

The Unveiling **Our Little known History**



Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's Dark History:

This is part one in a two-part series.

Few places in Louisville are more visually beautiful than the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Set among gracious homes on Lexington Road, the spacious campus of green rolling hills is enclosed by white wooden fences. It bears the elegant look reflective of an \$89 million endowment. Several of its traditional buildings bear the names of its founders: Boyce College, the James P. Boyce Library and Broadus Chapel. It's no secret that these founding faculty, like many

successful businessmen and clergy of their day, were slave owners. However, at the Seminary, those ties to slavery are deep and very dark. In 2017, amid growing national racial unrest, Seminary President, Reverend Al Mohler requested a thorough investigation into the institution's historic ties to racism and slavery. The results were published publicly, and they were about as bad as you can imagine. Yes, all four founding faculty members owned slaves. Yes, profits from chattel slave sales were used to found and maintain the school. Yes, founding trustees also embraced slavery and contributed to the seminary with funds gotten from slave sales and labor. One trustee went so far as to refer to the bondage of human beings as "an institution of heaven." And...And? Yes. Even after emancipation, the faculty of the seminary consistently used its unique platform as **a moral compass** to keep the Black race in struggle by preaching the rightness, even the godliness, of Black subjugation to whites.

And financially, the seminary survived and flourished because of monstrous, racist, greed and cruelty. Its original location was in Greenville, South Carolina. During the Civil War, students and faculty alike left to join the Confederacy as soldiers and chaplains. The seminary lost its endowment and closed in 1862. They struggled to re-open afterward and finally found backing from several financiers, the most generous of whom was Joseph Emerson Brown, a Georgia senator.

(SBTS's own report credits Brown with "saving the seminary.") With his \$50,000 donation (\$1,298,416.67 in today's dollars), they were able to construct their first building for a re-opening in downtown Louisville, Kentucky. Brown was given the role of Chairman of the Board, a position he held from 1880 -1894. The seminary's highest academic honor is named after him and is still in use today. Reverend Al Mohler now occupies the "historic" Joseph Emerson Brown Chair of Christian Theology.

Sadly, much of the funds for this impressive donation and the *salvation of the seminary* came from profits Brown made from the revolting practice of 'convict leasing' in his coal mines after the war. For those not familiar with this practice, states would lease out their prisoners to work for railroads, mines, and plantations. The convicts were overwhelmingly Black men, often imprisoned for minor infractions. The practice was widely criticized for its brutality, many calling it worse than slavery. Death rates among leased convicts were approximately 10 times higher than the death rates of prisoners in non-lease states. The seminary's 2018 report itself notes: "Investigations of Brown's Dade Coal operation concluded that 'if there is a hell on earth, it is the Dade coal mines.'"

How ironic that an institution with the purported goal of leading souls to heaven has its deepest roots in what they themselves acknowledge as a hell on earth.

The Seminary's president himself requested the truth of its past and boldly shared it with the world. What is the next logical, loving step?

Find the full 71-pg report here:

<https://news.sbts.edu/2018/12/12/report-discloses-history-slavery-racism-southern-seminary/>

2 min film on convict leasing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpZvTx5hlyI>