

Ebony and Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities

Craig Steven Wilder



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A 2006 report commissioned by Brown University revealed that institution's complex and contested involvement in slavery?setting off a controversy that leapt from the ivory tower to make headlines across the country. But Brown's troubling past was far from unique. In *Ebony and Ivy*, Craig Steven Wilder, a leading historian of race in America, lays bare uncomfortable truths about race, slavery, and the American academy.

Many of America's revered colleges and universities?from Harvard, Yale, and Princeton to Rutgers, Williams College, and the University of North Carolina?were soaked in the sweat, the tears, and sometimes the blood of people of color. The earliest academies proclaimed their mission to Christianize the "savages" of North America and played a key role in white conquest. Later, the slave economy and higher education grew up together, each nurturing the other. Slavery funded colleges, built campuses, and paid the wages of professors. Enslaved Americans waited on faculty and students; academic leaders aggressively courted the support of slave owners and slave traders. Significantly, as Wilder shows, our leading universities were dependent on human bondage and became breeding grounds for the racist ideas that sustained it.

Ebony and Ivy is a powerful and propulsive study and the first of its kind, revealing a history of oppression behind the institutions usually considered the cradle of liberal politics.

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