On These Grounds: Describing the Experiences of the Enslaved

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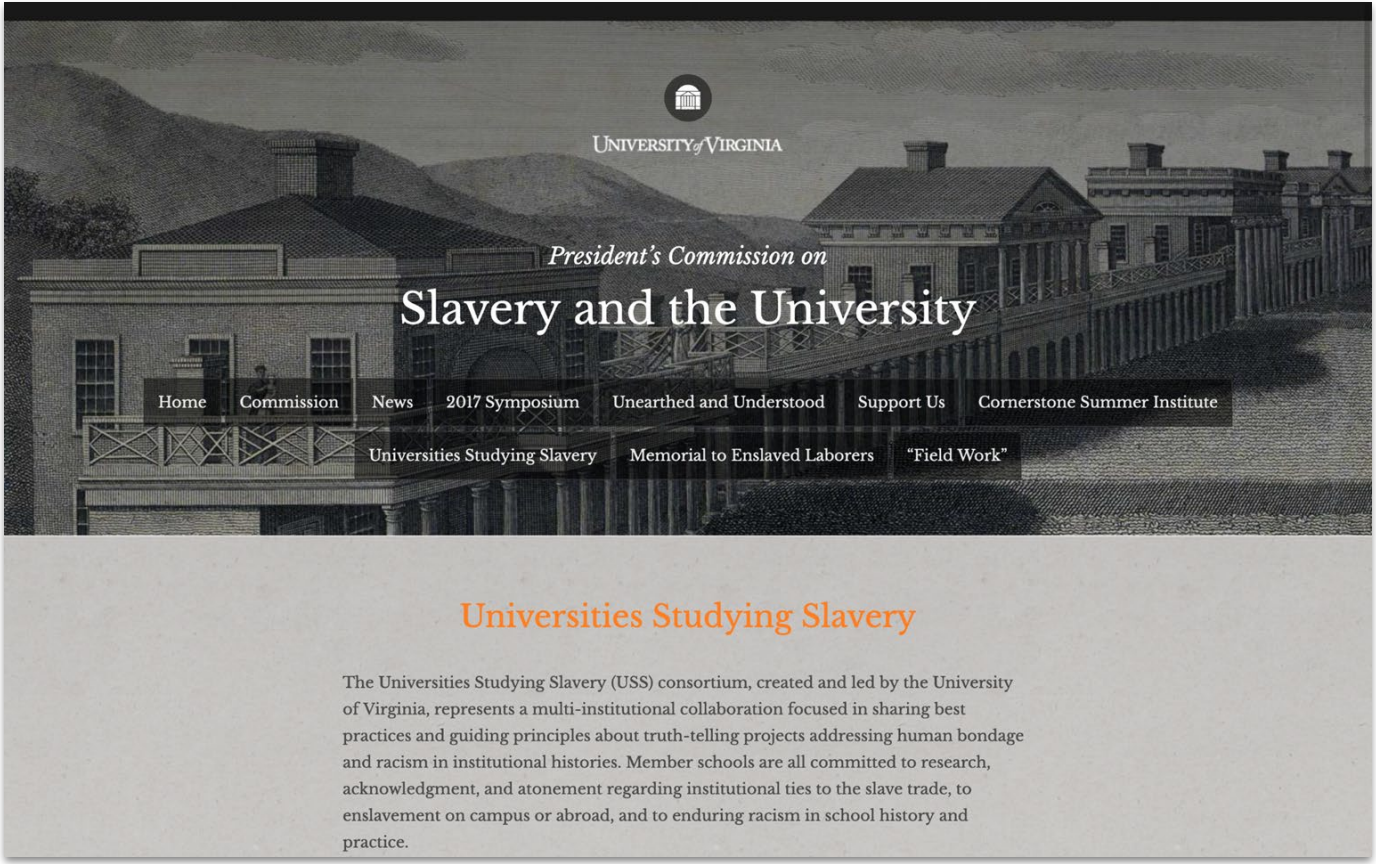
Over the past decade, many institutions of higher education have begun to publicly examine and embrace their historical roles in the injustices and legacies of slavery. So far, however, there is no common, shared method for collecting, organizing, and describing historical data from the rich archival holdings of all these institutions. Despite the similarities of record types, information sources, and data elements, each institution is taking its own, often duplicative approach to its history. The absence of a common, shared approach to documenting, describing, and organizing the data derived from the archival records relating these histories limits researchers understanding of the lives and experiences of the enslaved across these institutional contexts, retards search and discovery across collections, and constrains the possibilities of a broader analysis of American educational institutions' historical ties to slavery.

The richness and density of these myriad archives call out the need for a robust data model that can fully represent those events, their contexts, and the individuals—-black and white, enslaved and free—-who participated in them. Together, the data from these colleges and universities will provide scholars, students, alumni, and descendants with a new understanding of the lived reality of bondage at these institutions of higher education. But the fullest universe of

https://onthesegrounds.org/

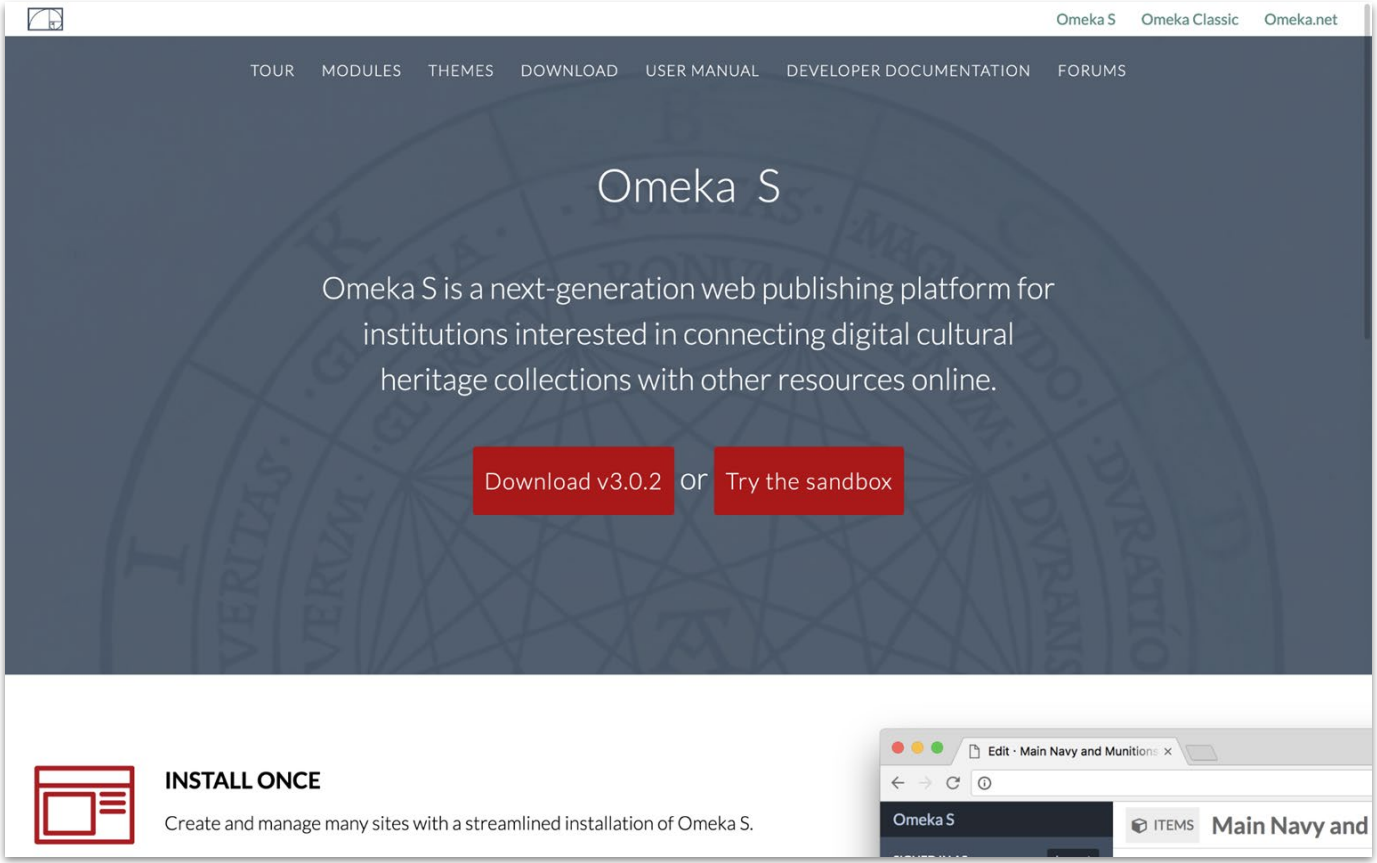


https://slavery.virginia.edu/universities -studying-slavery/

Diversity in Participants and Documents

Seeks a broad range of participants from universities with a history of enslavement

- Model testing is designed to anticipate a broad range of records
- Lead institutions have a broad range of sources
  - Georgetown: financial records, sacramental records, plantation ledgers
  - University of Virginia: Board of Visitors minutes, faculty minutes, faculty chairman journals, proctor's ledgers
- Collaborative Testing Partners joined in August 2021
  - Hampden-Sydney College
  - Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
  - University of Georgia
  - University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
  - Washington and Lee University
- Ongoing, interrative, and collaborative: Involves archivists, librarians, historians, technicians



https://omeka.org/s/

Model Structure

Four Record Types

- Event (primary record type)
- Person
- Organization
- Place

Controlled Vocabularies

- Event Types
- Freedom Status
- Enslaved Project vocabs for people, organizations and places

Event Types

- Commercial transaction
- Education
- Freedom status transaction
- Health
- Intra-community violence
- Inventory
- Labor
- Legal
- Life event
- Membership or participation
- Mention
- Narrative
- Provisions
- Religious
- Resistance
- Social Interaction
- Travel
- Violence

Coming in the Fall

Implementation Support

- Central site to host aggregated description
- Omeka S Resource Templates
- Guidelines for descriptive and data formation best practices
- Documentation workflows and descriptive practices

Technical Deliverables

- OTG Event Ontology 1.0
- Omeka S Theme
- Omeka S Item Importer