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## New website shows genealogy of descendants of slaves sold to benefit Georgetown

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A genealogical organization launched a free website Wednesday to help those who want to learn more about the families of 272 African American slaves sold in 1838 for the benefit of the Jesuit college now known as Georgetown University.

The site, [GU272.AmericanAncestors.org](http://GU272.AmericanAncestors.org), enables users to search for ancestors related to the enslaved people and listen to interviews with dozens of descendants who talk about their experiences in the 20th century in Louisiana and elsewhere.

The site grew out of a collaboration between American Ancestors, a nonprofit based in Boston, and the Georgetown Memory Project, an independent initiative that has sought in recent years to identify the people sold in 1838 and find their descendants.

The university in the District has also taken steps to acknowledge its connections to slavery, particularly the decision by Maryland Jesuits to sell 272 enslaved African Americans to plantation owners in Louisiana. Two of Georgetown's early 19th-century presidents had a role in the sale, and the proceeds were used to help the school pay off debts. The sale had long been known to Georgetown but gained renewed attention starting in 2015.

Since then, the university has been working with descendants of the slaves to make amends for what happened — a process that has been drawn out and at times controversial. In April, Georgetown students voted overwhelmingly for a proposal to create a fund to help descendants of the enslaved people. The measure was nonbinding but drew attention as an important statement in an evolving national debate over reparations for slavery.

Georgetown also maintains a website devoted to archival material about its connections to slavery.

The site unveiled Wednesday is focused on genealogy. Its debut coincided with Juneteenth,

an annual holiday commemorating emancipation, and with the anniversary of a key document dated June 19, 1838, that spelled out terms of the sale.

Richard J. Cellini, a Georgetown graduate who founded the Georgetown Memory Project, hailed the site.

“For the first time ever, members of the African-American community are being given direct access to the tools and information resources necessary to conclusively determine whether they are descended from the enslaved people sold by the Jesuits of Georgetown University in 1838,” Cellini said in a statement. “American Ancestors and the independent Georgetown Memory Project have built and delivered the free public website that Georgetown University and the Maryland Jesuits in good conscience should have built and paid for themselves.”

Georgetown spokeswoman Meghan Dubyak said in a statement that the university has been working for four years “to address its historical relationship to slavery and will continue to do so.” She noted that the university has apologized to descendants of the slaves; renamed a building for Isaac Hawkins, who was the first person named in the 1838 sale; and offered special consideration to descendants who apply for admission to the university.

“We have committed to finding ways that members of the Georgetown and Descendant communities can be engaged together in efforts that advance racial justice and enable every member of our Georgetown community to confront and engage with Georgetown's history with slavery,” Dubyak said. “We are grateful for the efforts that help connect Descendants to each other and to Georgetown University and the Society of Jesus.”