



**RIDER**  
UNIVERSITY

DECEMBER 2020

# Task Force on Rider and the History of Slavery

**PRELIMINARY REPORT  
WITH RECOMMENDATIONS**

# Charge

Convene the Task Force on Rider and the History of Slavery in the beginning of summer 2020 to discover Rider's historical relationship and connection with slavery and enslaved people, and make recommendations to the President on ways the University can recognize and educate around this past.

Specific actions may include:

- » Investigate and summarize the history of significant buildings and names on-campus that tie to a history of slavery.
- » Connect with Lawrence Township on this discovery project to determine mutual interests and opportunities for historical documentation and educational opportunity.
- » Propose specific actions to educate students, faculty, staff, alumni, visitors, and the surrounding community about the history of slavery in New Jersey, and as related to Rider's campus.
- » Propose specific actions to memorialize enslaved people who served on our campus (if the information is known), and/or prominently display educational materials in physical locations on campus to promote awareness of the history of slavery associated with the campus and community.

# Context

As outlined in the Rider University mission and values and the Inclusive Excellence Plan, Rider is committed to being a leader in inclusive excellence. This commitment includes all aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion, including providing leadership to eliminate systemic oppression. This kind of commitment requires acknowledging our historical contributions to oppression, leveraging that knowledge as education to inform transformative change that promotes full access to individual rights and privileges for all people.

In the process of their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, many institutions of higher education have uncovered historical markers of their past that perpetuated slavery or other pervasive acts of racism and oppression. Rider University is one of those institutions. As an institution, we want to take a proactive stance in researching and understanding this history and leveraging it in educational opportunities as we develop leaders who are "lifelong independent learners and responsible citizens who embrace diversity, support the common good, and contribute meaningfully to the changing world in which they live and work."

# Background

The Task Force on Rider and the History of Slavery (TFHS) convened in the summer of 2020 and had its first meeting on August 18, 2020. The committee included members from faculty, staff, alumni, and current students of the University. The task force committee met several times during the summer and early fall of 2020. The President, Greg Dell'Omo, requested a report by the end of October 2020.

# Membership

- » Lisa Arnold-Dempsey, Executive Assistant
- » Karen Bogнар, Associate Director of Advancement Services
- » Bob Congleton, Associate Professor, Librarian
- » Leanna Fenneberg, Vice President for Student Affairs
- » Adam Grybowski, Director of Communications
- » Brooke Hunter, Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences (co-chair)
- » Jerome Manning, Rider Student
- » Eugene Marsh, Doctoral Candidate, Veterans Affairs Review Board, and Rider Alumnus I
- » Cynthia Martinez, Assistant Professor of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures
- » Evelyn McDowell, Chair and Associate Professor of Accounting (co-chair)
- » Pam Pruitt, Executive Director, Center for Diversity and Inclusion
- » Wright Seneres, Princeton Entrepreneurship Council, Rider Alumnus
- » Dana Walcott, Rider Student

# Approach

To accomplish the charge, we implemented a four-step process. First, we met to review the history of slavery in New Jersey and Lawrence Township. We also discussed the known history of slavery relating to the Lawrenceville campus, including what we know about Benjamin Van Cleve and his property. Second, we met to discuss the plan to research how other universities and institutions handled their response to known or newly discovered history related to slavery (Appendix I). We divided the task force into two groups—one researched universities' reactions and the other investigated museums/historic houses. The third step consisted of two meetings to recommend and finalize our proposed actions. In the final step, we prepared the report. The scope of our analysis was narrow. We only focused on the Lawrenceville campus. We did not evaluate or review the history of the Princeton campus or the Westminster Choir College history. We did not analyze Rider's founders and early leaders' financial holdings or its prior institutions' organizers' actions.

The committee briefly discussed obtaining the views and opinions of various stakeholders by holding listening sessions and convening focus groups. We quickly realized that we needed to educate everyone before gathering their opinions—something we were not prepared to do, given the limited time allotted to the task force. We met with the Black Student Union and a member of Black Men United, two groups representing many students of recent African descent. The task force ultimately concluded the University should, at some point, gather the opinions and views of its major stakeholders.

## Established historical facts about Rider University and its connection to slavery

New Jersey's historical record documents the ruthless cruelty of American chattel slavery and the falsehoods of black inferiority and white superiority. Individuals of African descent, including infants and children, were bought and sold for hundreds of years. They were counted as property on tax lists, wills, and probate inventories. They were stripped of their basic human rights and ability to protect themselves by the laws of the country and by men and women who were focused on building wealth. Enslaved people sought freedom in the courts, staged uprisings, and self-liberated by escaping. English colonists and new Americans created and supported laws to enforce the unnatural ownership of humans based on the freedom status of their mothers and the ability of mankind to create hierarchies of the human species. Out of the struggle to subdue individuals of African descent and some individuals of indigenous heritage, the ideas of white superiority emerged, setting the nation on a continued path of racial subjugation and discrimination for centuries to come.


The Van Cleve House and the surrounding property ties Rider University to this ugly history and our nation's current realities. Benjamin Van Cleve (1739-1817) was a slaveholder who owned and operated the land as a plantation from ca. 1773-1817. The Van Cleve House was part of the property Rider purchased in 1956 for its new Lawrenceville campus. The University first used the building as a student residence in the early 1960s. In 1969, it was renovated and became the College Admissions office. In 1993, the admissions office moved out and the alumni relations office moved in. It was always called the Van Cleve House by Rider.

What follows is a preliminary summary of what we know about Benjamin Van Cleve and the enslaved people he owned. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, major sources of information like the New Jersey State Archives were closed. Many outside of the historical profession may be surprised by the limits of the archival record. We do not have personal papers for Benjamin Van Cleve, such as letters, diaries, or account books to recover his views about slaveholding or the experiences of those he enslaved. Public records such as tax assessments, census returns, and wills and probate inventories provide a significant source of information but leave many questions unanswered. We are committed to collecting as much information as we can from archival sources and using the scholarly literature to situate the fragmentary evidence into the fullest, most accurate account possible.

Appendix II provides a timeline of Rider's connection to slavery set in the context of New Jersey history.

**Benjamin Van Cleve.** Van Cleve was a Revolutionary War officer and New Jersey statesman who forces us to confront the paradox of liberty and slavery in American history. Van Cleve was born in Maidenhead Township, New Jersey (now Lawrence) in 1739. He purchased the property in the early 1770s, where evidence confirms he held enslaved people. Benjamin was not the only member of his family to enslave others. His brother Aaron, also a Maidenhead resident, was also a slaveholder.

Tax records from 1778, 1779, 1786, and 1799 report that Van Cleve owned at least one enslaved male in each of those years. Taxes do not provide a full record of Van Cleve's slaveholding because assessors only assessed male slaves fit to work between the ages of 16 and 50. Tax assessments do not tell us how Benjamin Van Cleve acquired these enslaved persons or the conditions of their daily life under his mastery. A further reminder of the dehumanization of slavery, their names are unknown. A runaway slave advertisement published in the New Jersey Gazette provides evidence that Van Cleve also owned at least one enslaved woman named Dinah. As America battled Britain for independence, on December 26, 1778, Dinah risked the perils of escape for her freedom. The ad described Dinah as seen through her master's eyes, "A Negro WENCH... 28 or 30 years of age, five feet six or seven inches high, black and very lusty." The last phrase in the 18th century suggested she was



strong and healthy. Van Cleve did not want to lose his investment in such a valuable slave and offered a substantial reward of 30 pounds for her capture. In addition to a description, the ad also included information about her previous owners. Van Cleve recently purchased Dinah from Rev. Jacob Van Arsdale of Springfield, New Jersey, located in Essex County about 50 miles away. She formerly lived in Rocky Hill, about 11 miles away near Princeton. The ad suggested she may be heading to a brother residing with Col. Nathaniel Scudder in Freehold, about 30 miles away. Dinah experienced continuous disruption and insecurity due to being sold multiple times and endured the wrenching separation from her family. It is unknown whether she escaped or was forced back into bondage.

Court records reveal that at the time of Van Cleve's death in 1817, several Black people resided in the Van Cleve household. An unnamed Black woman and boy, and a bound girl named Abigail Coulter whose race we cannot determine yet. Additional research may reveal more about these individuals.

## Recommendations

As a task force, we recommend a comprehensive response to the history of slavery connected with Rider University that has been discovered. We promote a genuine and sincere response about our intent to honor the lives of those who were enslaved and their descendants and use this history as a vehicle to educate the campus community about the history of slavery as it relates to ongoing means of oppression to black people in America. Our response should reinforce our institutional commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion, advancing the goals outlined in the Inclusive Excellence Plan and other strategic University documents.

In summary, the task force made recommendations in five areas: Commitment/Implementation, Building Name, Memorialization, Community Feedback, and Education. The recommendations included extending the task force and revising its charge to implementation; creating a budget for proposed actions; concluding buildings should not carry the name of enslavers, memorializing people enslaved on the grounds of the campus with remembrance ceremonies and scholarships, creating focus groups to further specify recommendations from Rider's immediate communities, and creating educational content about the history of slavery and the Rider's ties to it while being intentional about providing context to slavery's impact today.

## Commitment/implementation

- » To the extent applicable, Rider's administration should proclaim culpability surrounding its inaction and delays in discovering and acknowledging its connections to the history of slavery.
- » Extend the task force to implement actions. Additional members will be recruited as needed.
- » Align actions with the Inclusive Excellence Plan.
- » Develop a budget and fundraising plan.

## Naming

- » Change the name of the Van Cleve House so as not to honor an enslaver; however, we should consider acknowledging the complicated history of Benjamin Van Cleve.
- » Do not use the renaming of the house for fundraising.
- » Develop a framework for considering new revelations about the University's history and criteria for changing or maintaining the names of buildings.

## Memorialization

- » Support the adoption of historical markers placed around the campus, including in or near the building currently named Van Cleve House, to memorialize and recognize the enslaved people terrorized and brutalized on the land.
- » Create programming related to memorializing the enslaved people who suffered under the evils of colonial and United States slavery, including Dinah (name of an enslaved woman enslaved by Benjamin Van Cleve) that engages student groups and the local community.
- » Create a scholarship (e.g., named in honor of Herbert Hubbard, first confirmed African American student at Rider).
- » Establish a Student Award for race and social justice activism.



## Community feedback

- » Conduct focus groups with campus and local community members to inform planning and implementation.

## Education/research

- » Continue archival research on Benjamin Van Cleve and the enslaved people he owned.
- » Develop University webpages outlining Rider's connection to the history of slavery.
- » Create an exhibit on the history of slavery in Van Cleve House.
- » Establish a lecture series to address the history and legacies of slavery in today's society.
- » Establish a Postdoctoral Fellowship to support research and teaching on racial inequality/systemic racism in the United States and to recruit recent Ph.D. graduates from underrepresented groups into faculty positions.
- » Encourage undergraduate research on the history of slavery and its continuing legacies, including systematic racism, through classes and engaged learning.
- » Collaborate with Lawrence Township schools on a community project on the history of slavery.
- » Perform additional research about the university's founding and its early board members, administrators, and donors.

## Communication strategy

- » Develop an internal and external communication strategy using the Inclusive Excellence Plan as a model.
- » Publish articles in *News@Rider* and *Rider magazine* to keep the community informed.
- » Present to Cabinet and Board of Trustees.

## Appendix I: Best practices on institutional responses related to their connection with slavery

To gain a better understanding of how other institutions have addressed the history of slavery. These best practices guided our recommendations.

### Colleges/Universities

The subcommittee reviewed how thirteen universities addressed their troubled history of slavery. The following universities were included in our review: Brown University, Georgetown University, Princeton University, Virginia Theological Seminary, Columbia University, Yale University, Rutgers University, University of Pennsylvania, University of Virginia, Davidson College, Stockton University, Princeton Theological Seminary, and TCNJ. Each committee member reviewed 1-3 universities. The review of institutional responses informed the following categorical task force recommendations:

1. Create multiple responses to unfavorable history and connections to slavery—no one particular approach.
2. Engage all segments of the community in responding to history.
3. Create readily accessible information such as an educational website and other types of social media to inform the public of past and present actions.
4. Consistent actions—creating a process of continuous dialog with students
5. Formally acknowledge how the institution benefited from the institution of slavery and stolen labor of enslaved persons.
6. Create an infrastructure and framework necessary to address new information from the continuous discovery of new data.

7. Support and encourage ongoing research, teaching, learning, and programming related to understanding the impact of slavery and racism, its outgrowth.
8. Acknowledge its roles in supporting and perpetuating harms caused by the institution of slavery and its continuing legacies, including systematic racism.

### Historic Sites/Museums

The subcommittee reviewed the President's House (Philadelphia), George Washington's Mount Vernon, James Madison's Montpelier, Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, John Brown House (Rhode Island), National Museum of African American History & Culture. Each committee member reviewed one site. The review of historical sites/museums informed the following categorical task force recommendations:

1. Interpret the site from the perspective of the enslaved people who lived and worked there and update the interpretation through continuous research.
2. Create a memorial space/ceremony to contemplate the tragedies that enslaved people endured.
3. Involve descendants of enslaved people who lived and worked there.
4. Confront the paradox of liberty and slavery in that place/person and in the nation's history.
5. Address the legacy of slavery through the present day to engage in dialogue and deepen the national conversation about systemic racism and racial justice.
6. Engage and educate visitors through a range of experiences on-site and online (i.e., exhibits, tours, lectures, performances, archaeology, video, website, K-12 curriculum, publications).
7. Build community partnerships to educate the public about the history of slavery in America and why it is relevant today.

## Appendix II: Historical timeline of slavery in New Jersey

### PRE-CONTACT & EUROPEAN CONQUEST

New Jersey's indigenous inhabitants are known as Lenape or Lenni Lenape. The first recorded contact with Europeans took place in 1524. A century later the Dutch and Swedes established settlements. English colonization had a devastating impact on the Lenape, who were already reduced by European diseases. English settlers from New England, New York, and across the Atlantic dispossessed the Lenape of their lands. A group of Scots-Irish Presbyterian families from Newtown, New York founded Maidenhead (now Lawrence Township) in 1697.

### EARLY 1600S -1800

The Dutch introduced slavery to the region and it expanded after the English took control of the colony in 1664. By the 18th century, seventy-five percent of New Jersey's enslaved people lived in the six counties of Bergen, Essex, Somerset, Middlesex, Monmouth and Hunterdon.

*Note: Maidenhead was part of Hunterdon County at this time.*

### SEPTEMBER 30, 1739

Benjamin Van Cleve was born in Maidenhead (now Lawrence Township). He served as a captain and major in the First Hunterdon militia during the Revolutionary War and fought in the Battle of Long Island in 1776. He left the army on November 13, 1777 after being elected to the New Jersey Assembly where he served almost continuously until 1802. He was elected Speaker of the Assembly four times (1784, 1785, 1786, 1788). He served as justice of the peace and as a judge on the Court of Common Pleas for Hunterdon County. He also led Maidenhead's government (1804-1808).

<b>BETWEEN 1770-1798</b>	What is now the Van Cleve House was built. According to Charles Tichy, former historic restoration architect for the State Division of Parks and Forestry, the house was built in the last quarter of the 18th century. (see report dated 1972). Benjamin Van Cleve acquired the property by 1773. According to John Van Cleve's 1772 will, Benjamin's brothers Aaron and Joseph inherited their father's property and were to pay him £400. At the time of his death, John's estate did not report enslaved people among his property. In 1799, Aaron (275 acres) and Benjamin (254 acres) were the 6th and 7th largest landholders in Maidenhead. Wheat and other grains such as rye, buckwheat, oats and corn were grown for markets in Philadelphia and New York, Europe, but most shipments went to the Caribbean to feed enslaved individuals toiling on sugar plantations.
<b>1778, 1779, 1786, 1799 TAX</b>	Benjamin Van Cleve was taxed for owning one enslaved man. Tax lists provide an incomplete record of slavery because only enslaved males fit to work between the ages of 16 and 50 were assessed. Thus, tax lists undercounted slaves and slaveholders by exempting all females, boys under 16 and some men.
<b>DECEMBER 31, 1778</b>	Runaway ad placed by Benjamin Van Cleve to recapture an enslaved woman named Dinah, age >30 years old.
<b>1790 FEDERAL CENSUS</b>	11,423 enslaved people in New Jersey; 1,301 in Hunterdon County <i>Note: Mercer County was created in 1838, prior to that time Maidenhead/Lawrence was part of Hunterdon County.</i>
<b>1800 FEDERAL CENSUS</b>	12,422 enslaved people in New Jersey; 1,220 in Hunterdon County <i>Note: Mercer County was created in 1838, prior to that time Maidenhead/Lawrence was part of Hunterdon County.</i>
<b>FEBRUARY 1804</b>	New Jersey Legislature passed "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery." It provided that females born of enslaved parents after July 4, 1804, would be free upon reaching 21 years of age, and males upon reaching 25. These children were "bound out". In effect, the 1804 Act created slaves for life and term-slaves. However, their daily lives were indistinguishable. Like the laws in Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New York, it was designed to compensate slaveholders for their lost property through forced labor.
<b>1810 FEDERAL CENSUS</b>	10,860 enslaved people in New Jersey; 1,119 in Hunterdon County <i>Note: Mercer County was created in 1838, prior to that time Maidenhead/Lawrence was part of Hunterdon County.</i>
<b>AUGUST 3, 1817</b>	A bound girl named Abigail Coulter, 16 years old, and a nameless Black woman and boy lived in the Van Cleve household, according to court records. These individuals could be enslaved residents of Benjamin Van Cleve.
<b>AUGUST 31, 1817</b>	Benjamin Van Cleve dies. After Van Cleve's death, his two daughters contested his will, which gave the property to his son Joseph. Though the courts ruled in Joseph's favor, the price of litigation ultimately cost him the farm.
<b>1820 FEDERAL CENSUS</b>	7,557 enslaved people in New Jersey; 616 in Hunterdon County <i>Note: Mercer County was created in 1838, prior to that time Maidenhead/Lawrence was part of Hunterdon County.</i>
<b>1824</b>	Joseph W. Van Cleve sold the property and moved to Trenton. The property passed through several different owners, including Thomas C. Sterling (Trenton merchant), Andrew Allison, Elias Wampole (Trenton merchant), Rev. William W. Phillips (New York), and Thomas Roach (farmer).

**1830 FEDERAL  
CENSUS**

2,254 enslaved people in New Jersey; 172 in Hunterdon County;  
13 in Lawrence Township

*Note: Mercer County was created in 1838, prior to that time  
Maidenhead/Lawrence was part of Hunterdon County.*

**1840 FEDERAL  
CENSUS**

674 enslaved people in New Jersey; 22 in Mercer County (est. 1838);  
2 in Lawrence Township

**APRIL 18, 1846**

New Jersey Legislature passed "An Act to Abolish Slavery". Under this legislation, the status of a slave was converted to that of an apprentice bound to serve his or her present owner or his or her executors. Despite this law, individuals continued to be listed as "slaves" on the 1850 and 1860 federal censuses.

**1850 FEDERAL  
CENSUS**

236 enslaved people in New Jersey; 6 in Mercer County;  
3 in Lawrence Township

**1854-1910**

The house took on its current form during Benjamin White's ownership. The house was renovated by local carpenter Eli Matthews around the time of the Civil War. It is an unusual example of Italianate Style and shows no evidence of having been an eighteenth century house. It has a distinctive curved roofline and decorative trim. In the 1970s, Charles Tichy inspected the property. He noted that internally there was clear structural evidence that the current house was cleverly constructed around an earlier building.

**1860 FEDERAL  
CENSUS**

18 enslaved people in New Jersey; 1 in Lawrence Township. Sylvia Hunt, born ca. 1765 resided in the household of A. Price Lanning.

**1861-1865**

The American Civil War is fought to end slavery.

**DECEMBER 6,  
1865**

The 13th Amendment abolished the institution of slavery in the United States, freeing more than 4 million people. New Jersey had rejected the amendment on March 16, 1865, later ratifying it on January 23, 1866.

**SEPTEMBER  
14, 1956**

The Van Cleve house was part of Harry Pate's 140 acre Glenburnie Farm, which Rider purchased in 1956 for its new Lawrenceville campus.

Source: United States Federal Census data is from Giles R. Wright, *Afro-Americans in New Jersey: a short history*. (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1989), Appendix 3. County census data is from Peter O. Wacker, *Land and People* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1975), Appendices 1-4. Lawrence Township data is from the United States Federal Census 1830, 1840, 1850, Ancestry.com.

For more information, please visit:

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