FROM THE FRONT

"I guess the apple don't fall far from the tree"
APPLE CHARLIE XCX

Committee on Yale's slavery ties faded from public view

COMMITTEE FROM PAGE 1

ommendations, but four committee members said the messages did little to convince them their work was picking up steam.

Goff-Crews did not agree to an interview for this article but wrote in an emailed statement that the president's office has made "considerable progress on the recommendations that the president initiated work on." She did not directly respond to questions about Snowden and Ferguson's March 2025 letter or about why the recommendations were never published.

Some committee members blamed Yale's inaction on issues 300 miles away in Washington, D.C.



Surbhi Bharadwaj

The committee worked slowly in its early stages, and few of its recommendations — which were never published — were acted on. Members speculated that President Donald Trump's crackdown on diversity initiatives led to Yale's hushed tone about their work.

A mandate from Salovey, and a 'ghost committee'

After George Floyd's murder by a Minneapolis police officer sparked nationwide protests against police brutality in 2020, Salovey pledged to examine Yale's relationship to slavery and racism. He appointed history professor David Blight to research the history of slavery at Yale, and three and a half years later, Yale University Press published "Yale and Slavery: A History." The book detailed how enslaved laborers built parts of Yale and an 1831 University-led effort to block the creation of what would have been the nation's first Black college, prompting the February 2024 apology from Salovey on behalf of Yale.

In addition to announcing the committee, Salovey detailed Yale-led initiatives to reckon with the University's past, many of which are still active. Those include a teaching program on slavery, partnerships with historically Black colleges and universities and investment in New Haven public schools.

McInnis was announced as Salovey's successor three months later, inheriting many of the diversity initiatives he had championed. She began her role as president that July.

That October, the 14 administrators, professors, alumni, students and staff who comprised the committee gathered to host a listening session for the Yale and New Haven communities. Snowden, an emeritus history professor, and Ferguson, a women's, gender, and sexuality studies professor, estimated that 10 people without a connection to the committee or Yale and slavery project attended.

The committee then went six months without an official meeting, according to a list of committee events provided by Snowden. In February 2025, Snowden convened his own informal meeting, which was attended by around half of the committee's members, to share his concerns about the group's pace and cohesion. The full committee would not meet until April.

"We were a ghost committee," Snowden said.

In the letter Snowden and Ferguson wrote to Goff-Crews and McInnis in March 2025, the pair expressed "deep worries about the progress and operation of the committee."

"We hope that it is clear that our reason for writing is to call upon Yale to enable the CALS committee to fulfill the mission for which it was created," Snowden and Ferguson wrote. "Because of our belief in that mission, we agreed to become members of CALS. To date, however, the committee has been silenced."

Goff-Crews and Snowden had a phone call following the letter to discuss his concerns, according to Snowden. Between April and August 2025, the committee met four times. It held an additional listening session and voted on proposed recommendations for McInnis.

The committee received and considered around 40 proposals submitted by Yale faculty, staff, students and alumni, as well as committee members and New Haven residents, according to a document Snowden provided. The committee ultimately met six times between March 2024 and August 2025.

Nine recommendations, and half an hour with McInnis

In summer 2025, the Committee on Addressing the Legacy of Slavery voted on the top proposals it would recommend to McInnis. The committee trimmed the around 40 proposals to a list of nine, which Goff-Crews assembled in a seven-page report.

The nine recommended proposals were for Yale to partner with tribal colleges and universities, invest in early childhood education in New Haven, create a workforce development program, increase voluntary payments to New Haven, conduct archaeological surveys to find evidence of enslaved labor, search for the descendants of those enslaved by Yale's earliest trustees and donors, study Yale's connection to racism and slavery after 1915, produce an oral history on Black faculty and establish a museum in Woodbridge Hall on Yale's history and ties to slavery.

The committee members met with McInnis at 2:30 p.m. on Oct. 21, 2025, in her private meeting room in Sheffield-Sterling-Strathcona Hall. Goff-Crews gave opening remarks, and committee members presented the first four proposals to the president. They had between two and six minutes per proposal, according to the agenda. The entire meeting was slated for 30 minutes.

"It was not a long meeting, which was a little bit frustrating because there was a lot we wanted to share," Madeleine Keenan '26, one of four students on the committee, said.

University spokesperson Karen Peart and Goff-Crews did not directly respond to the News' questions about committee members' criticism of the meeting's length. Goff-Crews wrote that McInnis "met with the committee to thank them for their work, which is the norm for presidential committees."

The $200 million proposal killed by McInnis' office

The recommendation on early childhood education came from a group of professors associated with the Henry Koerner Center for Emeritus Faculty, which offers fellowships and office space for retired faculty. The center's social advocacy group, which Snowden is a member of, had pitched a 19-page plan to the committee for a Yale-sponsored center to invest in early childhood education in New Haven.

The plan said the center would serve as reparations for Yale's role in blocking the proposed Black college in New Haven in 1831 and its involvement in eugenics. It would cost $200 million to endow the center, and a five-year pilot program would cost around $7.5 million, according to the plan. In January 2026, three months after the committee met with McInnis, Snowden met with Matthew Tanico GRD '13 '14 '17, the strategic project manager for McInnis' initiatives, and Linda Mayes, the director of the Yale School of Medicine's Child Study Center, to discuss the childhood education plan.

But over the summer, it became clear to the Koerner Center group that their project would not be moving forward, according to Snowden, Angela Crowley and Jody Sindelar, who are all emeritus professors in the center's social advocacy group.

On July 7, the group met with Mayes and Tanico in the Koerner Center's seminar room to discuss why. The three professors said they argued for the financial viability of the Koerner Center's plan, why it was a moral imperative to invest in addressing Yale's ties to slavery and why early childhood education was one of the best outlets for reparations.

Snowden asked if there was anything wrong with the proposal. Tanico told them the center for investment in early childhood education no longer aligned with Yale's priorities, the professors said.

Instead, Tanico told them that the University would move ahead with a different plan created by Mayes' Child Study Center, the professors said. That plan is a consulting model to help improve early childhood educators and familial support, according to an April version of the plan reviewed by the News.

Crowley said Mayes' plan is a "valuable program" but estimated it would cost between $300,000 and $500,000 over three years — well under the $200 million sticker price for the Koerner Center's plan. Mayes declined to comment on the new plan, citing that it is in the grant review process.

Tanico, who did not agree to an interview with the News, wrote in an email that the University dropped the proposal because of financial constraints and that he had already told Snowden in a June email that the plan was too expensive.

"The Child Study Center provides a strong foundation from which to build a meaningful initiative that reflects the priorities CALS approved," Tanico wrote.

McInnis said in an interview last week that she was aware the Koerner Center's proposal was not moving forward.

Stalled progress on other recommendations

In an August 2026 email to committee members, Goff-Crews provided updates on where the top-ranked recommendations stood. On the proposal to increase support for tribal colleges, Goff-Crews wrote that McInnis and her chief of staff had met in June with the chief of the Mohegan tribe to "set the groundwork for further engagement and consultation on a renovation project that the Yale museums will undertake."

The committee's recommendation does not mention a museum and instead proposes collaboration on research and a fly-in program for prospective graduate students from tribal colleges.

Goff-Crews also wrote that McInnis' office had explored a "community-based policing workforce development program" but that efforts faltered because New Haven police hiring increased. The committee had floated workforce development programs in medicine or law enforcement.

In her October statement to the News, Goff-Crews said Yale is "exploring" a workforce development program modeled on the Yale Teaching Fellowship, a $10 million investment from Yale across four cohorts of teachers to help address New Haven's teaching shortage.

Goff-Crews has sent the committee two updates on their recommendation to increase support for New Haven. In an email after Yale announced an increased voluntary contribution to New Haven, Goff-Crews lauded Alexandra Daum, a committee member and Yale's associate vice president for New Haven affairs, for her role negotiating the contribution on behalf of the University. Her August email also congratulated Daum for helping set up a roughly $4.8 million fund for New Haven nonprofits.

Daum, in a statement provided by Peart, downplayed the role of the committee's recommendation, writing that the committee "did not factor into" Yale's negotiations and that "support for non-profits is not new and was not motivated by a recommendation from CALS."

Ferguson and Snowden said they are not aware of any progress on the committee's other five proposals. Goff-Crews did not address those recommendations in her August email or October statement to the News.

"We look forward to sharing more progress in the coming months," she wrote.

Michael Morand '87 DIV '93, the director of community engagement at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library and a member of the committee, defended the University's work.

"I think we'll hear more from the administration over the next year, and I think we'll continue to hear more from the administration," Morand said in an October interview. "The work sometimes is quick, sometimes is ongoing and I think these are different kinds of priorities."

The shadow of Trump

Committee members said they have noticed a muted tone on diversity initiatives from Yale's administration following President Donald Trump's reelection. As the committee sat dormant through the winter following its inception, Trump returned to the White House and began a crackdown on diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, including those in higher education.

"I doubt that we would be in the same situation, with so few of those recommendations enacted, if it was a different time in history," committee member Sheryl Carter Negash '82 said.

In December 2024, the University ended the Initiative for Faculty Excellence and Diversity. In April 2025, Yale eliminated diversity statements in faculty hiring. The University's diversity initiative, Belonging at Yale, concluded that June, which administrators said was on schedule. Some titles and events have been renamed to remove the words "diversity" or "multicultural."

McInnis said Yale eliminated diversity statements because there was no evidence they worked. Peart wrote in a statement that the Faculty Excellence and Diversity was established as a "short-term effort" and that its processes still support faculty recruitment and retention. She also wrote that after Belonging at Yale concluded, "People working in roles related to those programs had changes in their job scope and responsibility, and some were redeployed to new areas of work or emerging university needs."

Blight said in September that diversity programs at Yale went too far at times but that the pendulum has swung back at breakneck speeds since Trump returned to the White House.

"Peter resigns that spring, Maurie is appointed and then the 2024 election happens. Trump gets re-elected; everything changes," Blight said. "That's why elections matter."

Negash said she hopes Yale will address its historical involvement in slavery again after the 2028 presidential election.

"I'm not going to be the one — if it's within my power — to just let this go, because I think too much work was done, and too much was revealed, and Yale has a debt to pay," Negash said. "I believe in reparations, so hopefully 2028 will be a climate where we can get back to that. I'm willing to wait it out."

Four of the committee members and three emeritus professors said they are unsure whether the Committee on Addressing the Legacy of Slavery's shortcomings were caused by a permanent shift in Yale's priorities under McInnis or a temporary effort to outlast Trump.

"I'd like to be optimistic and say she's trying to protect Yale, but I don't know," Crowley said. "I hope for the country that we have a change in administration and we can start looking back."

Connecticut abolished slavery in 1848.

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