



THE COUNCIL OF
INDEPENDENT COLLEGES

Legacies of American Slavery

Reckoning with the Past

What Will Regional Collaboration Partners Do? A Hypothetical Case Study

Six Regional Collaboration Partners will operate at the confluence of a specific legacy of slavery and a relevant geographic location to promote a deeper understanding of the legacies of American slavery. CIC and the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition (GLC) at Yale University will help each Partner institution pursue a mix of activities related to research, faculty development, undergraduate instruction, and public engagement in cooperation with other colleges and community organizations in the region. Here is a hypothetical example of a Partner in action, with a college or university in the greater Chicago area serving as a regional hub and focusing on the legacy theme of “Race, Place, and Migration.”

Chicago was a major terminus for black Southerners fleeing poverty and oppressive Jim Crow laws during the period known as the “Great Migration.” Between 1916 and 1970, seven million descendants of slaves moved to Northern and Western cities; about 500,000 settled in Chicago. The migrants who made their way to Chicago found greater economic and social opportunities there but also faced significant racism. A legal regime of restrictive covenants and “redlining” by the banks and insurance companies (after 1934), reinforced by the threat of racial violence, kept black residents from buying or renting property in white neighborhoods, not only in Chicago but throughout the North.

Spatial segregation was a legacy of slavery. Despite the end of redlining in the 1970s, this policy has left its own legacy of segregation and depressed homeownership and property values for many African Americans. A Chicago-based Regional Collaboration Partner, working with other colleges and community organizations, could explore this complex history of place-based discrimination while charting its continued impact on Chicago’s minority communities in areas such as public housing, inequality of wealth, predatory lending through subprime

mortgages, and unequal access to quality public education. (Of course, the story of Chicago is exemplary of many other locations, so collaborators could be drawn from many other locations.)

The hardships and the social opportunities experienced by Chicago's African Americans, both during and after the Great Migration, inspired a cultural efflorescence that also must be considered a vital and vibrant legacy of slavery. Black migrants brought Southern culture to their new home in the form of religious practices, traditional foodways (such as barbecue), and music (such as jazz, the blues, and boogie-woogie). Several prominent black literary figures also made their home in Chicago and contributed to the Chicago Renaissance of the 1930s–1950s, including Richard Wright, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Langston Hughes. The Regional Collaboration Partner could host research conferences or faculty development programs devoted to these artists.

There are many CIC member institutions in greater Chicago that could serve as a Partner or an active contributor to the Legacies of American Slavery network. A number of them are already engaged in research, curricular change, and public outreach activities that could support the regional network. Given the density of local CIC member colleges and other educational, historical, and cultural institutions, there would be many opportunities for faculty and student research focused on the Great Migration; the Partner would coordinate and publicize these activities. Fundamental research in the humanities could inform course development across a wide spectrum of disciplines—for example, to create courses on Chicago and other cities in the northern United States that trace the development of urban geography and culture from the Great Migration to the present. The regional Partner would then be a resource to share syllabi, instructional materials, or even students among the participating institutions in the region and the national network.

Just as important, the academic research and teaching could be applied to raise awareness about the legacies of slavery among the broader public, promote public discussions of contentious issues, and explore ways that the legacies of slavery might be addressed through civic action. Potential community partners in the region include many local cultural and civic organizations, including the Chicago History Museum, the Newberry Library, the DuSable Museum of African American History, and the Metropolitan Planning Council (a nonprofit that has done extensive work in calculating the cost of segregation in Chicago while advancing concrete proposals to make the city more equitable). Participating CIC campuses might cooperate with one or more community partners to develop public-facing projects, which

could be shared and archived through a central repository maintained by the Regional Collaboration Partner. These public-facing activities might include:

- Exhibits in a local museum, library, or civic center that invite personal reflection;
- Audio tours of neighborhoods, accessible via mobile phones;
- Short documentary films or podcasts;
- Graphic novels shared in print or digital formats;
- The collection and sharing of oral histories conducted by college students and members of the community;
- The (re)interpretation of public sites through new historic markers co-written by students and community members;
- The digitization and interpretation of archival resources through a public website; and
- Town hall-style presentations and community discussion forums that bring together academic scholars, activists, artists, public intellectuals, museum professionals, and the general public.

The Chicago-based Partner also would be expected to serve as the main point of contact with participating institutions in other parts of the country, to help facilitate an ongoing dialogue and the sharing of ideas and successes across the entire national network. For example, faculty members in the South with a primary connection to a Georgia-based Partner and a primary focus on voting rights, could be invited to a conference in Chicago to share information about the Southern roots of the Great Migration. Or a Partner based in New York City and focusing on the artistic and cultural legacies of slavery could draw upon Chicago-based musicians and regional scholars associated with the Chicago Partner to develop a traveling exhibit about the history of the blues.

The Regional Collaboration Partner would be expected to prepare a schedule of activities and a budget at the beginning of each project year. The GLC staff will provide scholarly resources and guidance for all these activities, as well as opportunities to participate in summer seminars and public history training institutes. CIC could provide funding to support, among other things: released time for a project director; small stipends for faculty members engaged in curricular development; a one- or two-day conference for faculty members from CIC

institutions around Chicago and the Midwest; travel support and other research expenses for students and faculty members at participating institutions; and costs associated with the public-facing activities. CIC also would convene a monthly conference call for project directors from all six regions and periodic webinars for all participants in the Legacies of American Slavery initiative.

For more information about the Legacies of American Slavery project,
please visit www.cic.edu/LegaciesofSlavery.