was concerning. Why did Clemson need my research on African Americans in its history? The university historian Jerome Reel was writing a new two-volume official history of the institution titled *The High Seminary*. The Department of Historic Properties director Will Hiott was responsible for the upkeep and tours of plantation houses on campus. Clemson's Special Collections & Archives staff ensured access to primary documents associated with Clemson history. Why was a Black, female English professor devoting half of her research agenda to a public history project?

While I read documents in Special Collections & Archives I kept finding references to Black people, hundreds of "invisible founders," who were not public knowledge and were not included in published histories about Clemson. Sometimes I feel as if I have been called to "challenge white male authorial control of [Clemson] history."[16] My goal is to incorporate the stories of Black people into the Clemson University narrative, drawing attention to those who did not have access to the institution's production of history. My hope is that those who engage with these stories, such as the Clemson student groups I talk with every year, will be inspired to demand and work to create an inclusive, honest university history and to build and sustain a diverse and socially just campus community and world.

By the time Clemson trustees created their Task Force on Clemson History in 2015, after a white supremacist murdered nine African American parishioners during a prayer meeting at the Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, I had been researching Blacks in Clemson history for eight years. My hopes for a more inclusive Clemson public history narrative were tempered when members of the Trustee Task Force decided to conduct interviews with stakeholders and solicit suggestions through a website over a period of up to six months to determine recommendations for their history project.[17] Members of the Clemson History Implementation Team on which I was appointed to serve requested but were never given access to all of the suggestions the task force collected. The thirteen-member team included five staff members from marketing and communications; three directors of campus departments, campus planning, historic properties, and the visitor center; the chief diversity officer; an alumnus/volunteer; and three faculty members—the chair of the history department, the

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[16] Salamishah Tillet, *Sites of Slavery: Citizenship and Racial Democracy in the Post-Civil Rights Imagination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 33.

[17] Board of Trustees Task Force on the History of Clemson, Clemson University website, https://www.clemson.edu/administration/bot/clemson-history-taskforce/.

The author (front row, fourth from the left) with Marion Reeves (center, front row), Clemson alumnus who integrated the football team in 1970, Clemson football players, and other guests after Call My Name presentation that student-athletes requested for the Paw Journey program in February 2018. (Photo courtesy of the author)

faculty liaison to the trustees, and me—appointed by Clemson president James Clements.[18] I was one of two Black team members, both women, selected to serve. Sometimes that meant I was the only person of color in a meeting when my Black colleague was absent. I certainly wanted a seat at the table when Clemson history projects were being planned, but being one of two voices speaking directly on behalf of the Black Clemson experience became a weighty responsibility. During this time, Clemson also joined the Universities Studying Slavery (USS) consortium. Attending USS meetings and conferences connected me with a diverse group of scholars and students who were facing their own challenges in conducting research, implementing campus history projects, and working with administrators and trustees. We learn about each other's experiences and exchange ideas on how to keep the work moving forward.

When the team implemented the trustees' recommendations, numerous opportunities were missed to make visible the centrality of Black labor in Clemson history. New signage for historic buildings included biographical information about the structures' white namesakes—omitting affiliations with the Confederate Army—but only acknowledged Black people as classifications: enslaved persons and sharecroppers who once tilled the Fort Hill Plantation fields and as the "predominately African American state convict crew" who built historic academic buildings. When asked if details about Black people who had contributed to Clemson history could be included on the new signage, decision makers insisted space was limited and assured us that considerations would eventually be given to other means to honor Black lives and labor. The result is that Clemson's current public history still focuses on and extols the virtues of its white male founders, though their bios on the university website have been updated and the tours of the Fort Hill Plantation house have become somewhat more inclusive. Docents now include some direct references to slavery during tours. New interpretive signage was recently installed that includes information about the enslaved persons who labored in the Fort Hill Plantation house.

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[18] Clemson: The Complete Story, Clemson University website, https://www.clemson.edu/about/history/taskforce/.

More recently, Clemson has appointed a new university historian, Paul Anderson, who is advocating for a more inclusive, interdisciplinary, collaborative approach to Clemson history projects. Then, a few weeks after a white police officer senselessly murdered George Floyd, Clemson trustees announced their decision to change the name of the Calhoun Honors College to the Clemson University Honors College. They also requested a one-time exception in the Heritage Act to revert the name of Tillman Hall to its original name, the Main Building, changes student-activists and their allies have been demanding for years.[19] For many, the decision was symbolic. Although I wish the trustees had done more to honor Black people's contributions to Clemson history and provide resources for Black people on campus and in local communities, as a sixth generation South Carolinian whose family was adversely affected by both Calhoun's and Tillman's ideologies, I was glad to see their names removed from prominent places on campus.

However, very recently, after new research on the historic African American Burial Ground on campus revealed the location of the unmarked graves, Clemson trustees and administrators soon exhibited a level of compassion, sensitivity, and concern that surprised me. I was initially told the burial ground was a small area cordoned off by a black chain-link fence situated on the south side of the university's Woodland Cemetery. The fence had been installed to discourage contractors and others from filling the site with trash, not to protect the burial ground. The cemetery's history dated back to the antebellum period when John C. Calhoun's family began burying family members in a place that was called Cemetery Hill. In 1923, Clemson administrators created Woodland Cemetery on the site for the burial of white Clemson employees and their families. In 1946, in recognition of the part

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[19] Zoe Nicholson, "Clemson removes John C. Calhoun's Name from Honors College, asks to Rename Tillman Hall," *Greenville News*, June 12, 2020.

of the cemetery that Clemson identified as a burial ground for African Americans, the university's Buildings and Grounds Faculty Committee had recommended that "some type of permanent marker be established to indicate this colored graveyard" where "200 to 250 slaves and convicts" were believed to be buried.[20] Although Clemson trustees did not approve the marker initiative, interest in the burial ground persisted, and Clemson students and faculty as well as the local Black community continued to talk about the graves for Black laborers.[21]

In the early 1990s, Clemson hired African American anthropologist Carrel Cowan-Ricks to survey the African American burial ground to pinpoint the location of the graves. She also gave lectures and tours, and published articles about her research. As she completed her work, Cowan-Ricks advised, "I would, however, ask that the funeral directors who use the cemetery for burials be alert to the fact that grave diggers may encounter existing burials in this area and I should be contacted to witness the digging of any graves in these two sections."[22] *What two sections,* I wondered? *I thought there was only one burial ground.* Three years into her work, Cowan-Ricks and all but one member of her team were terminated during an economic downturn before they completed their research. I recently learned that about seven years later, Clemson's campus planning office created a preservation plan for Woodland Cemetery that included a recommendation for ground penetrating radar (GPR) to be used to identify graves in two African American burial sites.[23] I was also told South Carolina's state archeologist had surveyed the area several times, but the results were inconclusive. So Clemson began assigning graves to white employees throughout Woodland Cemetery, except in the fenced-in site. Although at least two Clemson staff members were familiar with the two burial grounds, they focused solely on the fenced area, even installing a sign, "Site of Unknown Burials Cira 1865," at the site. In 2015, they both worked with Bostic, several faculty members, and me to complete the application for a South Carolina historical marker for the burial ground and Woodland Cemetery that was installed a year later. But they directed our attention only to the small burial ground enclosed by the black fence.

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[20] "Minutes of the Building and Grounds Committee, 11 March 1946," folder 6, box 1, series 7, Robert F. Poole Presidential Records, Committee Files, 1928–1955, Special Collections and Archives, Clemson University Libraries.

[21] See for example "Members of First Class Talk It Over," an article published in a special Homecoming edition of the *Tiger* that included recollections by alumnus and chemistry professor B. F. Robertson's that some incarcerated individuals who helped build the college "were buried in unmarked graves on Cemetery Hill behind the graves of the Calhoun family." *The Tiger*, Homecoming, November 18, 1948.

[22] Carrel Cowan-Ricks Memo to Sonya Goodman, "Northwest Side of Woodland Cemetery," February 22, 1991, Carrel Cowan-Ricks Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Clemson University Libraries.

[23] Woodland Cemetery Preservation & Development Plan: A Summary of the History, Present Status & Future Development Goals, October 2003, on file at the Clemson University Planning and Design Office.

Four years later, two Clemson students, Sarah Adams and Morgan Molosso, redirected the university's attention to the African American burial ground after they heard about and visited the site and found it strewn with trash and part of the fence broken down. Staff in Clemson's Harvey and Lucinda Gantt Multicultural Center advised them to share their concerns with me.[24] I connected them to Anderson and Bostic, as well as campus planning, historic properties, and facilities staff, and several Clemson professors to renew efforts to determine the parameters of the burial ground, install a proper memorial, and secure a long-term commitment from Clemson to maintain the site. After several fits and starts due to COVID-19, the university hired Preservation South to survey the area enclosed in the black fence using GPR equipment. As our team examined the site in preparation for the survey, Bostic and Anderson noticed field stones like those that had been used to mark the graves of African Americans scattered throughout Woodland Cemetery. *Why were stones located outside the fenced area,* we wondered? They marked the stones with red flags. Bostic called and encouraged me to visit the cemetery. When I arrived, I saw red flags dotting the hillsides adjacent to the fenced-in burial ground.

The day before the survey company arrived, several of our team members examined the box of papers Cowan-Ricks had left at Clemson and discovered the university had sought and secured a court order in 1960 to disinter and relocate the graves of enslaved and convict laborers. Clemson officials asserted that the institution needed the land for the "orderly and proper development of the campus," and the graves were being moved to "a more suitable location . . . more accessible and one which can be kept in a condition more in accordance with the proper respect for the dead."[25] The court instructed Clemson to place a notice regarding their intentions in three newspapers for ten days. If no next of kin objected, the graves could be relocated.

We quickly changed plans and asked Preservation South to survey the site surrounded by the chain-link fence as well as the other burial ground at the foot of the hill behind the Calhoun family plot. I was on site, watching as the surveyors located two hundred and fifteen graves in both burial grounds, including seven under the paved road. We expect to find more graves as the survey continues. Until desegregation in 1963, Black lives hardly ever mattered at Clemson. The deaths of Black laborers mattered even less. Only Black labor mattered on the land where Clemson was built—the labor of Clemson's invisible Black founders.

Because Clemson trustees are the primary stewards of Woodland Cemetery where the burial ground is located, their first step was to establish a task force,

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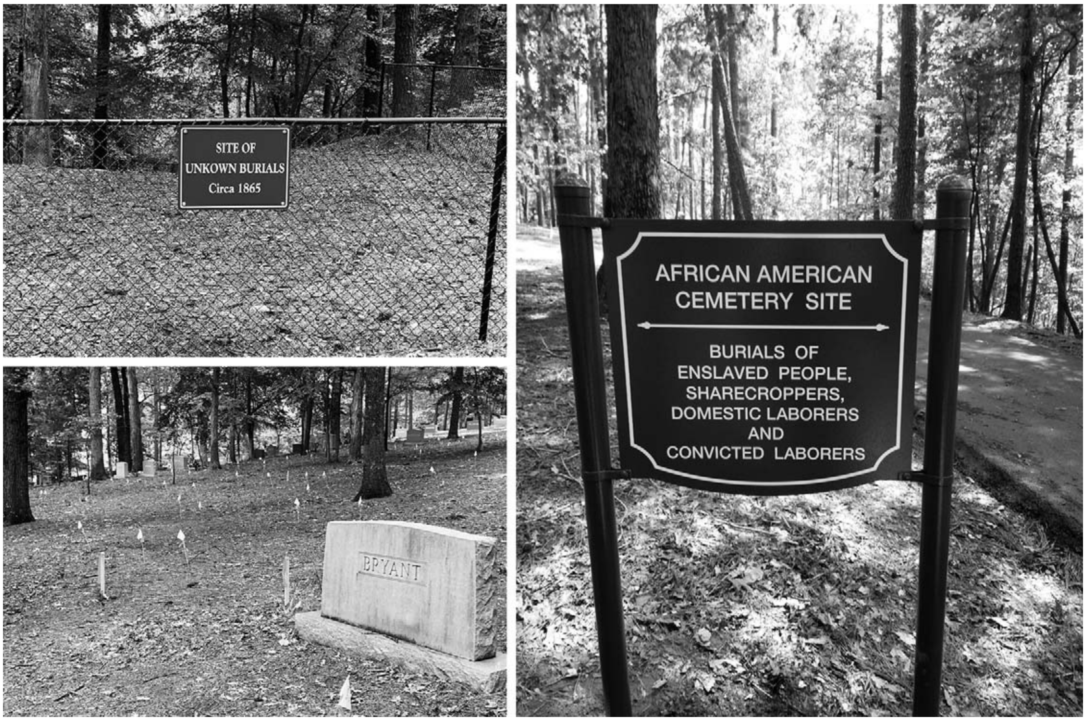
[24] Zoe Nicholson, "Clemson Students to Honor Unmarked Burial Ground for Slaves, Convict Laborers on Campus," *Greenville News*, March 26, 2020, https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/2020/03/26/clemson-students-honor-unmarked-burial-ground-slaves-convict/5023440002/.

[25] State of South Carolina, County of Oconee, Court of Common Pleas, Ex parte: The Clemson Agricultural College of South Carolina, In Re: The Purported Cemetery of Unknown Deceased Persons, Petition, 22 August 1960, and Order, September 3, 1960, folder 17, box 2, Carrel Cowan-Ricks Papers, Special Collections & Archives, Clemson University Libraries.



Images counter-clockwise from top left: 1) the fenced-in area where remains of African American laborers were reinterred and incorrect signage installed, 2) white flags with pink tags marking the locations of gravesites discovered by Preservation South in the original African American burial ground, and 3) new signage recently installed for the African American Burial Ground in Woodland Cemetery. (Photographs by the author)

as required by their By Laws, to determine how to address the matter.[26] The trustees' task force recommended the establishment of a Legacy Council to develop a memorialization and conservation plan for the burial ground and invited Anderson, Bostic, and me to be members. Our first priority was to inform members of local African American communities of the discovery of the location of the gravesites before making a public announcement. Trustees E. Smyth McKissick and David E. Dukes made follow up calls to assure them of Clemson's commitment to restoring and maintaining the burial ground. We also worked with Clemson Libraries' Special Collections and Archives and university relations staff to develop a website where digitized copies of all the documents we are discovering are shared with the public.[27] The university historian gained authorization to hire a graduate assistant, Clemson history student Marissa Davis, and a postdoc in history, Sara

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[26] "Statutory Authority and Composition of the Board," Chapter V, Organization and Operating Rules, *Board of Trustees Manual*, Clemson University, https://www.clemson.edu/administration/bot/manual/chapter5.html.

[27] "History of the African-American Burial Site," *Woodland Cemetery Historic Preservation*, https://www.clemson.edu/about/history/woodland-cemetery/?_ga=2.138466611.1815823558.1598160738-1667501967.1598160738.

Collini, to assist with research; I recently hired a postdoc for the Call My Name Project, La'Neice Littleton, with grants from Clemson's research office and the NEH, who will assist with community engagement efforts. We have already begun receiving inquiries from descendants who believe their ancestors may have been interred in the African American Burial Ground, from various individuals who have ties to Clemson employees who are connected to or buried in Woodland Cemetery, and from students, faculty, and community members who want to assist with the project.

My colleagues, students, and even strangers often ask me how I can devote so much time to researching and documenting history they find to be painful, sad, and depressing. I draw strength from my faith in God who has brought me and my people so far along the way.[28] I am also inspired by the stories of Black females in Clemson history, especially an enslaved girl named Issey. She was the daughter of Old Sawney and a favorite of the Calhouns' disabled daughter, Cornelia. On April 1, 1843, Issey slipped up the stairs of the Fort Hill Plantation house to a second-floor back bedroom and placed a pile of hot coals under fourteen-year-old William Lowndes Calhoun's feather pillow. People in the house smelled something burning and quickly put out the fire. John C. Calhoun's wife Floride claimed that "lately Isseys [*sic*] trying to burn us all up" in a letter to her son Patrick.[29] Although Issey reportedly confessed, she wasn't hanged, the punishment for arson, because the Calhouns never reported her to the authorities. Instead, they temporarily banished her to their son Andrew's Cuba Plantation in Alabama. Issey fought back against the oppression and injustice of enslavement. A bit of "privilege" didn't make her passive.

But my passion for my work is also fueled by my fury as I learn of the exploitation and marginalization of Black women in Clemson history. The aforementioned enslaved woman named Susan was forced to sleep with a string tied around her wrist that her mistress Anna Calhoun Clemson pulled to awaken her to care for her white owners' needs. Freedwomen Mary Cannon, Harriet Course, Mariah Green, and Emmaly Williams worked as sharecroppers for Thomas Green Clemson from 1871 to 1872, doing the same work and likely living in the same granite stone, barracks-like quarters where enslaved persons who labored on Fort Hill had resided.[30] Jane Edna Harris Hunter, founder of the Phillis Wheatley Association in Cleveland, recalled fending off the sexual advances of her white employer, traveling salesmen, and college employees at a hotel located near Clemson where she worked as a teenage waitress and chambermaid.[31] Call My Name honors these and other Black women whose labor under incredibly exploitative and dangerous conditions ensured that Clemson would eventually be established on the Fort Hill Plantation.

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[28] James Weldon Johnson, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," *The Poetry Foundation*, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46549/lift-every-voice-and-sing.

[29] "Floride [Colhoun] Calhoun to Lt. Patrick Calhoun, 'Fort Towson, Choctaw Nation, Arkansaw,'" April 3, 1843, in Clyde Norman Wilson, ed., *The Papers of John C. Calhoun, vol. 17* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1959), 136.

[30] Articles of Agreement between Thomas Green Clemson and the freed men and women, 1871–1872, Thomas Green Clemson Papers, folder 7, box 5.

[31] Jane Edna Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2011), 45.

Nevertheless, there are days when I can hardly muster the strength to carry on, moments when I am fighting back tears, and nights when I cry myself to sleep, overwhelmed by the injustices Black people have suffered at Clemson even as they persevered. Yet "when and where I enter, in the quiet undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole [Black Clemson] enters with me."[32] I, too, am a voice from the South, meeting the challenge of making Clemson University's Black founders visible.

I don't feel no ways tired . . . [33]

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[32] Anna J. Cooper, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*, Legacies of Social Thought Series (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Kindle Edition).

[33] Curtis Burrell, "I Don't Feel No Ways Tired," recorded by James Cleveland, AllGospelLyrics .com, http://www.allgospellyrics.com/?sec=listing&lyricid=420.