

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

For Immediate Release:

On These Grounds digital initiative to describe the history of enslavement at colleges and universities receives funding from the Mellon Foundation

[East Lansing, MI, July 6, 2020] The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has awarded Michigan State University (MSU) a grant of \$550,000 to support the first phase of the *On These Grounds* project (<https://onthesegrounds.org/>), a digital initiative to describe the history of enslavement found in archival materials at colleges and universities. A collaboration of teams from Michigan State University, Georgetown University (GU), the University of Virginia (UVA), and the *Omeka* web publishing platform, *On These Grounds* will produce a freely available linked open data model that is robust enough to describe the lived experiences of the enslaved people who lived and labored in conjunction with higher educational institutions.

“We are grateful for The Mellon Foundation’s investment in the work to describe this important history using linked open data,” said Sharon M. Leon, an Associate Professor of History and Digital Humanities at MSU, who will direct the project in partnership with Harriette Hemmasi of GU and Brenda Gunn of UVA. “This approach offers us a way to honor the specificity of the individual lived experiences of enslavement, while also making it possible for historians to step back and develop an understanding of the special kinds of conditions and events that might have resulted from the context of educational institutions.”



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Over the past two decades many institutions of higher education have begun to publicly examine and embrace their historical roles in the injustices and legacies of slavery. Despite the similarities of record types, information sources, and data elements, each institution is taking its own, often duplicative approach to its history. Producing a common, shared approach to documenting, describing, and organizing the data derived from the archival records relating these histories, *On These Grounds* will help expand researchers’ understanding of the lives and experiences of the enslaved across these institutional contexts, and extend the possibility of search and discovery across collections.

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