

Historical transgressions and Repair Efforts: The Case of U.S. Universities and Ante-Bellum Slavery

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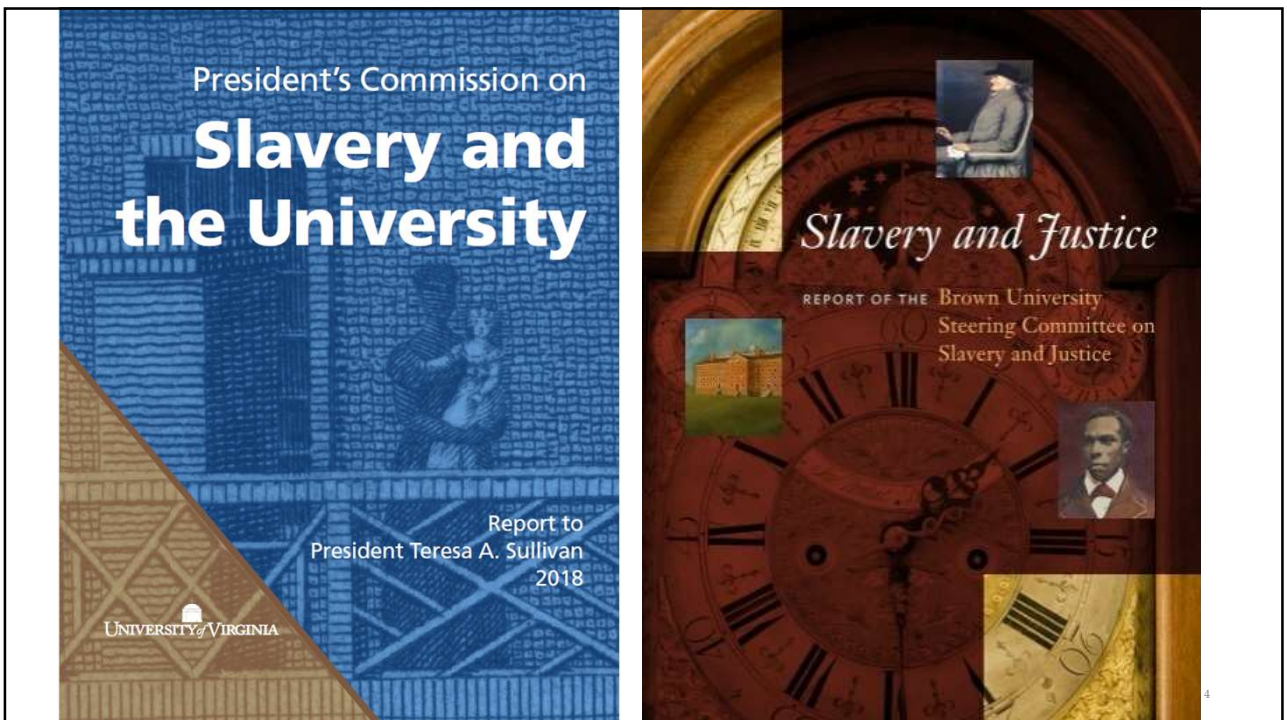
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Research Question

How do organizations restore legitimacy for their historical transgressions?

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Organizational Legitimacy & Transgressions

Legitimacy

“the generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions”

(Suchman, 1995: 574).

- Transgressions erode organizational legitimacy (Pfarrer et al 2008)
- Stakeholders may withdrawal support (Elsbach 2003)
- Legitimacy Restoration models
 - Pfarrer et al 2008
 - Dirks, Lewicki, & Zaheer, 2009;
 - Gillespie & Dietz, 2009;
 - Gillespie, Dietz, & Lockey, 2015;
 - Goodstein & Butterfield, 2010

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Organizational Repair Efforts

- Material Repair
 - Address the consequences
 - Compensation
 - Restitution
 - Rehabilitation
- Symbolic Repair
 - “carriers of meaning” (Megret 2009)
 - Apologies
 - Memorialization
 - Commemorations & rituals



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Sample

Repair efforts across 39 universities	Frequency
Renaming facilities	29
Available information (dedicated project/institutional website, open archives)	24
Task Force or similar body set by Dean or management	21
In campus dissemination	21
Memorialization	15
Promoting research.	14
Historical investigations led by Students	12
Written resolution stating regret / apology / acknowledgement	11
In-campus Inclusion / Diversity policies / racial climate	9
Re-writing of official history	8
Ceremony / commemoration / Annual Day	7
Changes in Curricula	6
Local Community Engagement	4
Engagement with Descendants	4
Engagement with HBCU	3
Supporting access to University by African Americans/ minorities and descendants	1

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Historical Transgressions



- Committed by previous generations of organizational leaders, managers, and/or employees.
- Part of organization's history
 - Overlooked / dormant
- Problematic in present by contemporary stakeholders
- Victims and members of organization gone
 - Repair only by proxies
 - Descendants / activists vs current management

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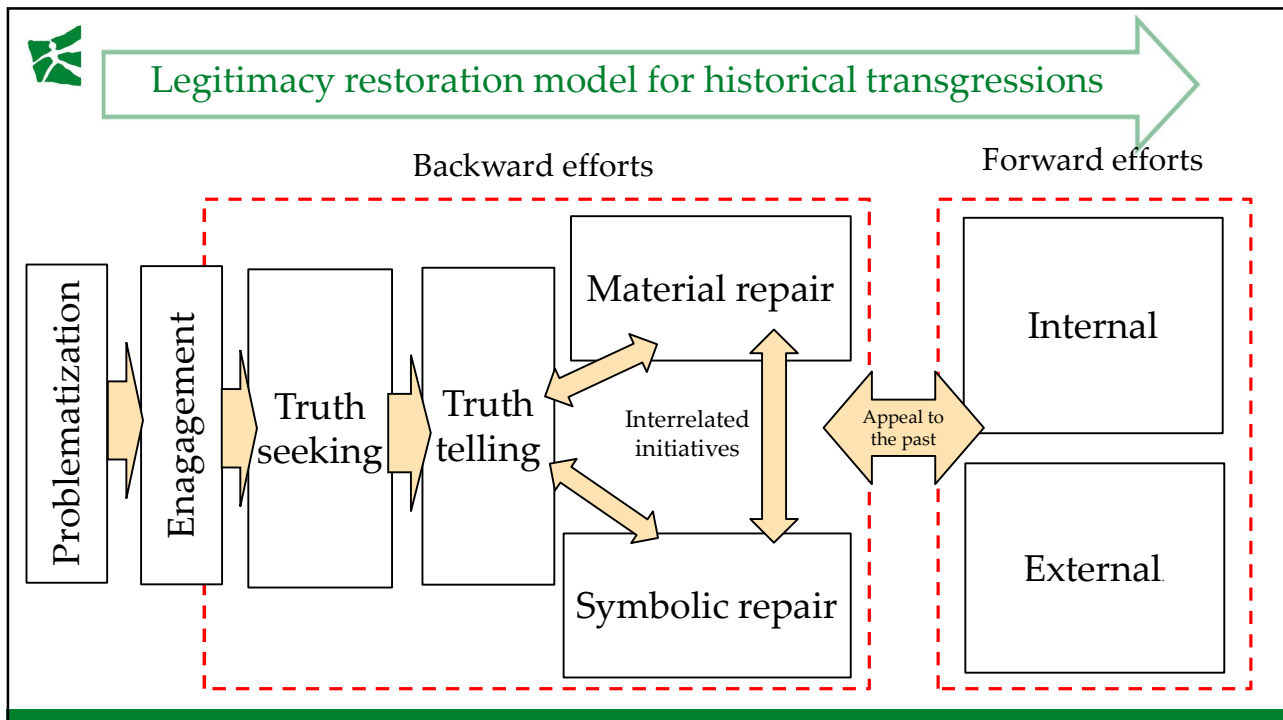
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Methods

- 180 higher education institutions prior 1865
- Past problematized
 - Basic information
 - When, who, how, repair efforts, type of complicity
- 39 Universities responded to problematization
- Deep dive into 9 universities
 - Chronology of 450 events
 - Listed 265 repair efforts
- Secondary sources
- Different rounds of independent coding

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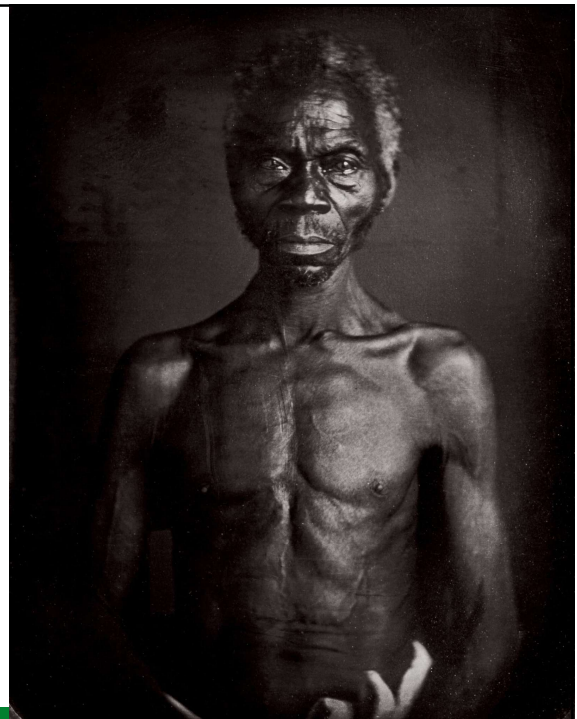
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Conclusion

- Enrich existing models of organizational reintegration
- Conceptualize organizational historic transgressions
- Propose a step-process framework



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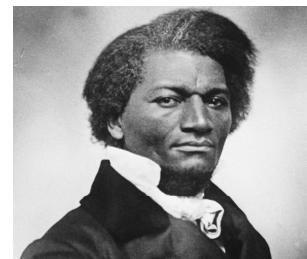
“We have to do with the
past only as we can make
it useful to the present
and future”

- Frederick Douglass

Thank you!

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Back up

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 Findings

- **Problematization**
 - Key role of internal Stakeholders
 - Societal context
 - Brown as the benchmark
 - Re-problematization

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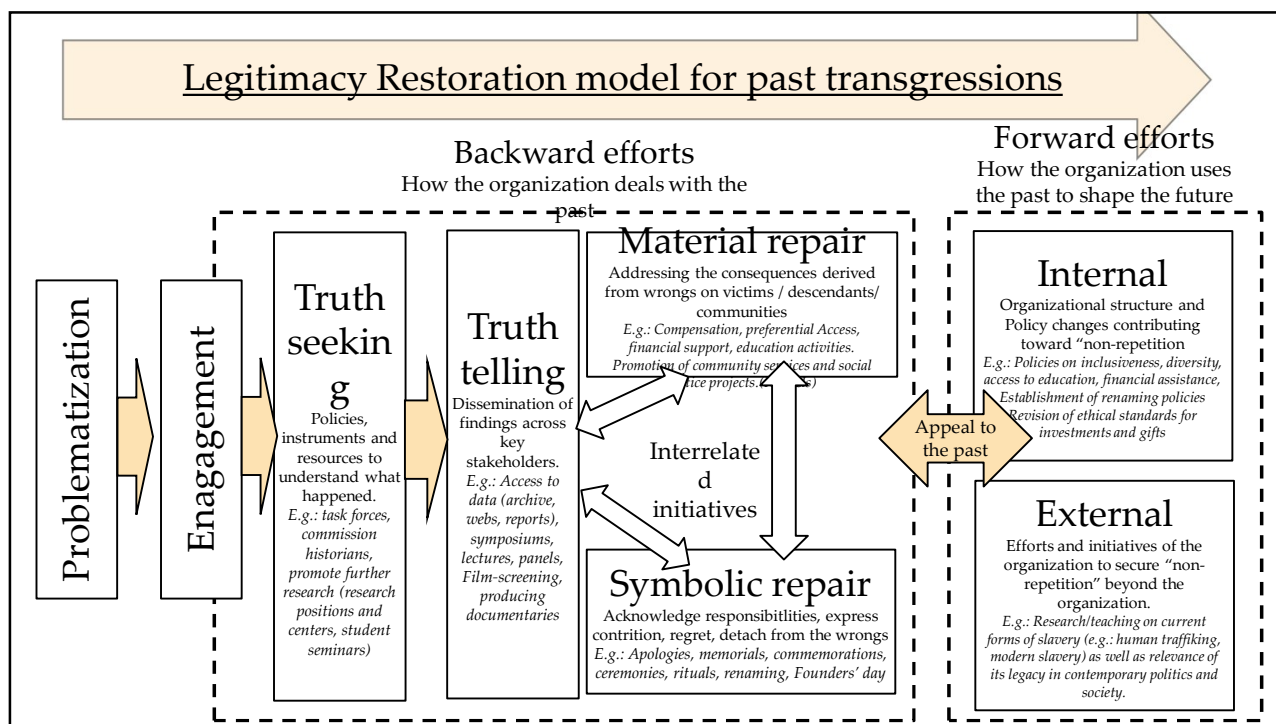
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 Findings

- **Repair efforts**
 - Revealing truth
 - Repair
 - Symbolic
 - Material
 - Non-repetition

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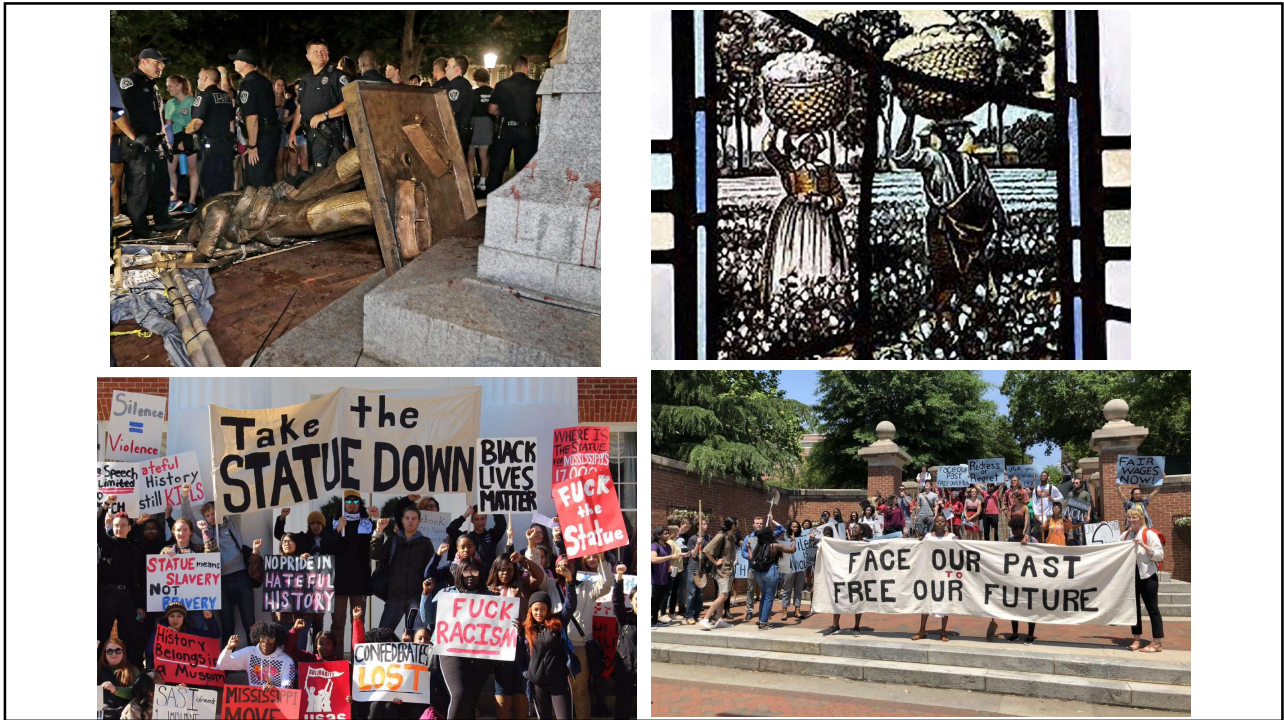
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Sample

University	Founded	State	Slavery Ownership	Students	Problemization	
Brown University	1764	Rhode Island	Free	Private	10,257	2001
Yale University	1701	Connecticut	Free	Private	13,574	2001
University of North Carolina	1793	North Carolina	Slave	Public	30,011	2002
University of Virginia	1819	Virginia	Slave	Public	27,018	2003
University of Alabama	1831	Alabama	Slave	Public	38,563	2004
The College of William & Mary	1693	Virginia	Slave	Public	8,773	2006
Harvard University	1636	Massachusetts	Free	Private	36,012	2011
Princeton	1746	New Jersey	Free	Private	8,623	2013
Georgetown University	1789	District of Columbia	Free	Private	19,005	2014

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