

## **Proposal For task force to further research into slavery in South Hadley Massachusetts**

Situated in Western Massachusetts, South Hadley was founded in 1775 and is formally identified in censuses as part of Hadley. Many citizens and community members believe the town to be and have always been an abolitionist town. At just the beginning of our research, we ran into many accounts and advocates of the historical sentiment that South Hadley was involved with freeing runaway slaves through the Underground Railroad. While we don't deny this statement and recognize the historical significance, we also aim to bring attention to the existence of Slavery in South Hadley, a topic widely overlooked. There were enslaved people in South Hadley, and while the exact number is unknown we have made efforts to collect names and locations we push for further research and a task force to be formed to investigate further the names and lives of enslaved people in South Hadley and discuss and move for a monument to enforcement the education and knowledge of this history. We believe it is vital to acknowledge and grapple with all parts of history and call for South Hadley to look deeper into their history, specifically with enslaved people. The efforts and difficulties to uncover names and lives of enslaved people in South Hadley points to the historical erasure of the injustices from the town's history.

We propose the initiation of a task force to research, educate and meaningfully memorialize the lives of enslaved people who lived and were enslaved in South Hadley MA. After conversations with Kijua Sanders-McMurty, a co-chair of the Mount Holyoke College's History, Legacy, and Memory task force, it is clear that a task force devoted specifically to this research is important. As we began this project in Professor Auslander's course we had many ideas and as the research continued to pile up and with the semester ending we soon realized certain aspects could not be completed with the time left. This is why we propose a task force to pick up where we left off and continue this research. The information will only be impactful if it reaches people who would benefit from this education, this being South Hadley community members, who are invested in creating and taking action steps towards acknowledging a racist history and moving towards a more anti-racist future.

## **What we already know and advice for continued research- - -**

### **-Enslavement in South Hadley Topical Guide**

*This document and record set intends to collate resources in the Pioneer Valley Area that center around looking for the names of enslaved peoples in South Hadley. This topical guide is a general overview of some of the research avenues that can be used to develop a more thorough understanding of the topic. The aim of this document is to give a starting point for researchers. It should be regarded as a living document, meaning information can be included or excluded as time persists. We welcome suggestions for other collections to include or incorporate as well as general feedback.*

## **How to move forward with research-**

Research in the future should include researching other enslaved peoples besides the ones we have. That includes looking at deeds and probate records to find historical records of enslaved people in local households.

After looking at the most recent census the demographics of South Hadley and several neighboring towns (Hadley, Northampton, Chicopee, and Hadley), were over 85% white and less than 6% black. In research going forward, it would be advantageous to try to dive deeper into the history of South Hadley in hopes of finding black communities, where enslaved and then formerly enslaved people went after, and if they were freed. Acknowledging that this is a predominantly white town is not something to ignore in this history and is also not by coincidence.

## **Monument and inspiration-**

Research needs to be done into the descendants of the enslaved people and if they are still alive they should be consulted in planning any possible monument. Community members especially within the Black community should be involved in the creation of a monument. The monument should be created with the community involved to best meet the needs of the community. There is not much of a Black community in South Hadley therefore neighboring towns and communities should be consulted to address slavery in the larger area of Western Massachusetts. With any consultations with Black communities and individuals, there needs to be a plan for monetary compensation for their time and energy.

Here are some monuments that we believe have a lot of potential and things to use as inspiration and jumping-off points along with our thoughts on them.

A helpful article on reparations is worth giving a look at.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/XAVRQVBEPDYHD9TPE5AZ/full?target=10.1080/15596893.2022.2062829>

**Witness Stones-** <https://witnessstonesproject.org/>



The witness stone project explores and memorializes the lives of people who through historic tragedies and injustices were robbed of lives and proper memorials. They set out to possibly stop people in their tracks, look down, realize what they have just stumbled on, and reflect on this person's life. The interesting element about these is the accessibility, they are in the street, they are in places where some people might not intentionally seek them out, and that is where they succeed in accessibility, they pull people in who did not set out

to engage necessarily. Beginning in Europe, specifically Germany to memorialize Holocaust victims, they were placed usually in front of the last chosen home of the person. In the U.S. in the context of slavery these stones are placed at the place where they were enslaved because their last chosen place of residence was not in the U.S. Also referred to as “Stumbling stones” one objective is that people will stumble over this grave marker in a way, and, then given the size of the stone, forces the audience to kneel to investigate more. The kneeling could resemble that of a prayer position. The act of stepping over someone is also one to make someone pounce. In some contexts this could produce renowned contemplation, however, it is also a possibly triggering moment for someone with generational trauma, to be faced with the reminder of such tragedy when they do not expect it.

Some objections to this type of memorial are that the act of stepping over the stones is viewed as disrespectful and some people may view it as not a proper memorial if you allow people to step over it. This complicated nuance needs to be deeply discussed and consulted with many experts and community members. The decision to put in a memorial similar to the witness stones would need the conscience of knowing the ways people may negatively react to it. The most important aspect of the witness stones is how it would bring the community together, it's not an installation that lives in a museum or a temporal space but something that needs constant engagement and care to stay present.

## **The Legacy Museum- The National Memorial for Peace and Justice**

<https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/>



This museum and memorial in Montgomery memorialize the lives of black people who were brutally murdered by lynching. It offers a space for healing and processing, while also sheds light on a travesty in this country.

## **Brown University, Slavery Memorial**

<https://www.brown.edu/about/public-art/martin-puryear-slavery-memorial>



This memorial at Brown University was created in 2014 by Martin Puryear after the university conducted a study in 2003 into the university's relationship to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This memorial is meant to remember Rhode Island's ties to the slave trade and how the university was built by enslaved and free Black people.

Other things to consider- the landscape and geography of South Hadley are something to take into account when brainstorming possible monuments. In our topical guide, you can find information about locations within South Hadley that have connections to slavery. It is overlaid with the current South Hadley geography. Using modern-day geography with the history of enslavement one could successfully educate and situate this history into residents who are familiar with South Hadley. With this idea of mapping, we have discussed possible online maps and or QR codes to make this information accessible to more.

**We believe that any memorial or installation should serve as an educational opportunity and offer space for reflection and healing. It is also vital that if a memorial is to be installed it is in South Hadley, and for South Hadley residents and neighboring communities.**