

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

BACKGROUNDER

A New Path to Atonement

Conflicts have mired the efforts of Georgetown U. and the Jesuits to make amends for their involvement with slavery. Now a more lasting reconciliation may be in sight.

By *Marc Parry*

JANUARY 20, 2019

Maringouin, La.



CLAIRE BANGSER FOR THE CHRONICLE

A street sign is visible acknowledgment of the Maringouin area's past as West Oak plantation, where slaves who were sold to save Georgetown U. in 1838 were sent to work.

In 1838, the Jesuit priests who managed Georgetown University rescued it from debt by selling the enslaved ancestors of people like Joseph M. Stewart. In 2016, Stewart sat down in an auditorium at Georgetown to watch its leaders tell the world how they planned to make amends. Their message left Stewart, a retired food-industry executive, feeling brushed aside.

For Georgetown's president, John J. DeGioia, the event was a chance to [showcase](#) his campus as a model of "the academy at its best." DeGioia had charged a committee with figuring out how to recognize Georgetown's slave roots. He now presented its embossed, dark-blue [report](#) as a call to arms for combating the legacies of slavery. "This is a moment to discover new ways of being a university," he said.

For Stewart, though, this moment should not have been happening. A devout Catholic, he was coming to grips with the reality that Jesuit priests had held his ancestors as chattel in Maryland and then shipped them to Louisiana in a mass sale. Stewart, now 76, and other descendants of the roughly 300 slaves involved in that transaction, known as the GU272, had not been represented on DeGioia's committee. They had implored the president's chief of staff to delay this event until they could be heard. When that failed, Stewart bought a last-minute plane ticket to Washington.

That afternoon, DeGioia vowed that the descendants would play a central role in Georgetown's reconciliation going forward. He laid out plans to rename buildings, establish an institute for the study of slavery, and erect a memorial to the GU272. Most notably, he announced that Georgetown would grant [preferential admissions](#) to descendants of those slaves, treating them akin to the children of alumni.

None of these steps, in Stewart's view, would significantly uplift descendants' lives. When DeGioia solicited questions, Stewart stepped to the front of the auditorium with a group of other descendants. They sought a partnership.

"Our attitude," Stewart told the Georgetown president, "is: Nothing about us, without us."

That confrontation captures the paradox of the university's reckoning. By opening a dialogue with descendants, Georgetown has won a reputation for going further than its peers in the national [movement](#) of colleges wrestling with their ties to slavery. But a gulf exists between Georgetown's rhetoric and the frustrating reality that descendants have faced over the two and a half years they have now been fighting to get Georgetown and the Jesuits to make a far bigger investment in mitigating the impact of slavery. The descendants' own conflicting agendas have only compounded the controversy.

The struggle has escalated to the top of the Roman Catholic Church. A year after Georgetown's announcement, an organization of descendants that Stewart helped establish sent a confidential petition to Rome. Its recipient: the Rev. Arturo Sosa, leader of the nearly 16,000-member order of Jesuit priests and brothers. The GU272 Descendants Association, whose membership has since climbed to about 1,300, pleaded with Sosa to resolve "a great and growing scandal in the church." Their 32-page petition, which has not been previously reported, can be read as a counterreport to the one that DeGioia unveiled at Georgetown.

In contrast with DeGioia's warm public embrace — a [presidential visit](#) to Louisiana, the [ceremonial apology](#) at Georgetown — the petition from the descendants' association detailed how the university and the Jesuits had privately obstructed their requests for "meaningful engagement." For over a year, the petitioners wrote, "we have literally been ignored." The descendants called on Sosa to send outside investigators to the United States. Those officials, they wrote, should study "the physical, social, educational, and economic harm and disadvantages that have resulted from the 1838 sale, continuing down into the present day." And they should help put together an agenda for "reparations and restorative justice" proportionate to that damage.

The descendants also demanded a full accounting of financial dealings connected with this history. Of particular interest: what seemed to have been a private reparations fund that the Jesuits had apparently liquidated around the time a public spotlight began to shine on the Georgetown slavery story.

Reckoning With Slavery

In recent years, scholarship on the history of slavery has leapt beyond academe to force a societal reckoning. This occasional series explores fresh questions scholars are asking as America confronts its history of human bondage.

[A 'Long Overdue Conversation': Do Universities That Benefited From Slavery Owe a Debt to Black Colleges?](#)

[The Scholars Behind the Quest for Reparations](#)

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And then a remarkable thing happened. Rome responded.

That letter from Sosa to Stewart is thought to be the first time since the 1800s that the Jesuits' leader has formally commented on the GU272 in writing. It has set in motion a series of talks whose outcome could be felt far beyond Georgetown. More than 150 years after slavery's abolition in the United States, many colleges and other institutions [grope for answers](#) to the dilemma of how to reconcile their complicity with America's original sin. What the descendants are negotiating might offer a way forward.

In Georgetown's case, the best place to begin thinking about that dilemma is not the university's hilltop campus in the nation's capital. Instead, it's 1,200 miles away, here in southern Louisiana, a half-hour's drive from Baton Rouge, in a rural farming community called Maringouin.

Maringouin is ground zero for the impact of the mass slave sale that saved Georgetown. About 900 of the town's 1,100 residents descend from the GU272, many of whom ended up enslaved on plantations in the area. The descendants in this region hold different opinions on how to redress that past. The more you talk with them, the more it can feel like stepping into a family quarrel.



CLAIRE BANGSER FOR THE CHRONICLE

“My ancestors have lived along this bayou since we came,” says Maxine Crump, at the gravestone of her great-grandfather. She is on the board of the GU272 Descendants Association.

On one hand, you will meet people like Maxine Crump. On a Sunday morning in late October, she leads a reporter to a narrow dirt road beside a dried-up bayou littered with tires.

“This was West Oak plantation,” says Crump, a colleague of Stewart’s on the board of the GU272 Descendants Association. “My ancestors have lived along this bayou since we came.”

Crump, 72, was one of the first major figures to emerge in the current Georgetown drama. A trailblazer in Baton Rouge, she helped desegregate Louisiana State University and later became the first black reporter at a local CBS affiliate. She now runs a [nonprofit group](#) whose educational programs seek to eliminate racism.

The place she visits today does not have a white-columned manor for tourists to see. What it has, on both sides of the bayou, is fields of spear-like sugarcane plants, brown-stalked and green-leaved, each about seven feet tall. The land crawls with bugs — Maringouin means “mosquito” in French — and, hidden from sight, snakes. A breeze carries the sweet-and-sour smell of cane being harvested.

When Crump looks at seemingly benign scenes like this, what she thinks about is the forced laborers, deprived of education, working from sunup to sundown, who enriched the economy of Louisiana and the United States. And then, after slavery, all the ways that society conspired to keep her people from accessing what they had built. The swindling of their land. The sharecropping. The lynching. The subjugation within segregated libraries, hospitals, schools.

Crump also sees how people struggle to discuss all this, even today. People like Robert, an elderly farmer she strikes up a conversation with in a cane field this morning. He’s fine talking about the machine that cuts the cane and the truck that hauls it away. But when a reporter brings up slavery, Crump spots his discomfort. She abruptly thanks him and walks away.

“Don’t get him in trouble,” she says. “It ain’t changed, OK?”

Later, Crump explains that he might have been fired if she hadn’t ended the conversation. She imagines the confrontation: *What are you doing talking about slavery? You don’t like your job?*

The question of why any of this should matter to Georgetown was not something Crump had thought about until three years ago, when she got a call from an alumnus of the university, Richard J. Cellini. At Georgetown, black students had been protesting to change the names of two buildings that honored the Jesuit priests who had orchestrated the 1838 slave sale. Cellini, a technology-company executive and lawyer

based in Cambridge, Mass., became curious about a different aspect of the story: What happened to the slaves?



MARC PARRY FOR THE CHRONICLE

Jessica Tilson, a GU272 descendant, walks through one of the first schools built for black children in the Maringouin area, a tin-roofed structure now long abandoned.

In 2015, Cellini emailed a senior member of Georgetown’s slavery committee to suggest that the university track down the slaves’ descendants. Georgetown had tried, the official replied. But it appeared that all the slaves had “quickly succumbed to fever in the malodorous swamp world of Louisiana,” he wrote, according to a copy of the email Cellini shared with *The Chronicle*. (The sender’s name was redacted.)

Unsatisfied, he founded the [Georgetown Memory Project](#), an independent nonprofit group focused on tracing the lives of the GU272 and finding their descendants. As of

this month, its genealogists have [identified](#) 7,712 direct descendants, about 4,000 of them living.

Crump, a resident of Baton Rouge, was driving to Maringouin to visit her mother on the afternoon that she first spoke with Cellini. She had always wondered how her family first came to Maringouin, and Cellini began to fill in the picture. She was descended from Cornelius Hawkins, a slave whom the Jesuits had sold to a Louisiana plantation at the age of 13. Hearing this, she felt as if her car was moving but she was standing still. She immediately felt love for her great-great-grandfather.

These days, that emotion mixes with frustration. Crump thinks Georgetown and the Jesuits have an obligation to rebuild this town. When the schools here desegregated in the 1960s, she points out, white people began fleeing, taking resources with them. Maringouin is now 86 percent black. The average household income is estimated to be \$59,000 a year, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, compared with \$81,000 nationwide. Nonfamily households — mostly individuals living on their own in Maringouin — fare worse, with an estimated average income of \$24,000. The community's public high school [shut down](#) in 2009. In its place, the school district put in a STEM-oriented academy with selective admissions, which has [struggled](#) to attract students.

The solution to Maringouin's woes? Georgetown should build a private high school here, Crump says, and make it free for descendants. They should also set up a memorial or museum that would attract visitors.

"Anybody who learned how to sell people, must learn how to do what it takes to restore people," she says.

And yet others here see no such duty. Some resent Crump and her group for speaking on Maringouin's behalf. They take offense at visiting reporters who parachute in seeking scenes of poverty. Sure, Maringouin has people living in aluminum-skirted

trailers. But it also has the retired chemist with the brick ranch house and an Audi in the garage.

If you ask Jessica “Millie” Tilson, another descendant, she will tell you that she feels satisfied with what Georgetown has done. Tilson, 37, appreciates the university’s admission of wrongdoing and its faculty’s engagement with the Louisiana descendants. She frequently shows around the journalists, Jesuits, and Georgetown folks who make pilgrimages here. She depicts Maringouin as a place more of community self-reliance than of systemic deprivation.

The descendants of the slaves are offering what might be a way forward. “Our attitude is: Nothing about us, without us.”

She points out what would have been one of the area’s first local schools for black children: a tin-roofed structure, boarded up and tucked beside some woods. She speculates that some of the original GU272 may have built it for their grandkids. That’s how she remembers it growing up around here: black people building what they needed — their own baseball field, their own bar. They hunted and shared the meat with their neighbors. They checked on the sick. They bartered.

Tilson, who now lives in Baton Rouge, does not have an easy life. This morning, she has just come off an overnight shift stocking groceries. She also works a day job at a uniform-cleaning company. She earns about \$50,000 a year and owes \$83,000 in student loans from the degree she earned at Southern University and A&M College. She is a mother of two kids.

Still, she says, her whole family is against monetary reparations. She can’t stomach putting a price on her ancestors’ suffering, just as their enslavers did. As for Georgetown’s building a school in Maringouin, where she still has family, Tilson

thinks the idea makes no sense. There aren't enough kids here. Plus, putting it here would be unfair to those, like her, who left.

Tilson cares deeply about the GU272 history. But much of Maringouin has lost interest in the story. That, anyway, is what you will hear from the mayor who ran the town until recently, Demi L. Vorise.

Tilson's mother, Debra, gets why. People, she says, have concluded that if Georgetown was going to do something for Maringouin, it would have done so by now.

Georgetown, as they see it, is a mostly white college. Should Maringouin's residents depend on white people to save them?

"No," says Debra Tilson, "Maringouin wasn't built like that."

Within Georgetown and the Jesuit hierarchy, two key people are trying to negotiate a lasting reconciliation with the descendants, both of them 56-year-old white men. One is Joseph A. Ferrara, Georgetown's vice president and chief of staff. He is the guy behind the scenes who moves along projects that need management across different parts of the university. Raised in Charleston, S.C., he was a career civil servant before his arrival at Georgetown. He had never worked on racial-justice issues before the slavery project landed in his inbox.

The main Jesuit official collaborating with Ferrara, Rev. Timothy P. Kesicki, has kept a lower profile than Georgetown's leaders. His headquarters, located in a nondescript office building in downtown Washington, is less imposing than the arched hallways of polished stone that a visitor walks to reach Ferrara's space in the presidential suite at Georgetown's Healy Hall. But he may be more critical to whatever becomes of the descendants' ambitions.

To understand why, it helps to know a bit about the nearly 500-year-old order that Kesicki represents. The Jesuits are a centralized group divided into about 70 regions

around the world, each run by a “provincial” appointed by the Rome-based leader, the superior general. As president of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, Kesicki coordinates the provincials’ work in the U.S., including their ties to its 28 Jesuit [colleges and universities](#).

Kesicki has worked with black communities in Detroit, teaching and pastoring in schools. He spent five summers at the Institute for Black Catholic Studies, at Xavier University of Louisiana, in New Orleans. The education at that institute aims to help priests like Kesicki minister to black Catholics, like Stewart, whose faith is often a legacy of church slaveholding.

“This touches at the core part of who I am,” Kesicki says in an interview.

“It’s safe to say ... that Georgetown really owes its existence to the sale of those slaves in 1838.”

It was at Xavier years ago that Kesicki says he came to understand the 1838 slave sale that has lately occupied so much of Ferrara’s time at Georgetown. Jesuit scholars had been publishing articles and books about that history long before the rise of an organized descendant community. They knew the Jesuits had been “among the biggest planters in Maryland,” as Adam Rothman, a slavery historian at Georgetown, describes them in a 2017 [article](#). By the 19th century, Rothman writes, those Jesuits owned about 300 slaves across a series of farms and plantations. “The profits from their labor subsidized the Jesuits’ religious and educational activities,” he writes, “including the Jesuits’ flagship school, Georgetown College.”

But the farms floundered, and the college faced crippling debt. In 1838, Rothman writes, the Rev. Thomas F. Mulledy, head of the Maryland Province and an ex-Georgetown president, arranged to sell the Jesuits’ slaves en masse to two Louisiana planters for \$115,000, or about \$3.3 million today. Mulledy used part of the windfall to

settle Georgetown's debts. "It's safe to say, and rather shocking to understand, that Georgetown really owes its existence to the sale of those slaves in 1838," Rothman, a member of its slavery committee, [has said](#).

The sale that secured Georgetown's future was calamitous for the slaves themselves. The Jesuits' superior general in Rome at that time, Rev. Jan Roothaan, had acquiesced to it only under certain conditions: among them, that families would not be broken up, that the sick and elderly would be cared for, and that all the slaves would be able to continue practicing their faith. None of those conditions were fully met.

Fast forward to 2017. When the current holder of Roothaan's office, Father Sosa, received the GU272 descendants' petition in Rome, with its exasperated account of what they described as stonewalling by Georgetown and the American Jesuits, the document in his hands was different than reparations bids that had come before it in the United States. It was not a legal demand seeking individual monetary payments via the courts. It was a moral appeal for atonement by a church that had baptized their ancestors and then abandoned its pastoral obligations to care for them.

Sosa's reply was prompt and unequivocal. Jesuit enslavement and the 1838 sale "were a sin against God and a betrayal of the human dignity of your ancestors," he wrote to Stewart. He expressed deep concern for the legacy of that history. And he entrusted Kesicki and the U.S. provincials with figuring out a path toward reconciliation.

So how does Kesicki see reparations? Beyond an [apology](#) he offered, do the Jesuits owe any material debt to descendants?

Officials at Georgetown seem to think that *they* owe something. "While we acknowledge that the moral debt of slaveholding and the sale of the enslaved people can never be repaid," the slavery committee's 2016 report said, "we are convinced that reparative justice requires a meaningful financial commitment from the University."

When Ferrara is asked to explain that, he talks about two things. Georgetown, he says, will focus primarily on what it can “realistically and feasibly” do within its mission of teaching and research. Along those lines, he points to the admissions advantage for descendants and a free online [archive](#) of historical materials related to Jesuits and slavery. Ferrara also emphasizes Georgetown’s racial-justice work writ large, such as its programs to study and solve problems like [health disparities](#) and [mass incarceration](#).



ALLISON SHELLEY, THE WASHINGTON POST, GETTY IMAGES

“We pray because we have greatly sinned. And for that we are profoundly sorry,” said the Rev. Timothy Kesicki, president of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, at Georgetown U. in April 2017.

But Kesicki, citing his continuing talks with descendants, prefers to avoid commenting on reparations, except for a general affirmation of his “absolute commitment” to reconciliation.

“The Jesuits have not formulated a statement like that,” Kesicki says of the reparations remarks in Georgetown’s slavery report. “We have to do something,” he adds. “Something has to come out of this.”

His vague answer is notable because some evidence suggests that past Jesuit leaders not only recognized a debt, they also spent a lot of money trying to atone for it. They just didn’t tell people.

The evidence comes from an unpublished thesis that has circulated at the highest levels of Georgetown and the Jesuit order. It was written in 2015 by a Jesuit seminarian, Sean Toole, who at the time was pursuing a master’s degree in theology at Santa Clara University and who is now a priest teaching at a Jesuit high school in Baltimore. Toole’s thesis, obtained by *The Chronicle*, describes how in the early 1960s the Maryland Jesuits sold property that had been part of a plantation where many of the GU272 were born. They knew the land’s history. And so, Toole writes, the province wanted to use proceeds from the sale “to offer private and unrecognized restitution for its history of slave holding.”

This so-called “secret apology” — Toole’s words — took the form of an account called the Carroll Fund that was set aside to finance the education of poor, mostly black students in Jesuit schools. At the time Toole carried out his research, which drew on interviews with Jesuit officials in Maryland, the fund was worth about \$10 million.

Here’s how it worked. The province, Toole writes, gave lump-sum payments to each of its 10 secondary and pre-secondary schools. The schools vowed to spend the money for needy students. The students who got the money could use it only for tuition. And neither the students nor the schools were made aware of the money’s origins.

The Maryland Jesuits apparently liquidated the fund around the same general period that Georgetown’s slavery committee and *The New York Times* began to [focus](#) public attention on the GU272 story. The province disbursed \$1 million to each of its schools,

according to the descendants' petition to Rome. The timing of that step has raised suspicions that the Jesuits may have cashed out to prevent the GU272 descendants from making claims on the money.

Evidence suggests that past Jesuit leaders not only recognized a debt, they also spent a lot of money trying to atone for it.

The Carroll Fund proves that the Jesuits felt a need “to try to reconcile themselves with the wrong that had been done,” says Stewart, whose descendant association’s petition sought access to the fund’s records.

“Except that it had these ill elements of self-dealing,” he says. “And it only served to strengthen their own institutions. And it did nothing to uplift descendants who had been those the harm had been done to.”

Toole declined to be interviewed on the record, referring questions to Kesicki. Asked about the Carroll Fund, Kesicki provided *The Chronicle* with a written statement from the Maryland Province. It says the province has “no recorded statement describing the purpose for the founding of the Fund.” But it notes that the Jesuits, in an era of national concern over civil rights and racial equality, used the money to make their schools “a viable option for racial minorities.” That remains the aim of the fund under its current management by the individual schools, the statement says.

The Carroll Fund’s 1960s-era creators would not have construed what they were doing as an explicit atonement for slavery, Kesicki says. And its modern-day stewards did not liquidate the fund to keep the money from the GU272 descendants, he says. They divided the money among the individual schools in the context of a national Jesuit restructuring process that will merge the Maryland Province with those of New York and New England in 2020.

The full extent of the Jesuits' entanglement with slavery is still emerging. Cellini's Georgetown Memory Project, drawing on scholarly research and its own archival sleuthing, estimates that the Maryland Jesuits owned about 1,000 enslaved people between the Jesuits' arrival in Maryland, in 1634, and the state's abolition of slavery, in 1864.

As Jesuit missions spread, so did slaves. The story directly and indirectly touches other colleges, including [Saint Louis University](#), in Missouri, [John Carroll University](#), in Ohio, and the [College of the Holy Cross](#), in Massachusetts. Cellini contends that Jesuit slavery and slave-trading essentially "made possible the entire edifice of Jesuit higher education in America today."

Joseph Stewart thinks he knows a way to reconcile that history. It's a vision that goes back to that afternoon in 2016 when he and his fellow descendants appealed to Georgetown's president for a partnership. But the partnership that Stewart seeks today differs from the one he imagined then.

Stewart quickly realized, he says, that the GU272 Descendants Association was "barking up the wrong tree" at Georgetown. The university would be unlikely to play the marquee role in realizing descendants' ambitions. It wasn't just the unsatisfying slavery report. It was something more basic. Georgetown, he saw, was governed by a board with a fiduciary duty to protect everything involved with its mission. That mission is not mitigating slavery. Georgetown, he says, has no responsibility to answer for the morality of the church.

"Georgetown is an institution — a fine institution — that needs to play a role in supporting the Jesuits," says Stewart, a former Kellogg Company executive, in an interview at his Florida home. "But the burden of this is not theirs. And so I want to stop pretending that it is."

No, the ultimate resolution would come from Rome. But Stewart also confronted another challenge: How could the descendants reach a resolution with Rome, when they themselves were divided?

The GU272 diaspora extends far beyond Stewart's native Maringouin. The opinions that Crump and Tilson expressed in that town only gesture at the breadth of descendants' views. In 2018 a collective of 200 descendants, calling itself the GU272 Isaac Hawkins Legacy Group, staged a [news conference](#) demanding that Georgetown pay them reparations. A third group of about 200 descendants, the Legacy of the GU272 Alliance, enlisted a team of [seven lawyers](#) in its own campaign to achieve an agenda of potential goals that included monuments, scholarships, monetary payments, and life-insurance policies.



EVE EDELHEIT FOR THE CHRONICLE

“Georgetown is an institution — a fine institution — that needs to play a role in supporting the Jesuits,” says Joseph Stewart, a GU272 descendant leader. “But the burden of this is not theirs. And so I want to stop pretending that it is.”

Stewart's petition to Rome had accused the Jesuits and Georgetown of ignoring descendants. To Ferrara, though, it was the emergence of these different GU272 groups that delayed the university's response.

To break the stalemate, Stewart, Kesicki and Ferrara turned for help to the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, an \$8-billion philanthropy whose board Stewart had once chaired. In August, with Kellogg's consultants acting as neutral facilitators, the GU272 descendant groups met privately in Baton Rouge for three days. They emerged, Stewart says, on a path to unification. In November, meanwhile, leaders from Georgetown and the Jesuit provinces gathered in New Orleans for their own private convening. They dug into social-science data on the legacies of slavery and segregation and aired their goals and anxieties. If the plan holds, all parties will face one another in a high-stakes meeting this year.

Under the proposal, descendants would sacrifice personal gain for community self-determination in the future.

The outcome Stewart's side seeks: a \$1-billion charitable foundation that would support the descendants of Jesuit slaves for generations while also working more broadly to mitigate the impact of slavery in America.

Under this proposal, the descendants would sacrifice direct personal gain in the present for community self-determination in the future. They would no longer have to plead with Georgetown or the Jesuits. Instead they would join with representatives of those institutions, along with other philanthropic investors, to run the new GU272 Foundation. Its work would be sustained by a trust fund that would grow from an initial commitment of up to \$800 million from the Jesuits, the Roman Catholic Church, and Georgetown.

Descendants of the Jesuits' slaves could apply to the foundation for money to support their educations — not just at Georgetown, or in Maringouin, but anywhere. The destitute among them could turn to the foundation for help with food, shelter, and medical care.

The foundation, Stewart says, would also invest in wider projects of “truth, racial healing, and transformation.” He won't specify details, saying those would be for the foundation's board to decide. But the spirit of what he has in mind aligns closely with a major Kellogg Foundation [project](#) devoted to uprooting the beliefs that sustain racism. Kellogg's work borrows from the many panels that have sprung up around the world to help countries reckon with systemic wrongs, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that Desmond Tutu led to rehabilitate race relations in post-apartheid South Africa. Since the Ferguson, Mo., unrest in 2014, experts have argued that similar processes can help Americans heal the [wound of slavery](#) and face problems like police [killings of black men](#).

Stewart hopes that universities beyond Georgetown would eventually support the GU272 Foundation. Their motivation, on one level, would be practical. All of America's oldest seats of higher learning were complicit in slavery. Harvard University and the University of Virginia, among others, face [growing pressure](#) to make amends for that history. By investing in the foundation, Stewart says, they could settle the matter once and for all, indemnifying themselves against future claims. More important, he says, they would show leadership in a cultural transformation that will take the next century to achieve. And they would do it together, with a measurable impact, rather than spending their money on memorials and other scattered projects.

Ferrara responds warmly to the general concept Stewart has laid out: the idea of advancing future generations rather than only looking backward at the past. For now, though, neither he nor Kesicki will say much more publicly about the descendants' foundation proposal. The outcome, Stewart expects, will most likely involve Pope Francis.

“This is a tough, hard journey,” says Stewart, placing a hand on his chest. “We are dealing with one of the strongest and longest bureaucracies in the history of mankind, called the Catholic Church. And it is no pushover. And we understand that. But then, too, we believe in the concept of David and Goliath. There’s got to be hope.”

Dan Bauman contributed research to this article.

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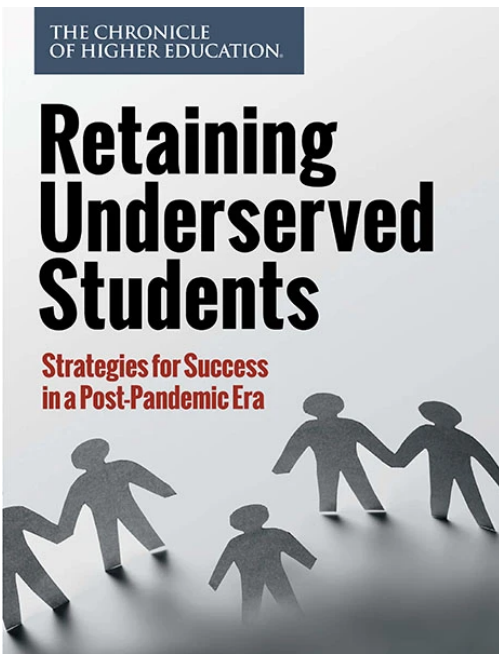
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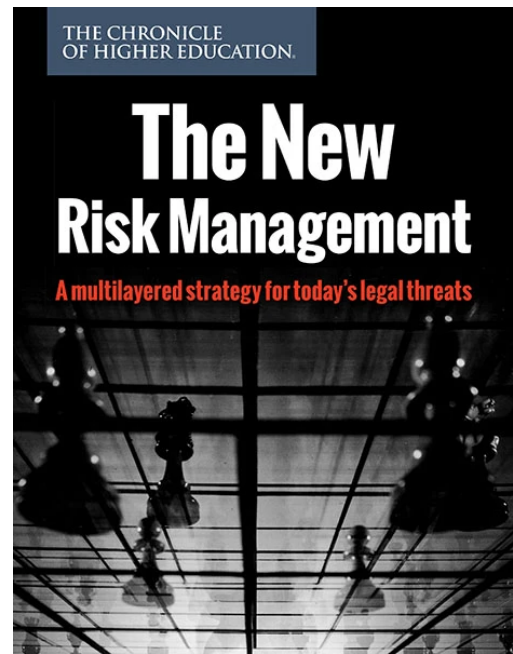
Marc Parry

Marc Parry wrote for *The Chronicle* about scholars and the work they do. Follow him on Twitter [@marcparry](#).

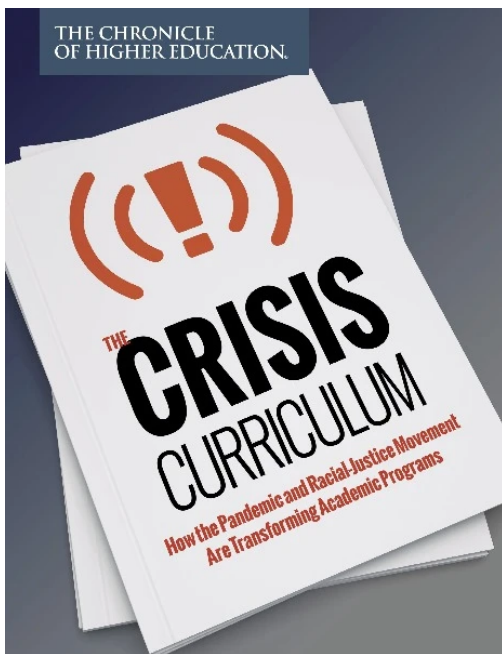
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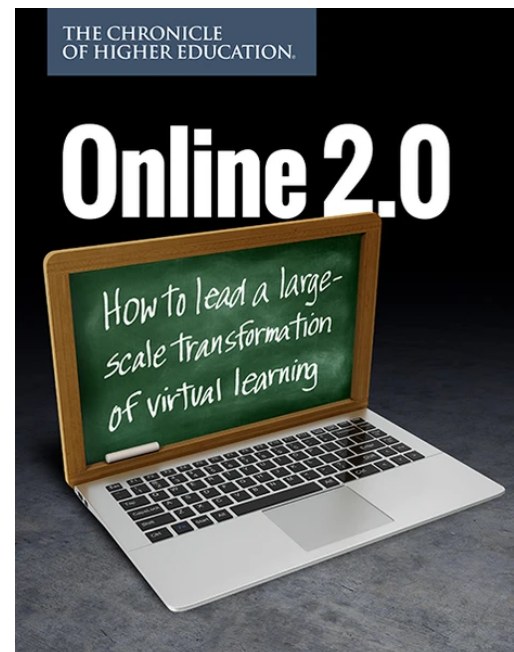
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