

A NEW ORIGIN STORY

The
1619
Project

Created by NIKOLE HANNAH-JONES

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize

& THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE

The 1619 Project Forum

Why has the *American Historical Review* commissioned nineteen scholars to review the 1619 Project? There is no precedent in the history of the journal for a review forum of this scope and magnitude. Without question, the 1619 Project has become a very public flash point within academic and public debates centered on the work history does in the world. Its creator, Nikole Hannah-Jones, won a Pulitzer Prize for her lead essay that opened the project in an August 14, 2019, special issue of the *New York Times Magazine*.¹ And some historians of the United States credited the 1619 Project with opening up new ways of looking at the American past and with helping to give the work of academic historians on slavery a broader audience. But many specialists in early American and antebellum history offered sharp criticism of the project for what they termed interpretive overreach and factual slippage. “Was slavery really the salient cause of the American Revolution?” some of them asked. For other American historians, the 1619 Project did not go far enough in its efforts to reconceptualize the larger meanings of the Black experience in North America.

The 1619 Project has also been at the center of the polarized politics of our era. The very notion that the “founding principles” of the nation started with enslavement rather than the high principles of the Declaration of Independence has sometimes provoked fierce pushback in the public sphere. Most notably, the claim, often advanced without evidence, that the 1619 Project and critical race theory (the two are usually conflated in these arguments) dangerously infuse the K–12 history curriculum has become a staple of national and local politics.² It is fair to say that in and out of the academy, the 1619 Project has been the subject of heated, if not always illuminating, debates.

As we conceived of this review forum, the critical question for us was what the *AHR*, given its global range, could uniquely bring to the conversation around the 1619 Project. Most debate over the project has been situated in an American context. But how, we wondered, might the project be viewed by scholars who work on the historical questions of slavery and race from different geographical and chronological perspectives? For example, what might historians of slavery in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East find compelling or controversial about the project and its method for rethinking the past? At the same time, we saw this forum as an opportunity to invite historians in fields too long underrepresented in the pages of the *AHR* to critically engage with the 1619 Project.

We asked most of the reviewers to focus on the recently published *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (2021) and to respond to one or two essays of their choice.³ Because the 1619 Project has taken both print and digital forms, we also invited several other scholars to concentrate on its digital components, including the project’s podcast, teaching resources, and social media site. We asked the editors at the *New York Times Magazine* if they would be willing to respond to these reviews. They agreed, and their response follows the reviews here.

We hope this forum will stimulate productive and novel discussions about the 1619 Project that are attentive to its local and global reach and receptions.

—Mark Philip Bradley and Fei-Hsien Wang

1 “The 1619 Project,” *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html>.

2 The decentralized nature of public education in the United States offers challenges for understanding the history actually being taught in the nation’s schools. The AHA’s newly launched Mapping the Landscape of Secondary US History Education seeks to combine analysis of published content standards and curricula with interviews with state- and district-level administrators and surveys of educators to offer a more granular picture of the twenty-first-century landscape in which US history teachers do their work. See “Mapping the Landscape of Secondary US History Education,” American Historical Association, accessed November 29, 2022, <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/mapping-the-landscape-of-secondary-us-history-education>.

3 Nikole Hannah-Jones, Caitlin Roper, Ilena Silverman, and Jake Silverstein, eds., *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (New York, 2021).
Frontis: Front cover of *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*.
Courtesy of *The New York Times Magazine*.

What Fear Produced

The Culture of White Supremacy in America

That slavery on the North American continent was racially based, only people of color—most often people of African descent—could be enslaved—helped to cement an ideology of white supremacy that plagues the United States to this day. People who were forced from a continent that we now know has the most genetically diverse population of all the continents were reduced to a skin color: *Black*. Those who held power over them became *White*. The laws and customs of, first, the thirteen colonies and, then, the United States of America sought to enshrine the myriad barriers that had been erected over time between Black and White.

If John Locke was right in describing slavery as essentially a state of war between enslavers and the enslaved, a war between Black and White existed in the United States for nearly two and a half centuries. As with any such conflict, the war stoked fear and distrust between the combatants, though with uneven moral implications. The enslaved feared the vagaries that went along with being treated as items of property—the lash, sale and separation from family, endless work with no personal gain for one’s labors. The enslavers feared that the enslaved would seek revenge, either through individual acts of murder—poisoning, for example—or through collective action in the form of organized revolts. Most of all, they feared that “the wheel of fortune,” a phrase Jefferson used during a critique of slavery, would turn.⁴ If freed, those who had once been enslaved would hence be in the position to enact revenge, and do so by copying what whites had done to Blacks—dominate and enslave them. This fear has negatively affected Blacks’ prospects for equal citizenship in the United States, thereby shaping the course of American history.

Chapter 4 of *The 1619 Project* consists of a lead essay, a short story, and a poem. The authors of the essay—Leslie Alexander, a professor of history at Northwestern University, and Michelle Alexander, a visiting professor of social justice at Union Theological Seminary—trace the development and effects of this fear. Rather than starting from the date used in the book’s title, the authors begin with the events surrounding the murder of George Floyd in May 2020. Millions of people around the world saw the video of Floyd’s fatal encounter with Derek Chauvin, the Minneapolis police officer’s knee on Floyd’s neck as he begged for his life and called out for his mother. As the authors note, Chauvin

4 Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia: An Annotated Edition*, ed. Robert Pierce Forbes (New Haven, CT, 2021), 250.

and the other officers involved initially suffered no consequences for their actions. As with so many well-publicized cases of Black individuals' deadly encounters with the police—some of them described in this chapter—the usual fear-based assumption that Black people, particularly Black men, must be brought under control at all costs held sway. But this situation turned out differently.

By the time Floyd was murdered, pervasive police violence and the tragic consequences of white fear of Black people had become undeniable in the eyes of many Americans. In the weeks and months that followed, thousands upon thousands of protestors took the streets in all fifty states, in large cities ... as well as in suburbs, small and medium-sized towns, and rural areas. Protests erupted even in places as far away as Hong Kong, South Africa, Germany, South Korea and New Zealand. Never before had a Black rebellion been met with such support by people of all colors, classes, and walks of life" (100).

Although the overwhelming majority of the protests were peaceful ("95 percent" of them, according to a study cited by the authors), "the response by the police was brutal" (100). Even President Donald Trump weighed in with his own verbal assault, calling "the 'Black Lives Matter' slogan" a "symbol of hate." The police, aided by "white nationalist organizations like the Proud Boys," unleashed a torrent of violence against unarmed and peaceful protestors (100). In contrast, on January 6, 2021, when rioters stormed the US Capitol building, hunted for members of Congress, and spoke of "hanging" Vice President Mike Pence, the police response was muted. This, even though warnings had circulated that violence would take place and the National Guard, had it been called out in time, could have prevented the damage and loss of life. Aggressive and violent protestors, almost all of them white, invaded the iconic seat of the US government but were not constructed as fearsome enough to confront or constrain.

These contrasting responses have their roots deep in American history. As the authors of chapter 4 put it: "The glaring double standard reflects a centuries-old pattern in which Black strivings for liberation have been demonized, criminalized, and subjected to persecution, while white people's demands for liberty are deemed rational, legitimate and largely unthreatening" (101). Black assertions of humanity, which have ranged historically from "doing nothing more than living their lives, trying to be free," to exercising their right as citizens to protest the actions of their government, are seen as inherently hostile acts mandating a severely punitive response (99). The authors say this is "traceable to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when White people

desperately sought to control a large unfree population who refused to submit to their enslavement” (102). For this reason, they write, the Haitian Revolution was a nightmare scenario for American whites who had championed freedom for themselves. Even the American Revolution, during which Blacks fought on both sides for the chance at freedom, alerted whites to their potential as soldiers, a subject that Robert Jones, Jr., addressed in an affecting short story about conflict between individual freedom and the love of family (125). As historian Alan Taylor has written, Blacks were cast as internal enemies of whom white Americans should be wary.

Although the Civil War and the Constitutional amendments that followed destroyed slavery as a legal economic system, they did not destroy the racial hierarchy that the institution wove into the fabric of American society. Blacks were technically free, but were to exercise that freedom in a decidedly circumscribed fashion, in deference to white expectations and fears centuries in the making. How to escape this deadly formulation has been the work of civil rights agitation and private assertions of freedom by Black Americans since the end of slavery.

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The authors adroitly detail how the laws of the American colonies codified white supremacy, making Black people “the object of perpetual surveillance and control” (103). These laws did not just affect the lives of the enslaved. Even the much smaller number of free Blacks were, in the words of historian Douglas Bradburn, merely “denizens” instead of citizens, subject to restrictions that did not apply to free White people. All this in spite of the document that has come to be seen as setting forth the nation’s creed, the Declaration of Independence, with its soaring preamble about the equality of mankind. The person who wrote those words, of course, held hundreds of people in bondage over the course of his life. It would difficult, if not impossible, to write a thorough chapter on the history of race relations in the United States without mentioning Thomas Jefferson, the Founding Father with the most to say on the subject, for good and for ill. He appears several times throughout the chapter—not only in the lead essay, but also in a brilliant poem by Reginald Dwayne Betts inspired, in part, by the famous correspondence between Jefferson and Benjamin Banneker.

In addition to the Declaration of Independence, which has been an inspiration to countless Black and White readers over the years, Jefferson wrote *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), which contains harsh and eloquent denunciations of slavery. As the authors note, Jefferson admitted that “rebellions were a legitimate, rational response to an immoral and inhumane system” (102). “Even God,” Jefferson conceded, “would likely side with enslaved people if they organized a successful slave revolt” (102). In the same text, however, Jefferson wrote of his “suspicion”—really more than a suspicion—that Blacks were intellectually inferior to Whites. He also professed his belief that the races could not live together in peace in the United States. Jefferson favored emancipation and the expatriation of Blacks, who could then form their own country where they could live in freedom and equality.

Although Jefferson’s views on Blacks and their future in the United States reflected the perspective of many Whites of that era—if they did not, the circumstances of Black life would have been very different—having put these ideas to paper and written other things that contradicted them placed Jefferson at the center of eighteenth and nineteenth-century thought on the condition of and prospects for Blacks in America. The 1619 authors see Jefferson’s “anxious reflections” as a kind of inheritance, something passed down from generation to generation among uneasy white enslavers” (102–103). That makes sense. Of course, one wonders how many “uneasy white enslavers” there actually were. It’s safe to assume that many of them were the very opposite of “anxious” or reflective about holding human property. In truth, the generation that came after Jefferson and his revolutionary cohort grew militant in their support of slavery and were increasingly willing to fight a war—destroying the Union that Jefferson helped create—to maintain it. One suspects that this second strain of thought, which led to the deaths by some estimates of over a half a million people, has been more powerful in the consciences of white Americans than Jefferson’s “anxious reflections.”

So, how does one control a large population of formerly enslaved people whom one does not really wish to bring into full citizenship. In the prolonged aftermath of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the rise of the so-called Redemption governments across the South, the solution lay in using the law to bring the situation as close to slavery as possible with the free rein provided by a Supreme Court hostile to the concept of equal citizenship for Black people. As the authors write, Blacks and their White allies resisted this effort well into the twentieth century in the form of a civil rights movement that sought to move beyond fear as the central dynamic between Blacks and whites. But old habits die hard.

White fears of losing political, economic, and social dominance—combined with fears of unruly, rebellious Black people—led to massive investments in punitive control over Black people rath-

er than massive investments that might have repaired the harm caused by centuries of racial oppression. For more than four decades, our nation has declared war on drugs and crime, invested billions of dollars in highly militarized police forces, and embarked on a race to incarcerate in Black communities, while slashing funding from education, drug treatment, public housing, and welfare (119–120).

Public policy based on fear is one of the most direct and powerful legacies of the institution of slavery. “The impulse to resist efforts by Black people to gain freedom and equality and to respond with punishment or violence, no matter whether the demands are made through peaceful protests, lobbying, or outright rebellion, has been the defining feature of Black-white race relations since the first slave ships arrived on American shores” (121). This legacy affects not only Black Americans, but other people of color as well, who have suffered from this “habitual impulse ... driven by fear” (121).

How do we overcome this legacy in what many see as the twilight of the American Republic? Despite the gravity in their depiction of the nation’s racial landscape, the authors end on a hopeful note, one that seems to draw on the reserves of that fabled American optimism. The outpouring of support in the wake of the murder of George Floyd suggests that enough whites, the descendants of “anxious” former enslavers, might be willing to banish fear—not totally, but enough to create “a radically different path forward” with the descendants of people who continued to strive in the midst of horrific circumstances (122). One hopes the authors are correct.

Rose Stremmlau, Malinda Lowery, and Julie L. Reed

Interconnected Histories of Enslavement and Settler Colonialism

As scholars of the Native South, we recognize that thriving societies should have multiple origin stories. Creation narratives tell us that some Native peoples emerged from the ground; others fell from the sky. All of these narratives situated humans as one among many beings with whom they shared emergence. Rather than having dominion over creation, Native peoples relied on other-than-human counterparts to create livable geographies. For example, for Cherokees, without Granddaughter Water Beetle’s dives into the watery depths to retrieve mud, land would

not exist, and the southern Appalachians would not be recognizably textured if Grandfather Buzzard had not dried the land as he flew above it. These origin stories weave multilayered histories that continue to evolve. Our work is united by a shared purpose to conceptualize the past to shed light on the present, and like the authors of *The 1619 Project*, we understand how stories about the past continue to resonate through the lived experiences of Indigenous and Black peoples. The luxury to divorce the past from one's present is a privilege of whiteness.

As professional historians—and for Malinda and Julie as Native women in academia—we recognize that *which* stories get told is inseparable from *who* does the telling. Working in Indigenous history means naming the obvious, making the unnoticed legible, and highlighting the ignored. We share Nikole Hannah-Jones's frustrations with the failures of K–12 education to educate Americans about slavery and settler colonialism; Black and Native people suffer from widespread ignorance about these enduring structures. Although Hannah-Jones describes the central conclusions about African American history as “uncontroversial among historians” (xxi), the contributions of Native American and Indigenous studies (NAIS) to the American past remain ignored, contested, and rejected by some of our peers. For instance, university-level surveys continue to ignore the fact that Native Southerners organized themselves into sophisticated societies that resisted invasions; that intentional acts of enslavement, rape, and natural resource extraction (rather than microbes alone) enabled European settlement; and that the founding of this nation was predicated on a centuries-long and ongoing genocide rather than the result of the inevitable if unfortunate outcome of progress. The failure to educate the general public about Native history does not result from a confusion about the facts.

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We were not surprised by some of our peers' vitriol toward the project and Hannah-Jones. Native scholars, especially women, regularly face white supremacist and misogynist attacks at professional conferences and in print when they challenge established scholars, particularly those who are non-Native. As Hannah-Jones noted concerning the criticism of Princeton historian Allen C. Guelzo, he “made clear that the source of his antipathy was not just *what* the project was saying but *who* was saying it” (xxvi). Historians who police authority over historical truths and who marginalize nontraditional perspectives receive prestigious

platforms for their opinions, even in this journal. In April 2020, the *AHR*'s then editor decided to publish a questionable critique by David Silverman of NAIS methodologies veiled as a negative review of recently published monographs by our colleagues Lisa Brooks and Christine M. DeLucia. DeLucia and Philip J. Deloria, Jean M. O'Brien, and Alyssa Mt. Pleasant responded with clear explanations of NAIS methods and an invitation to historians to embrace the challenges they pose. Deloria stated, "Silverman invokes a history of bad history where Native peoples are concerned, but uses it to frame NAIS as a kind of retribution story, an overbalancing away from rigor and standards in order to compensate for the ills of the past. The claim hardly seems fair, and to soften it, he claims a rhetorical position of sympathy."⁵ Their responses should have prompted questions about the merit of the initial review; instead, the editor published all the pieces and gave Silverman the final word in an additional response. Silverman's complaint—that NAIS scholars do "bad history" that does not meet professional standards—remains a cudgel wielded against those who produce narratives using methods and sources that might not fall into the traditions of conventional academic historiography but that do conform to the historiographic traditions of Native societies. If *The 1619 Project* had done nothing more than hold up a comparable mirror to the historical profession, it would have accomplished enough.

But this project has done so much more to engage those who otherwise would not be aware of or debate these different conclusions, the purpose of historical narratives, or the premise of a common national origin story. We offer our critique of the book's overall framing of the importation of enslaved Africans as isolated from the exploitation of colonized Native people. Tiya Miles's essay on dispossession is excellent, but segregating Native peoples to their own chapter, with scant reverberations in a few other pieces, perpetuates a strategy weaponized in mainstream historical narratives, one that prevents us from recognizing deeper truths about the history of race in America. Telling Black and Native stories separately obscures the shared dispossession of peoples of both Africa and the Americas under the doctrine of discovery. It precluded each group seeing themselves in one another well after the doctrine became enshrined in US law through the Northwest Ordinance and *Johnson v. McIntosh*.

Black and Native people were not begotten but were instead made into separate, racialized groups through the violence of colonialism and racial capitalism. Part of this process involved treaties that delineated borders between Native and settler civilizations in North America and that also substantiate Native nations' contemporary claims on sovereignty—claims that, in Oklahoma, for example, have supported a noxious agenda to exclude Black tribal citizens. Native nations have asserted their sovereignty to control the boundaries of territory and citizenship in response to physical invasions; assaults

5 Philip J. Deloria, "Cold Business and the Hot Take," *American Historical Review* 125, no. 2 (2020): 537–41, here 540.

on their systems of property ownership; and legal and ideological impositions of laws and ideas about race designed to acquire, monitor, control, and exploit their lands and bodies. In this context, anti-Black racism is an unsurprising, but very American, failure of nationhood, one that some Native nations and their citizens are working now to rectify.

For Native and Black Americans to have this racial history, white people had to recognize themselves as a racial category with special privileges. In the United States, race became what we now know it to be—an identity marker with an entrenched hierarchy—through a history of conquest, conversion, and enslavement shared by both Native and African peoples. This history predates 1619. The origin here is the “doctrine of discovery,” a term applied to the series of Catholic decrees and orders governing the activities of church members and nations as they navigated the world. This term appears only once in this collection—in Miles’s essay (141). Let us summarize: In 1455, an iteration of the doctrine authorized Portugal to trade with African nations and to enslave some Africans who were not Christians. In 1493, the pope declared yet-to-be-“discovered” lands of the Americas to be the property of Spain and Portugal, provided they would convert Indigenous people to Catholicism. The doctrine and its later cognate, the right of conquest, presumed *terra nullius* (“empty land”). *Terra nullius* meant not that either Africa or the Americas were actually devoid of people but rather that their cultures, not biologies (that came later), were non-Christian and non-European. By definition, they were not entitled to political or legal rights except that of occupancy. When the pope declared that non-Catholics in Africa and the Americas could be lawfully enslaved and forcibly converted, he created a structure that bound the histories of North American and African peoples together. That bond is barely visible in this volume; without diminishing the focus on Blackness and experiences of Black Americans, this should connect essays throughout the collection.

Those who do not study the Native South but are familiar with points of intersection with historiographical debates in US history would rightly point out that Native Southerners, too, were enslaved and slavers. In discussing settler colonialism, historians talk about how power flows from colonizer to colonized, and historiographic arguments revolve around what the colonized do with retained power. For some Native people, this included participating in the slave trade to mitigate the further enslavement of their people. Much of the work in histories of the Native South describes political factionalism within tribal communities and cultural divisions that spring from interactions with colonizers around issues of violently coerced labor. Beyond our field, this violence continues to be framed as conflict over land rather than the kind of labor done on that land, by whom, and control over materials produced. When we understand that settlers wanted Native labor, too,

we begin to chip away at the settler-constructed boundaries between Black and Native stories.

Slavery in the Native South entered mainstream historiographical conversations with the work of Jack D. Forbes, Theda Perdue, Christina Snyder, Alan Galloway, Robbie Etheridge, Tiya Miles, Barbara Krauthamer, and others. In these works, the enslavement of Native people is described as an outgrowth of older systems of captivity but with distinct context provided by imperialism's deerskin, gun, and liquor trades as well as colonizers' demand for labor in the South and Caribbean. The slave trade offered diplomatic opportunities to Native leaders and made Charles Towne a profitable outpost in the British Empire and a magnet for the development of the transatlantic slave trade. Discussions of Native slavery include Native people as slave traders, slave owners, and enslaved people, roles with some antecedents in

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Native societies but that were produced by the profound destabilization wrought by European imperial expansion and settler colonialism.

At the same time, these histories of Native slavery shed little light on the role of race and racialization in Native life, in part because European ideas about racial difference did not determine who became a captive, raider, trader, or owner in early Native engagement with European-style chattel slavery. It took the American Revolution and the late eighteenth-century transition in European thought between Enlightenment ideas about the cultural perfectibility of people and romantic nationalist ideas about the immutability of ethnic and national cultures, as well as the growth of cotton cultivation, to prompt an embrace of racialized slavery within Native communities. Even then, it was largely limited to groups whose diplomatic negotiations over land with the US government and southern states encouraged them to demonstrate their cultural kinship with colonizers as a means to resist encroachment.

Seeing the history of Black and Native people exclusively through the lens of Native nations does not shed enough light on the ongoing anti-Black racism in Native communities. Anti-Black racism in Native communities does not exist only because some Native ancestors held slaves, any more than anti-Black racism exists in white communities only because some whites' ancestors held slaves. Native people display

anti-Black racism because the racial identity of Native people was crafted in tandem with the creation of white and Black racial identities and with the slave trade as it developed on this continent. In this process, some Native people, as some white people, began to see themselves as biologically and culturally different from and superior to Black people. As legal scholar Cheryl Harris has written, race has been a quantifiable commodity, the value of which has been measured in proportion to the protection whiteness offers. Division between Black and Native people was not an accidental by-product of colonizers' goals of exploitation—nor is it a reflection of multicultural and inclusive approaches to US history. It was a specific strategy that served to protect white property and whiteness as property. Too many scholars falsely continue to assume this separation was natural and inevitable rather than intentional. But as Hannah-Jones partially quotes in the preface, anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot insisted that “history is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous. The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots.”⁶

Instead of drawing conclusions that reify the flow of power from colonizer to colonized, which keeps Native and Black people discussed as separate groups, we must interrogate the history of “white” as a racial category. We must discuss how whiteness came to acquire this power to determine the identities and legal statuses of Black and Native people. Frantz Fanon, Nell Painter, Toni Morrison, and others have explored how much about whiteness, and, by extension, the racial hierarchy, defies claims of inevitability. Without tremendous violence of the kind used against Black and Native people since 1455, including genocide, legal erasure, and enslavement with religious justifications, it would have been impossible for peoples as varied as the Irish and Caucasians (incidentally, both historically victims of the slave trade) to reemerge as members of a free ruling class on this continent.

When we see the creation of race as historically contingent and correlated processes, we also see where the colonizer failed. Examples include the experiences of Esteban, the North African who freed himself on a journey through North America in the 1520s, and successful slave revolts beginning in South Carolina in 1524 through the 1729 Natchez revolt in French Louisiana. With artistry, *The 1619 Project* creates reverberations in its chronological interludes, essays, and poetry, the events many US history textbooks hide in plain sight; this includes the Haitian Revolution of 1791 (xxviii, 20, 82, 110, 115, 179, 190) and the Seminole Wars (144, 186, 188). At the same time, we see missed opportunities to emphasize how Blackness and Indigeneity are intertwined in discussions, for example, of Crispus Attucks and Paul Cuffe, in *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, in Delta blues, in Natives' disavowal of their Black relatives under a national Jim Crow and assimilationist regime, and now in Native and Black solidarity in places as diverse as Standing Rock,

6 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995), xxiii, partially quoted in Nikole Hannah-Jones, preface to *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, ed. Nikole Hannah-Jones, Caitlin Roper, Ilena Silverman, and Jake Silverstein (New York, 2019), xvii–xxxiii, here xxx.

South Dakota; Detroit, Michigan; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Robeson County, North Carolina. These voices might be in the minority, but our nation's history reveals that it is those on the margins who are the vanguard of greater freedom.

Black and Native people share traumas, historically and in the present day—forced displacement, physical violation, disease, incarceration, injustice. Black became Native, and Native became Black, when it suited the political aim of the conqueror/settler. Both Black and Native are colonial constructs, even as they contain multitudes, and we must not assume that colonialism's totalizing agenda contains seeds of truth. To be sure, for Native Southerners, damage has been done, but history is neither over nor relegated to the past.

The history of the Native South models how to rewrite narratives in relationship with those of others. The story of the Native past has turned toward survivance, the ability of Native people to exist despite genocide and the reasons for that persistence. We see that same turn in *The 1619 Project* and applaud it. If some object, so be it. We can explain how white supremacy has worked and acknowledge that white supremacists failed to attain some goals. The flaws of omission and indifference in traditional historical narratives are readily addressed by Black and Native American histories; the stories told show that the fruit of power hangs from multiple branches within our reach. We need not reduce ourselves to one particular point of origin but can embrace a “multiple rootedness,” a term coined by scholar Josué López, which offers more stability to carve the path forward.⁷ The objective of such a history is not retribution but repair, including a return home, wherever it may be, to hear the stories belonging to the peoples who share this place we now call the United States of America.

Joanne Barker

Troubling Democracy

While diverse in objective, social justice movements have understood education to be necessary in building comradeship across multiple axes of social difference and in bringing about substantive social change. Partly this is because the inherited curriculum of public education and the information circulated on news and social media have all but erased critical attention to the contexts necessary to understanding the structures and experiences of social injustice, or they have represented injustices as isolated events or individual character flaws that deviate from the otherwise democratic ideals of the country and its citizens. Teach-ins, workshops, lectures, and writings have characterized the strategies of movements in order to provide historical background and

7 J.R.López, “Mobility, Indigeneity, and the Creolizing classroom” (doctoral dissertation, University of Connecticut-Storrs, cited in Bennett Brazelton, “On the Erasure of Black Indigeneity,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 43, no. 5 (2021): 379–97, here 390.

testimonies of oppression and hate so as to contextualize and make relevant their demands for change.

This is how and why *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, edited by Nikole Hannah-Jones, Caitlin Roper, Ilena Silverman, and Jake Silverstein and produced by the *New York Times*, is important. Drawing from the pedagogical core of Black liberation and civil rights struggles, and specifically from the tool kits of the anti-police violence efforts of Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name, *The 1619 Project* situates anti-Black violence and hate in a broader historical and experiential view of slavery and its afterlives. Recalling the work of Michelle Alexander and Ava DuVernay in connecting slavery and mass incarceration, *The 1619 Project* confronts some of the fundamental myths of American enlightenment and progress and so, unsurprisingly, garnered much hyperbolic conservative recoil.⁸

But even while offering good information and context for understanding slavery's continued relevance in the operationalization and institutionalization of anti-Blackness, *The 1619 Project* falls into the fallacies of recognition as a resolve. By thinking through Nikole Hannah-Jones's chapter "Democracy," I will try to show how *The 1619 Project* aims itself not at a radical challenging of racist ideologies and practices but at a reinforcement of the kind of American (neo)liberalism that so powerfully articulates anti-Blackness.⁹ The backlash, in other words, is a distraction from the way the project reinforces the kind of self-congratulatory (neo)liberalism that denies racism. As a conclusion, I provide an alternative reading.

Nikole Hannah-Jones's chapter "Democracy" is a revised reprint of her Pulitzer Prize-winning article "Our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written. Black Americans have fought to make them true."¹⁰ She begins by remembering her dad's American patriotism and the flag that flew in front of their Mississippi family home. In the context of histories of lynching and segregation, and her father's own experiences of racism even after serving in the military, Hannah-Jones works to reconcile the promise of American democracy with the reality of anti-Black racism. This leads her, through her father's military service, to a realization that Black people's "contributions to building the richest and most powerful nation in the world were indelible, that the United States simply would not exist without us" (9). After identifying some of these contributions, she writes, "Black Americans have also been, and continue to be, foundational to the idea of American freedom. More than any other group in this country's history, we have served, generation after generation, in an overlooked but vital role: it is we who have been the perfecters of this democracy" (10). Blacks, she maintains, have embraced the ideals of American democracy against the lies of Black inferiority. So much so that "without the idealistic, strenuous, and patriotic efforts of Black Americans, our democracy today would look very different; in fact, our country might not be a democracy at all" (11).

8 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, 2010); Ava DuVernay, dir., *13th* (Los Angeles, 2016).

9 See Hazel V. Carby, "We Must Burn Them," *London Review of Books*, May 26, 2022, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v44/n10/hazel-v.-carby/we-must-burn-them>.

10 Nikole Hannah-Jones, "Our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written. Black Americans have fought to make them true," *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html>; Nikole Hannah-Jones, "Democracy," in *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, ed. Nikole Hannah-Jones, Caitlin Roper, Ilena Silverman, and Jake Silverstein (New York, 2019), 7–36.

Hannah-Jones argues that Black efforts defy anti-Black ideologies and the institutionalization of those ideologies in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, segregation, and discrimination as well as widespread practices of racialized violence. “As W.E.B. Du Bois wrote, ‘Few men ever worshiped Freedom with half such unquestioning faith as did the American Negro for two centuries’” (27). Blacks volunteered military service, served in elected office, went to university, and created civil rights groups to ensure the implementation of their Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendment rights so fiercely that they protected those rights for other racialized groups: “The bloody freedom struggles of the civil rights movement laid the foundation for every other modern rights struggle” (33). “Our founding fathers may not have actually believed in the ideals they espoused, but Black people did,” Hannah-Jones explains before concluding with a powerful question: “What if America understood, finally, now, at the dawn of its fifth century, that we have never been the problem, but the solution?” (33, 36).

While offering astute analyses of US law and southern policy, Hannah-Jones scaffolds those analyses around American (neo)liberalism. It is not America’s claims on an exceptionalist democracy that need to be challenged, just an understanding of its true protagonists. So erased within are more radical liberation movements and their demands not for recognition or inclusion but for substantive structural change. For revolution. As Glen Sean Coulthard argues, recognition or being recognized within an imperial formation or racial capitalism is a fallacy.¹¹ It does not require anything about or within that formation to change or be changed.

Lisa Lowe argues that liberalism’s promise of human freedom, rational progress, and social equality cannot be extrapolated from the global conditions of slavery, colonialism, capitalism, and empire out of which that promise is defined.¹² The human who is righted and freed, the society that is righteous and progressive, is possible *only* because of imperialist and racist ideologies and conditions of invasion, genocide, occupation, exploitation, and extraction. To understand this, Lowe turns to the colonial archive. She examines how the liberal archetype of freedom and equality, masking and distorting state violence for stories of individual character and mobility, is institutionalized and protected.¹³ The archive compartmentalizes the slave trade in Africa, the colonization of the Americas, and the indentured labor of Chinese—suggesting that Africans, Indigenous, and Chinese people and their societies are isolated from one another and from Europe—in order to articulate a narrative of capacity for freedom and salvation. By reading the connections and interdependencies among, Lowe exposes the violence of slavery and invasion at the heart of liberal claims to rationality and sovereignty. Drawing from Lowe, I want to suggest another way of reading *The 1619 Project* that rejects American exceptionalist (neo)liberalism for the revolutionary possibilities of connection and interdependency.

11 Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis, 2014).

12 Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC, 2015).

13 Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 3–4.

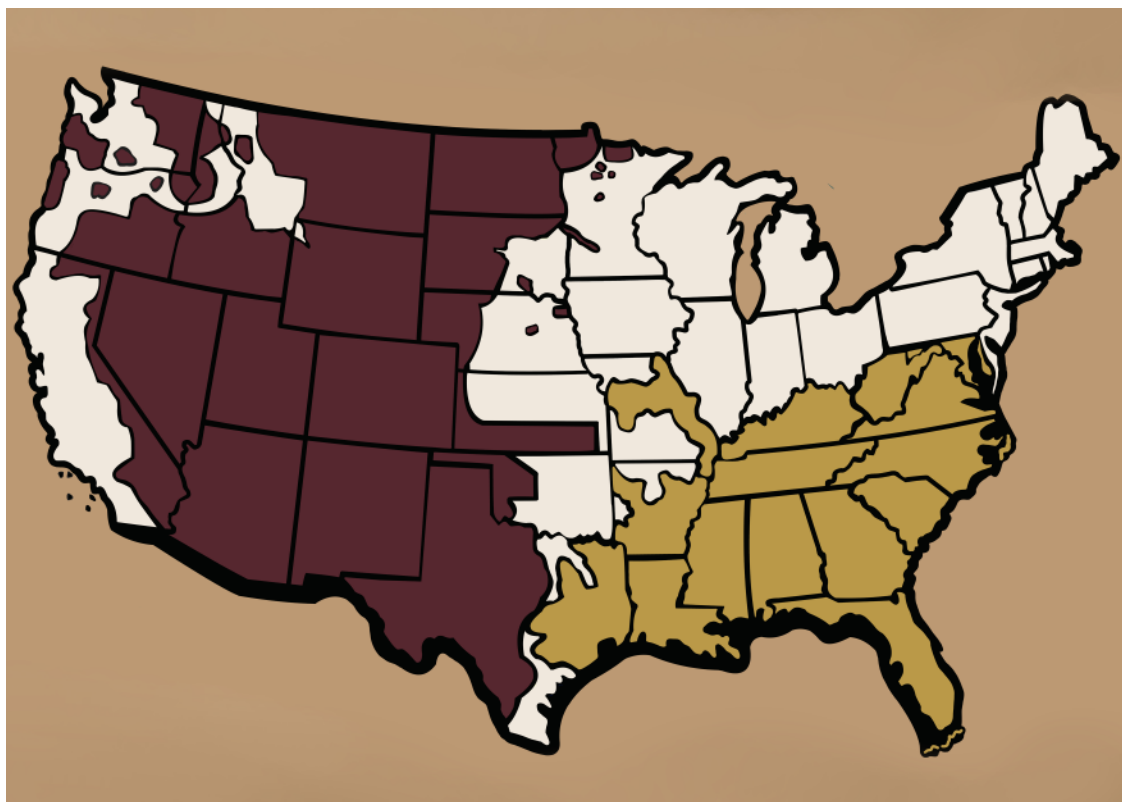


Figure 1. Joanne Barker, “1860” (2022).

The “20. and odd Negroes” who were brought to Virginia in 1619 were among the 350 who had been captured by Portuguese slavers in Kongo and Ndongo, marched to the Port of São Paulo de Luanda, and ordered onto a slave ship, the *São João Bautista*, heading to Vera Cruz, New Spain (Mexico). Before arriving, the *Bautista* was attacked by two privateer ships, the *White Lion* and the *Treasurer*.

The *White Lion* was captained by John Colyn Jope. The *Treasurer*, owned by Robert Rich, Lord Warwick, and Virginia’s deputy governor, Samuel Argall, was captained by Daniel Elfrith. Both captains possessed papers that allowed them to attack Spanish ships, except that Elfrith’s papers were no longer valid. Despite this, when they encountered the *Bautista*, they attacked. They captured up to sixty of the Africans. They headed for the Virginia Colony hoping to trade their “cargo” for food and supplies. The *White Lion* arrived first.

John Rolfe wrote the letter to the Virginia Company London about the *White Lion*’s arrival and “cargo.” Some of the Africans were transported to Jamestown and others to Flowerdew Hundred, a plantation on the upper reaches of the James River.

The *Treasurer* arrived several days later. Because Elfrith’s letters were no longer valid, he and his crew were threatened with legal charge, sold few Africans into slavery, and were unable to secure provisions. Some of those under the direction of Thomas West, 12th Baron De La Warr, who



Figure 2. Joanne Barker, “1619” (2022).

had been aboard disembarked. The shipmaster’s mate, a Mr. Gray, was taken up to Jamestown, where he was interrogated under the penalty of death for pirating. The rest sailed onto an English colony in Bermuda, where they sold the Africans into slavery on a tobacco plantation.¹⁴

Pocahontas, born around 1595, was named Amonute and went by the name Matoaka. She supposedly earned the nickname Pocahontas, which means “playful one.” She was the daughter of Chief Powhatan, the leader of the Powhatan Confederacy, which at its strongest included about thirty Algonquian groups.

In 1607, the Jamestown colony was established. Without adequate supplies and facing starvation, John Smith led multiple raids into Powhatan villages. He was captured a couple of times. For whatever reason, much debated, Smith survived his captivity, but he continued to attack Powhatan villages. After a near-fatal injury during one of those attacks in 1609, he returned to London.

Between 1609 and 1614, the First Powhatan War occurred between the Powhatan and the colonists (the Second Powhatan War occurred between 1622 and 1632). Around 1610, Pocahontas married a Powhatan named Kocoum. In 1613, she was kidnapped by Argall, under the direction of De La Warr, and held for ransom. She remained imprisoned at the colony for several years. During this time, she allegedly converted to Christianity and was baptized Rebecca. In 1614, she married Rolfe. In 1615, she bore a son named Thomas. The family went to London, England, on behalf of the Virginia Company, to raise funds for the beleaguered colony. In 1617, she died in England.

14 Martha McCartney, “Africans, Virginia’s First,” *Encyclopedia Virginia*, March 22, 2022, <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/africans-virginias-first/>.

De La Warr was a cofounder of the Virginia Colony. His name was also spelled Delaware, and used to rename the Delaware Bay, the Delaware River, the state of Delaware, and the Delaware Tribe. The Delaware referred to themselves as Lenape, the word for “people.” They referred to their territories as Lenapehoking.

Sixteen nineteen is an instance, an articulatory present of the global conditions of slavery, colonialism, capitalism, and empire. The slavery of Africans, the invasion and occupation of Indigenous territories, the genocidal violence, and the sexual assault and assimilationist coercion cannot be isolated: Indigenous people were enslaved; Africans were ripped from their lands; both were subjected to severe and multiple forms of genocide—physical, cultural, and otherwise. Might we read the history that 1619 is made to anticipate against, instead of with, the historical grooves of imperialist compartmentalization and toward relationality? Not a single person or place involved in the slavery represented by 1619 was not also involved in colonization.

In “1860” (fig.1), I combine archival maps of the removal of Indigenous nations and the enslavement of Africans. I imagine the lands to which Indigenous nations have been removed (burgundy or dark gray) and the lands into which Africans were enslaved (gold or light gray) in order to suggest that the histories belong to each other.

In “1619” (fig. 2), I reimagine “contact” as a moment of compassion and generosity between African women and Indigenous women. What if instead of isolated experiences under the empire, we told stories about our connection and interdependence?

Daniel Sharfstein

The Critique and the Claim of the 1619 Project

In a packed Cleveland courtroom on the morning of May 12, 1859, a forty-two-year-old schoolteacher named Charles Langston rose to be sentenced for violating the Fugitive Slave Act. Months earlier, he had helped free a young man whom a group of kidnappers was attempting to transport south to a life of bondage in Kentucky. The jury that convicted Langston excluded anyone who opposed slavery. When the judge asked whether he had anything to say to mitigate his sentence, Langston noted that he was “for the first time in my life before a court of justice” and would just “say one or two words.” He then stunned the courtroom with a blistering critique of a society that had been structured “to crush the colored man.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Jacob R. Shipherd, comp., *History of the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue* (Boston, 1859), 14, 175–76.

“I know that the courts of this country, that the laws of this country, that the governmental machinery of this country, are so constituted as to oppress and outrage ... men of my complexion,” the schoolteacher said as he faced the judge. “I cannot, then, of course, expect, judging from the past history of the country, any mercy from the laws, from the constitution, or from the courts.” In Langston’s view, the racism that developed alongside slavery permeated American life, leaving no individual or institution free from its taint. “I was tried by a jury who were prejudiced,” he declared, “before a Court that was prejudiced; prosecuted by an officer who was prejudiced, and defended, though ably, by counsel that were prejudiced.” A fair trial was impossible and the legal system corrupt and illegitimate.¹⁶

While Langston’s invective caused “much sensation” in the courtroom, he rooted his critique in something altogether different: a heartfelt claim of belonging. Langston declared that his “Revolutionary father,” who had “served under Lafayette, and fought through the whole war,” had taught him “that the fundamental doctrine of this government was that *all* men have a right to life and liberty.” Despite the injustice of the moment, despite not quite knowing if his country classified him as a “citizen” or an “outlaw,” Langston insisted that he was a stakeholder in the national project, with freedom as his inheritance and endowed with the right to define that freedom for himself. “My father,” Langston said, “fought for *my* freedom as much as for his own.”¹⁷

Langston’s critique and his claim may seem at odds. One emphasizes the nation’s original sins and enduring faults, its long history of systemic oppression. The other emphasizes the nation’s promise and possibilities, the resilience of Black Americans and the genius of their agency. But they work together. Condemning the fugitive slave law was a patriotic act. Resisting it was Langston’s duty as an American. More than that, it was a constitutive act. It made him American.

1619 is part of a long tradition in Black
political thought that has paired critiques of
structural injustice with claims of belonging
and a deep investment in the idea
of America.

Amid all the backlash to the 1619 Project—school boards overrun with parents fulminating about “critical race theory” in the curriculum; the risible 1776 Commission; more than a dozen state legislatures, including in my own state of Tennessee, banning public schools from teaching material relating to structural racism, white privilege, or anything else relating to race that might cause students discomfort—Charles Langston’s speech suggests two aspects of the project

16 Shipherd, *History of the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue*, 175, 177.

17 Shipherd, *History of the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue*, 176, 177.

that have been lost in the glare. First, contrary to right-wing dismissals of the 1619 Project as simply “injustice, injustice, injustice,” it is more than a critical origin story that centers slavery and racism in American history.¹⁸ Rather, like Langston’s speech, the critique is joined to a claim of belonging: that “Black Americans ... are this nation’s true founding fathers,” “the perfecters of this democracy,” whose advocacy, witness, and acts of rebellion have time and again made the United States freer and more equal.¹⁹

Second, the 1619 Project is part of a long tradition in Black political thought that has paired critiques of structural injustice with claims of belonging and a deep investment in the idea of America. From abolition to emancipation and Reconstruction to Jim Crow to civil rights, activists in the struggle for Black freedom and equality have detailed the nation’s endemic pathologies while also justifying why they would continue to fight and sacrifice and die. The 1619 Project’s double edge echoes in Frederick Douglass’s denunciation of the “bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy” of American democracy, but also in his call a decade later for Black men to enlist in the US Army, claim their citizenship, and redeem the nation. It echoes in W. E. B. Du Bois’s description of the United States after World War I as a nation that “lynches ... disenfranchises ... encourages ignorance ... steals from us ... [and] insults us,” and also in his declaration that “the faults of *our* country are *our* faults” and that Black activism could create a genuine democracy in America. It carries through to Martin Luther King’s sense that “the Declaration of Independence ... was always a declaration of intent rather than of reality” and that “Negro agitation” would replace America’s “comforting myths” with reforms that “genuinely treasure our national ideals.”²⁰

As the 1619 Project brings this tradition into the present day, the critique often overwhelms the claim. The imbalance is understandable. There is simply a lot to account for in the current moment: intractable health and wealth gaps, segregated schools and housing, police brutality, mass incarceration, disenfranchisement, the resurgence of unapologetic white nationalism, complex legacies of trauma. With regard to the collection of essays, *The 1619 Project*’s sharpest pieces that operate in a purely diagnostic mode draw tight lines between past and present and invite further study. Jamelle Bouie’s “Politics” compellingly roots Trump and his mob’s denial of the legitimacy of Black votes in John C. Calhoun’s proslavery understanding of American constitutional design, tracing its evolution in the late twentieth century into “a homegrown ideology of reaction” marked by “fear of rival political majorities; of demographic ‘replacement’; of a government that threatens privilege and hierarchy” (204). Pre–Civil War and post-*Brown*, the struggles that Bouie documents are twofold: (1) structural, over the power split between the national and state governments and the US Senate’s countermajoritarian norms, and (2) substantive, over whether citizenship is a unitary, egalitarian status or is hierarchically tiered, and whether government’s primary purpose is to bring as many people as possible

- 18 Sam Stockard, “In Affluent Williamson County, an Uproar over Critical Race Theory,” *Tennessee Lookout*, June 25, 2021, <https://tennesseelookout.com/2021/06/25/in-affluent-williamson-county-an-uproar-over-supposed-teaching-of-critical-race-theory/> (quoting Williamson County Moms for Liberty leader Robin Steenman).
- 19 Nikole Hannah-Jones, “Democracy,” in *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, ed. Nikole Hannah-Jones, Caitlin Roper, Ilena Silverman, and Jake Silverstein (New York, 2021), 7–36, here 10–11. Further citations to *The 1619 Project* will be parenthetical.
- 20 Frederick Douglass, *Oration Delivered in Corinthian Hall, Rochester* (Rochester, NY, 1852), 20; “Speech of Frederick Douglass,” *Liberator*, July 24, 1863, 118; W. E. B. Du Bois, *Crisis* 18, no. 1 (1919): 14 (emphasis in the original); Martin Luther King Jr., “A Testament of Hope,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York, 1991), 315.

into citizenship's fold or to guard its many boundaries. Bouie's piece should inspire classroom discussions of other battles over belonging throughout American history: over Reconstruction and its aftermath, post-Reconstruction imperial projects in the West and overseas, and the emergence of the New Deal state.

While *The 1619 Project* paints a broad picture of American injustice, Khalil Gibran Muhammad's "Sugar," Tiya Miles's "Dispossession," and Trymaine Lee's "Inheritance" find power in their specificity. Mohammad's focus on sugar in Louisiana and its enduring marks on our geography, economy, and bodies keeps a much larger discussion of colonization and the slave trade urgent and precise. "Dispossession" explores the profound imbrication of slavery and Indian removal and its lasting effects in Indian Country and across activist coalitions. Through one 1947 lynching in Lowndes County, Alabama, "Inheritance" quietly builds into an unforgettable story about broken government promises, persistent wealth gaps, entrenched poverty, and intergenerational trauma. These essays suggest that one of the legacies of the 1619 Project, beyond the backlash, will be in seeding local history curricula, inspiring students to explore their own communities and discover how so much that seems natural, from landscapes to neighborhoods and the built environment to social worlds, reflects ideologies and economic imperatives that were constructed over time.

Claims of belonging and their accompanying sense of individual possibility appear most regularly in the photographs, poems, and imaginative writings that bridge one essay to the next—in Tracy K. Smith's exquisite found poem derived from a Senate floor speech by Hiram Revels ("I rise. I rise, lifting my voice") (269), in Joshua Bennett's clarion sense of the strength, liberation, and joys of community action ("Anything that wants to be can be a panther") (385). Responses to injustice, individual and specific to time and place, are necessary ballast for the aggregate accounting of it. Only Martha S. Jones's "Citizenship," Anthea Butler's "Church," Wesley Morris's "Music," and Nikole Hannah-Jones's "Justice" place Black voices front and center. Martha S. Jones's essay is particularly important for showing how claims of equal citizenship could develop, spread, and ultimately take root despite structurally daunting odds: contrary opinions of the attorney general and the Supreme Court, compromises in Congress, and well-funded emigration organizations all too eager to pay one-way passage to Liberia. Jones's essay stands alone by suggesting that regardless of positive law, legal concepts such as liberty, equality, and citizenship invite contesting claims. The concepts themselves were all but undefined by our founding documents, the Declaration and the Constitution, the Emancipation Proclamation and Reconstruction Amendments. Leon Litwack described the central question of 1865 as "How free is free?" and liberty, equality, and citizenship have always had to gain meaning through practice, through people asserting claims in everyday life and defending them in one forum after another.

As Black litigants and lawyers have long known, the law can function both as an instrument of oppression and as a pathway to freedom and equality, sometimes simultaneously. Virginia's colonial legislature could enact a rule of matrilineal descent for slave status, which, as Dorothy Roberts explains in "Race," allowed white men to profit by raping the women they held as slaves. At the same time, the law enabled the first free communities of color in colonial British North America to form, constituted largely of people with white mothers.²¹ And Matthew Desmond in "Capitalism" is right to observe that the American regime of strong property rights was forged in the crucible of slavery, but after emancipation, property rights also had radical potential to remake the South, as freedpeople claiming ownership of confiscated rebel land from Edisto Island, South Carolina, to Davis Bend, Mississippi, well understood.²²

Legal authority in the United States is split among federal, state, and local governments and among judicial, legislative, and executive branches, including overlapping and competing administrative agencies.²³ Persistence in pressing a claim from one authority to the next can yield tangible rights, but even then, nothing is ever quite resolved. There is always another authority to turn to. As Jones observes, decades after the Fourteenth Amendment codified birthright citizenship, federal administrators could believe they were acting legally when they refused entry to an American-born man of Chinese descent. The issue of his citizenship would remain contested until the Supreme Court decided *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* in 1898. The diffuse structure of power means that progress is seldom settled and secure. As a result, there tend to be no civil rights movements except long civil rights movements.

Without claims of belonging, structural injustice appears outsize and overwhelming. Even as I agree with Ibram X. Kendi's sense in "Progress" of the precarity of Black social, economic, and political advancement, his observation that narratives of racial progress give cover to racist backlash is limited by the essay's narrow focus on how complacent whites and disingenuous conservatives have invoked progress. I was left wondering how progressive ideas and rhetoric worked within Black communities. When NAACP lawyers convinced the Supreme Court to strike down Oklahoma's grandfather clause in *Guinn v. United States* (1915) and Louisville's racially segregated housing ordinance in *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917), their victories were at most small and incremental. Oklahoma could exclude Black voters by other means, and private covenants kept neighborhoods segregated. At the same time, the victories mobilized people, boosted NAACP fundraising and membership, made it a powerful civil rights organization, and laid the foundation for more expansive gains from much bigger claims, producing what Kendi might call "actual racial progress" (432).

Seventy-seven years after Charles Langston's courtroom speech, his words reverberated in the poetry of his grandson Langston Hughes: "America never was America to me, / And yet I swear this oath— /

21 Paul Heinegg, introduction to *Free African Americans of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina*, accessed November 17, 2022, <https://freeafricanamericans.com/introduction.htm>.

22 Desmond mischaracterizes *Lochner v. New York* as a case in which property rights blocked labor protections. *Lochner* invalidated a statute limiting the hours bakers could work because it violated the liberty of contract of both the bakers and the bakery owners. Contract rights, like property rights, could be both liberating and oppressive: once valorized by antislavery advocates as the embodiment of freedom, contract also created new forms of unfreedom after the Civil War. See Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge, 1998).

23 In addition, the capacity of federal, state, and local governments to implement policy and regulate the economy and society has drastically changed over the course of American history. The relative incapacity of the federal government in the Civil War's aftermath shaped the kinds of rights and opportunities that came to define citizenship. Property, contract, voting rights, and access to education were especially important because they presented opportunities for Black people to leverage themselves into a place of equality in the absence of a government that could or would do much for them.

America will be!”²⁴ And eighty-six years after Hughes published “Let America Be America Again”—decades past landmark Supreme Court precedents, major congressional enactments, and the election of a Black president—no milestone of progress has ever made the critique and the claim obsolete. As racism endures and social and economic hierarchies fight to stay entrenched, and as movements for social change take new form and press forward, there remains nothing more American than the 1619 Project.

Daryl Michael Scott

African American Exceptionalism in the Service of American Exceptionalism

The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story marks the coming of age of a partnership among journalists, reformers, and academics to create public-facing scholarship. Edited by Nikole Hannah-Jones, the *New York Times Magazine* version of the project drew the ire of conservatives for placing slavery and racism at the center of the American narrative and denying the United States her place as a beacon of democracy. President Donald J. Trump launched a commission that responded with a version of American exceptionalism highlighting the US commitment to democracy and racial progress. In this expanded version of the project, the editor has added a new dimension of her own. With a solid foundation of Blacks as victims in place, the project calls for reparations for the oppression of Black people at the core of the American past. Fraught with racial reductionism that elides the question of class, this exercise in African American exceptionalism appeals to the very ideology it critiques in the hope of securing reparations.

The 1619 Project seeks to carve out a place for itself before the public by exaggerating how scholars and our education system have ignored slavery. Few professional historians can convincingly argue that American slavery has been a marginal field of study since the publication of Kenneth M. Stampp’s *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* in 1956 and the innumerable award-winning works that followed. The profession has long accepted Edmund Morgan’s thesis that American freedom could not be explained but for slavery; increasingly, historians have seen a racial component in the Revolutionary War and the making of the Constitution.²⁵ A new Jefferson establishment

24 Langston Hughes, “Let America Be America Again,” *Esquire*, July 1936, 92.

25 Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975).

that accepts Thomas Jefferson's sexual relationship with Sally Hemings has replaced the old one at Monticello that denied it. If race has been identified almost everywhere in the American founding among professional historians, it is also true that few professional historians or the public have accepted that slavery was even a tertiary cause of the American Revolution. It was the claim that slavery caused the American Revolution in *The New York Times Magazine's* version of the project that drew fire from several leading historians. In this edition, slavery has been reduced to one of the causes. The project's popularity ensures that this interpretation will influence public opinion for years. The content of public-facing history matters.

To grab the general audience and advance the cause of reparations, the volume is unabashedly presentist. Not since Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* has anyone so visibly sought to marshal the effects of slavery on African Americans and American society to support a policy position. Indeed, because of the Moynihan Report, longstanding effects of slavery on African Americans were widely regarded until recently as a taboo topic among scholars, who construed it as an effort to blame the victim for their nation's social problems. Black Studies, including Black history, entered the mainstream of the academy, denying victimhood and the enduring negative effects of slavery. Documenting Black resistance, agency, and resilience became the founding project of the new discipline. Even popular understandings of Black history, especially Alex Haley's *Roots*, reflected this academic trend.

With the participation of prominent professional historians, *The 1619 Project* marks the end of a silent, unacknowledged phase—a historiographical shift from a moratorium on depicting African Americans as victims. The new sensibility is visible in the move away from referring to Blacks in bondage and the owners of human chattel as slaves and slaveholders, respectively. The “enslaved” and “enslaver” better convey an ongoing power dynamic that highlights the victims and victimizers. In Afrocentric circles, the centrality of Black victimhood never died, but other communities of scholars have made the crucial difference in giving this emphasis a wider hearing. Afro-pessimism and epigenetics are influencing scholars for whom victimhood is central.²⁶ In an age of interdisciplinary work and Black Studies Departments, the locus of historiography is no longer inside history departments. Moreover, since the rise of reparations as a policy issue, leading activists and scholars such as Randal Robinson and the late Charles Ogletree have emphasized a history of victimhood to justify reparations.²⁷ The new historicism, including this work, has a policy purpose for the past under study.

Taken together, the essays collected in *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* do not disappoint in capturing the victimization of the enslaved and the institution's adverse effects on African Americans and the nation as a whole. From Khalil Gibran Muhammad we learn that the high rates of diabetes among African Americans today has its origins in

26 Frank B. Wildeson III, *Afropessimism* (New York, 2020); Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjugation: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1997); Joy Angela DeGruy, *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (Milwaukie, OR, 2005); F. Jackson and L. Jackson, “Developmental Stage Epigenetic Modifications and Clinical Symptoms Associated with the Trauma and Stress of Enslavement and Institutionalized Racism,” *Journal of Clinical Epigenetics* 4, no. 11 (2018): 1–7.

27 Ana Lucia Araujo, *Reparations for Slavery and the Slave Trade: A Transnational and Comparative History* (New York, 2017); Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (E. P. Dutton, 2000.); Charles J. Ogletree Jr., “Litigating the Legacy of Slavery,” *New York Times*, (March 31, 2002), 9.

sugar production. Dorothy Roberts tells us that the “laws that invented race also created a regime intent on policing Black women’s sexuality and controlling Black women’s bodies,” and still fail to protect Black women (49). Whereas whites benefit from the right to self-defense from the slavery inspired second Amendment, Carol Anderson argues that the same is not true for African Americans. Slavery and its effects, we are told, are everywhere—from the destruction of Black communities and the reinforcement of segregation by federal highway programs to the failure of the United States to create a universal healthcare program. Linda Villarosa’s essay “Medicine” reveals how racialized thinking about Black people’s health, ranging from speculative philosophy to medical science, has a hold on Black health care treatment to this day.

As one might expect, the effort to create a useable past at times fails intellectually. While he sidesteps his customary effort to link mass incarceration to the Thirteenth Amendment, Bryan Stevenson still attempts to put a southern stamp on imprisonment, suggesting that the treatment of Blacks in US prisons can be traced to the southern experience. “Recognizing the unbroken links between slavery, Black Codes lynching, and our current era of mass incarceration is essential” (282). Yet neither convict slavery nor the convict lease system that followed gave birth and currency to the trope of Black criminality. The North, not the South, gave rise to the notion of Black criminality, and the evolving prison system of the North came to dominate the entire country, not vice versa. The disproportionate incarceration of Blacks in freedom began in the antebellum North, when reformers complained that the recidivism of free Blacks doomed rehabilitation. Southern convict leasing, the chain gang, and prison plantations did not become the future of penology but its past, as the South developed along the lines of Northern prisons, where the incarcerated rarely work outside and are often idle. In the age of mass incarceration, the image of Blacks laboring in the fields of Angola and Parchman prisons is no more representative of the Black prison experience in Louisiana or Mississippi today than it is for Northern Blacks.

In chapter 7, Jamelle Bouie fails to tie today’s political problems back to slavery. Bouie invokes John Calhoun’s theory of the concurrent majority to explain the January 6, 2022, insurrection and the attempt made by a political minority to rule the United States. In Bouie’s telling, the fear of a Northern majority that would end slavery motivated Calhoun in the same way that present-day whites’ fears of becoming a minority led them to attack the capital. Completely missing in Bouie’s analysis is an understanding that Calhoun, as part of the planter class, had no use for mob-based, anti-constitutional solutions to political problems. Calhoun’s theory of a concurrent majority recognized the sovereignty of states acting through their legislatures, not the sovereignty of individuals acting as a mob. From the vantage point of anyone who believes in states’ rights, let alone state sovereignty, the Trump-induced insurrection trampled on the power not simply of the federal government,

but also of the states. The sovereign states of Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Nevada, New Mexico, and Arizona had selected their electors and stood poised to confirm the will of the majority of their states. The insurrectionists were denying the states their sovereign right. Calhoun's theory of government had no relevance to the insurrection and the current movement for demographic minority rule.

The project's treatment of lynching demonstrates the perils of public-facing scholarship that includes work by academics and intellectuals not wedded to scholarly consensus or debate. Social science scholars and historians have created databases of lynchings that reflect a consensus that lynchings involve a mob of three or more persons.²⁸ In *The 1619 Project*, the journalist Tramaine Lee tells the story of the lynching of Elmore Bolling, a Black man shot and killed by *two* men. Lee honors the family's view that the murder was a lynching, a view shared by Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative. Indeed, the Initiative's standard for what constitutes a lynching, conveyed by Stevenson during a television appearance on MSNBC, requires only two murderers, which would partially explain why the Initiative's database has four thousand cases, almost a quarter more than others. The book's fourth chapter, "Fear," relies on the Equal Justice Initiative's database. Are historians and other academics ready to embrace the idea of mobless lynchings?

The effort to dismantle America's self-image as a beacon of democracy by placing the legacy of slavery and race at the center of the story fails more fundamentally when it attempts to tackle the issue head on. In his chapter titled "Capitalism," the sociologist Matthew Desmond revisits the question that gave birth to the phrase American exceptionalism: why is there no socialism in America. Joseph Stalin accused American communists of promoting the idea that the United States was exceptional in the development of class struggle and socialism. As if in rebuttal, Desmond posits slavery and racism as the twin explanations for why the American labor movement failed to usher in socialism. More forthrightly than any other essay, he thereby dismisses the role of class struggle in shaping the trajectory of American history. Yet class in America is about more than socialism, and racial reductionism cannot dismiss the role of class conflict and cooperation in transforming the place of African Americans. The successful labor union campaigns to organize in workplaces once considered private meant the state could regulate private property, underwriting fair employment and fair housing laws. For all the racism of labor unions, the political alliance forged between organized labor and Black workers was essential in expanding American democracy to include Black Americans.

The entire architecture of *The 1619 Project* is not so much a rejection of American exceptionalism as it is a restructuring to give African Americans a special place in America's central myth. In chapter 17, titled "Progress," Ibram X. Kendi cites President Barack Obama's frequent invocation of racial progress as proof of its long, failed history. In not recognizing that this version of American exceptionalism has shallow

28 Charles Seguin and David Rigby, "National Crimes: A New National Data Set of Lynchings in the United States, 1883 to 1941," *Socius Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 5, no. 3 (2019): 1–9; Stewart Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882–1930* (Urbana Champaign, IL, 1995). Comment by Bryan Stevenson May 7, 2020, on MSNBC, <https://www.msnbc.com/11th-hour/watch/father-and-son-charged-with-murder-in-death-of-ahmaud-arbery-83181637766>.

roots that bore political fruit only after the triumph of the Civil Rights Movement, Kendi himself becomes the mythmaker, tracing racial progress back to Cotton Mather and the Puritans—a century before the founding of American nationality. Predictably, what Kendi finds there is not the origins of “American progress” in “American race relations,” but the widespread belief among Europeans that Africans benefit under slavery from contact with Western civilization. In his dual role as mythmaker and debunker, Kendi conflates Black and racial progress.

Using African slavery in colonial America and its consequences as an alternative source of mythmaking about the United States legitimizes national mythmaking and keeps the original alive by begging the comparison. Moreover, it gives not race, but only English-speaking Black people a special place in the national story. Ignoring the role of Indigenous people and others in the origin myth, Nikole Hannah-Jones poses African Americans as exceptional in their suffering and in their role in realizing the founding myth. She writes, “But as this book has shown, a truer origin story requires us to place Black Americans prominently in the role of democracy’s defenders and perfecters” (452). This is no multicultural narrative. Within a founding myth that excludes all but Black Americans, only they require reparation. Using the collective, American “we,” she writes: “If we are to be redeemed, we must do what is just: we must, finally, live up to the magnificent ideals upon which we were founded” (476). As public-facing history, *The 1619 Project* is a sad, angry black-white love song calling for reconciliation and repair.

Karin Wulf

Descendancies

By the late 1830s, the Vanns of Georgia, a Cherokee family who had been accumulating wealth since the eighteenth century, were forced along the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma while their property was taken and redistributed to white settlers. James Vann, their patriarch in a matriarchal Indigenous culture, had been at the table for treaty negotiations with the United States and by the early 1800s was reckoned one of the wealthiest men in the east in no small part because he enslaved people of African descent. When he was shot to death in 1809, the Cherokee resisted Vann’s desire to leave his property, Anglo-style and including seventy enslaved people, to his son, “Rich Joe” Vann, though they eventually acceded to his wishes. Conformity to American culture and laws had helped make James and “Rich Joe” Vann rich, though ultimately it could not save the legacy of wealth the family was trying to secure once they became the target of white settlers with claims to the law.

By the late 1940s, the Bollings of Alabama, a Black family who had been accumulating wealth since the nineteenth century, witnessed the murder of their patriarch, the extinction of their businesses and property through fraudulent claims and amid threats of further violence, and experienced generations of trauma from these losses. Elmore Bolling, the head of the family, had learned from his father and grandfather how best to skirt Jim Crow laws and practices that kept or took property from Black families. He and his wife and coentrepreneur, Bertha Mae Nowden Bolling, developed a general store, delivery service, catering company, and gas station, all on leased land—because they reckoned that could not be stolen as land owned in a previous generation had been after Reconstruction. Yet no amount of strategy could save the legacy of wealth the family was trying to secure once they became the target of violent white people with claims to the law.

One of the potencies of grand-scale history is in connecting themes across time and space. *The 1619 Project*, Nikole Hannah-Jones writes in the preface, “relies heavily on historical scholarship, but is not a conventional history. Instead, it combines history with journalism, criticism, and imaginative literature to show how history molds, influences, and haunts us in the *present*” (xxix). Resting the origins of the nation at the moment and site of the first African people to be enslaved in British North America, in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619, provides a different vantage, highlighting the centrality of slavery and the enslaved and their descendants to that molded, influenced, and haunted present. This is one of the revelatory aspects of *The 1619 Project*, a conscious choice to gain enough altitude so that readers can see across centuries and geographies, but also to remain rooted in a perspective (Black history) such that we can observe these meaningful connections.

When we glimpse vital themes in fresh contexts, like the history of family and families, and their essential situation in law and property, it reminds us how much is regularly sacrificed for the sake of a traditional “overarching narrative” or “grand synthesis.” “Family” is both an experience and a social structure to which governments are exquisitely attuned. Governments may choose to forbid, promote, or otherwise regulate families, while many people work near tirelessly to advance and protect their families either in opposition to or by leveraging state policies. Though family structures are never universal or homogenous, the intensity on both sides—families and the state—tells us a lot about how important families have always been to the most important historical developments and phenomena. Yet so often family is absent from historical analysis and narrative. Historians writing the history of the United States have so often fallen into a traditional narrative of national politics (and economics and war) that it’s a cliché to complain about the inexorable trajectory of American Revolution to Civil War to World Wars I and II to—maybe—civil rights and the postwar liberal order, which mutes or entirely obscures such critically important themes.

In “Dispossession,” historian Tiya Miles takes up the question of Native American enslavers of African and African-descended people. Focused on the Southeast, she lays out the series of treaties that the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw Nations signed with the new United States beginning in 1785, and the consequences of having accepted therein the status of Black people as property. Though Miles does not focus exclusively on the Vanns, she knows their history well, having written a book about their Diamond Hill plantation and its history into the twentieth century. Rather, she describes the Vanns in the context of explaining how the southeastern tribes, in part through these treaties, became so enmeshed in slavery. It was there at the beginning, when the tribes that saw common cause with the British agreed to return to citizens of the United States any “Negroes, and all other property taken during the late war” (138). It continued beyond the Civil War, when “even those [nations] who did promise equal rights to the formerly enslaved and their descendants did not fully live up to that vow” (153).

In “Inheritance,” journalist Trymaine Lee writes about the consequences of national and local Jim Crow through the subversion of Reconstruction commitments and institutions that would have provided newly freed people and their families a path to financial and civic independence, and attendant personal violence against Black people. Focused on the Bolling family but ranging across the South, Lee describes the violent policies and practices of post-Reconstruction, when commitments to education, housing, financial assistance, land reallocation, and more went unmet. New laws then “stripped Black people of much of their newfound freedom” alongside “a campaign of terror” that made “gathering the means to educate their children and keep their families safe ... a full-time mission” (298–99). The legacy of historical racial violence, as well as contemporary racial violence, is evident in the lives of the Bolling descendants as they continue to struggle with the losses of 1947 and after.

“Dispossession” and “Inheritance” show us how relentlessly government policies as well as independent groups targeted family and families. And as well as colonialism’s long legacies, these essays point to some of its searing ironies and paradoxes. The Vanns and the Bollings were each working within systems that disadvantaged them in part by explicitly targeting their ability to build intergenerational stability. The United States was coercing Native Americans to give up collective claims to land in favor of individual ownership, the benefits of which were supposed to confer rights of inheritance. The Bollings were among the generation that inherited the Jim Crow policies that made ownership and inheritance nearly impossible. These should be opposing forces: to dispossess is to take away, typically via a government, and to inherit is to receive, typically from an ancestor. But they were unified as Native Americans and Black Americans experienced them, disempowering both.

While setting these two chapters together helps us see just how thoroughly families were implicated in and made vulnerable by colonialism,

their very titles suggest even more complex dynamics. “Dispossession” is a term deeply associated with the staggering impact of colonialism on Native people; while some reject it for implying the total erasure of Native people’s continued existence, including as political communities, or a complete lack of process for land acquisition, the most regular use of “dispossession” is still to indicate the extraordinary expropriation of territory across North America by European empires and then the United States. Miles is using the term, though, to show how one people (Native) could be dispossessed while simultaneously dispossessing others (Black). Miles’s own research as well as others’ has shown how profoundly the same logic and practices of colonialism that wreaked havoc on Native people and communities also fueled the Atlantic slave trade—and then new forms of enslaving Native Americans. Though it was crucial for the purposes of this book to highlight the experiences of the people and their descendants represented now by the Descendants of Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes Association, and she does acknowledge that Native Americans suffered from colonialism and the policies of the United States, a greater attention to that mutual dynamic at the outset—at the American origins, as it were—would be not only appropriate and compelling but of enormous historical value.

Lee invokes “inheritance,” which in the Anglo legal tradition refers to the provision of property to a person’s descendants, usually at their decease. Instead he is describing the trauma that the Bolling family inherited. The impact of Elmore Bolling’s murder reverberated through generations; instead of being able to pass on the wealth he and Bertha accumulated from the hard work they invested in their businesses, their descendants have experienced diverted ambitions and worse. Enslavers and the law they made to enrich themselves at the highest cost to African and African-descended people twisted inheritance in two ways. First, it created a status—enslaved—that was inherited by babies from their mothers. Second, it allowed people to inherit other people, classing some as the property of others. The very thing that was designed in the Anglo law to create more family stability—inheritance—largely shattered that foundational potential for Black people. That context does not change the experience of the Bollings, but it does deepen the historical resonance for us.

The 1619 Project is dedicated “to the more than thirty million descendants of American slavery.” Slavery and its long afterlives—in freedom and in struggle—were saturated with the meanings of descent. Who came from whom, and for whom? Family and families, made and unmade, are American origins.

“Necessary, Despite Errors, Distortions and Omissions”

Perhaps no other project has received as much attention as Nikole Hannah-Jones’s *The 1619 Project*, first published in *The New York Times Magazine* in 2019, and then revised and expanded as a book in 2021 with the title, *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*.

The overall focus of the book is clearly articulated in the forward by Hannah-Jones. Its purpose is to examine the history of race in the United States, and to emphasize the extent to which the legacies of slavery and racism continue to haunt every aspect of American culture. Like the original project, the book has sparked a cascade of praise and criticism. Expressions of love, hate, and qualified support have been enumerated in countless interviews, book reviews, and newspaper articles by journalists, politicians, and political scientists.

Historians have also weighed in. Some have done so publicly, with irate letters to the *New York Times*, while others have opted to express their opinions in the more traditional formats of journal articles, book reviews, and magazines. The concerns most often expressed by historians, the vast majority of whom work on some aspect of US history, had to do with Hannah-Jones’s interpretations of the motives of the Founding Fathers in rising up against British colonialism. Others criticized her omission of Native Americans as part of the origin story of the country. As a historian, I too have criticisms. But it is equally important to acknowledge why the project was launched, as flawed as some of its content may be.

In the late 1960s, when I was a high school student in southern Ohio, African American history was just beginning to enter into public consciousness. Even so, it was not yet considered important enough to include in a US history course. Twenty years later, Hannah-Jones’s high school had added one course in African American history to its curriculum, but only as an elective that was considered by other students appropriate for African Americans alone. As an African American myself, this story feels very familiar. And while much, hopefully, has changed in the teaching of history—I say hopefully because we really do not know what is being taught in the hundreds of thousands of high-school history classrooms across the country despite the *sturm und drang* around “divisive history”—most Americans still know very little about the history of race in the United States beyond slavery and the civil rights movement. They certainly have no clue

about how the legacy of slavery and racism continue to impact their society, as demonstrated by the shocked responses to police killings of Black Americans in the 2020s, a pattern too well known among African Americans to elicit the same surprise. This is why the publication of *The 1619 Project* is so important, despite its flaws. And flaws it has. Beyond factual errors, several chapters simplify to the point of distortion. Others suppress the many ways that African Americans have responded historically, and continue to respond, to the dangers of living in a racist society.

To suggest ... that Black Americans should feel more American than anyone else, is to simplify, distort, and suppress the many ways in which African Americans have responded historically, and still do today, to the dangers of living in a racist society.

As a historian of Africa, I am also aware that the general public knows even less about the history of a continent more than three times the size of the United States. Sadly, that limited knowledge consists largely of the racist stereotypes that predominate in movies and the news media, which regularly portray Africa as a continent (if it isn't described as a single country), beset by unrelenting poverty, poor governance and war, afflicted by devastating droughts and floods as well as bizarre, incomprehensible cultural practices. African History is taught in few high schools, and is still not considered essential in many US university history departments. I was the first historian of Africa hired by the History Department at Cornell University, and that happened only in 1996. Still, one would hope that scholars who seek to include Africa as a place of origin for African Americans would take the time to learn more, to not only eschew the racist portrayals so common in the media, but also to move beyond the simplistic or the just plain wrong. Evidently that can be too much to ask. Thus, we read about "practitioners of African traditional religions like Yoruba" in Anthea Butler's chapter "Church" (308). There is no religion called Yoruba. There are Yoruba speaking people, and there are religious belief systems and practices associated with the Yoruba, but there is no "Yoruba religion" by that name. Hannah-Jones's own essay, "Democracy", discusses the impact of the slave trade on individual African identities. Hannah-Jones writes: "The teal eternity of the Atlantic Ocean had severed them so completely from what had once been their home that it was as if nothing had ever existed before, as if everything and everyone they cherished had simply vanished from the earth. They were no longer Mbundu or Akan or Fulani" (34).

While this poetic language captures the anguish of enslavement and the dehumanizing experience of being transported in wretched conditions across the Atlantic, it attributes too much power to the slave trader to erase language, culture, and a sense of community from the enslaved. As decades of research has demonstrated, many reconnected in the Americas with others on the basis of a common language and a common culture. They then used those connections to resist enslavement, and to establish communities that drew heavily on their African origins. They were no longer Mbundu or Akan or Fulani because they had never defined themselves that way in the first place. Those ethnic identities only emerged during the colonial era. Prior to that period, Africans in Africa identified themselves according to their citizenship in specific political communities, not by language, not by ethnicity. Did nineteenth-century Americans, Anglo-Canadians, and white Australians identify themselves as English speakers rather than as citizens of a particular country simply because they spoke a common language? No, and neither did Africans.

These might be considered minor points, especially to those who know little of African history. One could even argue that simplifying the history of African identities is necessary to bring an otherwise relatively unknown set of names of peoples and places into a narrative that focuses not on Africa, but on African Americans and their influence on every aspect of American culture. Cutting such corners, however, is indicative of a much larger concern that is pervasive in Hannah-Jones's chapter.

That concern has to do with the silencing of alternative voices. Just as Hannah-Jones (and others in the book) ignores how Africans themselves identified their communities in Africa, so she disregards African Americans who did not adhere to the resolution that: "This is our home, and this is our country. Beneath its sod lie the bones of our fathers ... Here we were born, and here we will die" (27). Many African Americans throughout history decided that they no longer wanted to endure the systemic racism and accompanying threats to their lives that came with living in the United States. While mention is made of the American Colonization Society and its white supporters who sought to deport African Americans, nothing is said of the Black supporters of these schemes. African Americans have been escaping slavery and/or racism since their arrival in this country. This cohort includes those who left on British ships for Nova Scotia during the Revolutionary War; those who immigrated to Liberia; and such notable artists as Josephine Baker, Maya Angelou, and James Baldwin. And while most African Americans did not leave the United States, I seriously doubt that patriotic fervor was upmost in the minds of those who left the former slave labor camps in the South to establish all-Black towns in Florida and Oklahoma, to live under their own hoped-for jurisdictions free from threats of violence and exploitation. It is unlikely that the millions who left the South for the North and the West during the Great Migration did so out of

an undying commitment to the much lauded principles on which the United States is said to have been founded. No, they left their homes, the places where they were born, because they were not willing to die in those very places at the hands of slave owners and racists. Where they could go was limited by finances and a variety of other compelling factors. To suggest that most African Americans remained in the United States because “here we were born, and here we will die,” that Black Americans should feel more American than anyone else, is to simplify, distort, and suppress the many ways in which African Americans have responded historically, and respond today, to the dangers of living in a racist society (27).

I also find it curious that Hannah-Jones is so insistent on focusing on a purely American identity for Black (not African-) Americans, who are said to have been shorn of any connection to either Africa or white America. She writes of our “unique isolation” both from our native cultures and from white America. This perspective runs contrary to decades of studies on the cultural retentions and blendings that took place historically, and continue to take place today, as people mix with each other willingly and unwillingly. One has to wonder about the origins of her rejection of Africa and the realities of cultural adaptation. It flies in the face of eighteenth-century Black Americans calling themselves African; it ignores the romanticized image of Africa that was an integral part of the writings of Harlem Renaissance writers in the 1920s and 30s; it ignores the Black is Beautiful movement of the 1960s and 70s that sought to valorize attributes white Americans had stigmatized for centuries: our hair, our skin color, Africa and our African roots; it ignores completely the long-standing Pan-African movement that sought to connect all oppressed Black people wherever they lived because what linked them was, in fact, their African origins and the oppression they faced in light of those origins. This is not to say that African Americans have not been affected by the imagery of Africa as “uncivilized,” as “the Dark Continent.” Many have surely accepted these images and sought to deny any significant connection to Africa. But many others have categorically rejected that imagery. To ignore their voices, to deny the value of their efforts, to relegate them to invisibility because of the erroneous claim that Black Americans were uniquely isolated is simply unacceptable.

As a historian of Africa, who has also studied, written, and taught about the historic and contemporary connections between Africans and African Americans, I find Hannah-Jones’s discussion of these connections sorely wanting. Yet, as an African American, I also support *The 1619 Project*. As noted by Northwestern University historian Leslie Harris, the book “is a much-needed corrective to the blindly celebratory histories that have dominated our understanding of the past—histories that wrongly suggested racism and slavery were not a central part of U.S. history.”²⁹ This is an important book, a necessary book, one that is not without error and significant omissions.

29 Leslie M. Harris, “I Helped Fact-Check the 1619 Project. The Times Ignored Me,” *Politico*, March 6, 2020.

But those errors and omissions should not be used as an excuse to deny the reality that racism and slavery have influenced every aspect of US history.

James H. Sweet

An African-Atlantic Perspective on 1619's "Origins" Project

The 1619 Project calls itself a “new origin story.” At the most basic level, this “new origin” is chronological, starting in 1619 rather than 1776. For Nikole Hannah-Jones, Jamestown’s first “20. and odd” Africans were incipient Americans, the pioneering generation of a people whose contributions to building the nation have been fundamental.³⁰ Various scholars have noted that there is nothing particularly “new” in this formulation. As early as 1882, George Washington Williams made a similar claim in his pioneering work, *History of the Negro Race in America* (1882). The first line of his chapter introducing the 1619 story asserts, “Virginia was the mother of slavery as well as ‘the mother of Presidents.’”³¹ From the perspective of staking a claim to the nation’s origins, the historical equivalency was clear, even one hundred twenty years ago.

As a scholar of the African diaspora, I am less interested in the histories of empires, colonies, and nation-states than I am in the histories of peoples. As such, my questions about the “origins” of the Africans in 1619 Jamestown do not consider them as British imperial subjects, let alone potential members of an American nation-state not yet imagined. Rather, I am interested in their immediate historical contexts—their “origins” as shipmates, as members of family and friend groups, and as “Angolans.” Understanding these histories requires seeing Jamestown not only as a beginning, but also as an end point in a much longer and broader saga that bound African-descended peoples across the Atlantic world.

When viewed from a broad Atlantic perspective, there was nothing unique about the Africans that arrived in Virginia. Scholars estimate that more African slaves had already been dispersed across the Atlantic world prior to 1619 than would arrive in British North America and the United States for the entire history of the slave trade.³² The first enslaved Africans in the territory that would become the United States actually arrived from Spain in the sixteenth century. In 1526, explorer Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón attempted to settle San Miguel de Gualdape,

30 John Rolfe to Sir Edward Sandys, January 1619/20 in Susan Myra Kingsbury, ed. *The Records of the Virginia Company of London* (Washington, 1933), 3:243.

31 George Washington Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880* (New York, 1882), 115.

32 Ivana Elbl estimates that 156,000 Africans arrived in Iberia and the Atlantic islands before 1521. Elbl, “The Volume of the Early Atlantic Slave Trade, 1450–1521,” *Journal of African History* 38, no. 1 (1997): 31–76. *The Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (TSTD) estimates that 368,669 Africans disembarked in the Americas between 1502 and 1619: <https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>. [Accessed November 19, 2022]

along with roughly five hundred Spaniards and one hundred African slaves, near the mouth of the Savannah River. The Spanish colonists quickly succumbed to hunger, cold weather, and disease. Taking advantage of the bleak conditions, a group of Africans torched the house of one of the Spaniards—arguably the first slave revolt in what would become the United States.³³

Just a year later, in 1527, the more famous Esteban de Dorantes (aka Estevanico and Esteban the Moor), arrived with his Spanish master on Pánfilo de Narváez's ill-fated exploration of Florida.³⁴ Though the original Spanish expeditions to Florida were a disaster, by 1565 the Spanish established a permanent settlement at St. Augustine. In 1606, on the eve of the British arrival at Jamestown, there were at least one hundred enslaved Africans in Florida, forty belonging to the Spanish Crown. Yet these small numbers of Africans on North American soil paled in comparison to the rest of the Americas, where enslaved Africans often outnumbered their European masters by wide margins. In 1570, the population of Mexico consisted of 20,569 Africans and just 6,644 Europeans, a ratio of more than 3:1.³⁵ By the time the first Africans arrived at Jamestown, in 1619, Africans outnumbered Europeans in Lima, Cartagena, and Panama City as well.³⁶ In Havana, the numbers of whites and Blacks was almost even.³⁷ In Brazil, estimates suggest that there were fifty thousand Portuguese residents in the colony in 1620. Meanwhile, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database estimates that 158,676 Africans arrived into Brazil between 1600 and 1625.³⁸ Altogether then, the Americas of 1619 were measurably more African than they were European. This fact alone should challenge us to reframe the histories of imperial and colonial America as *African* histories. It should also inform our understandings of the experiences of Virginia's first "20. and odd."³⁹ But who were these hundreds of thousands of Africans in the Americas? Where did they come from and what were they doing?

Between 1600 and 1625, more than 261,000 West Central Africans were forcibly transported to the Americas as slaves. These Africans, most often referred to as "Kongos" and "Angolas" in colonial documents, represented more than 90% of all Africans who made their way to the Americas during this 25-year period.⁴⁰ When combined with the data on the preponderance of Africans in the overall population of the Americas, we can safely conclude that West Central Africans dominated the immigrant populations of the Americas by the time of the arrival of the first Africans at Jamestown. As a result, communities such as Cartagena (New Granada) and Salvador (Brazil) were more deeply influenced by the Kimbundu and Kikongo languages than by Spanish or Portuguese, more definitively shaped by spirit possession rituals known as calundu than by Catholic ritual, and often more responsive to the political and economic demands of Luanda than of Lisbon or Madrid. In short, the idioms and cultures of West Central Africa profoundly shaped seventeenth-century American history in ways that have scarcely been

- 33 Paul E. Hoffman, *A New Andalusia and a Way to the Orient: The American Southeast During the Sixteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1990). Some have argued for a "1526 Project" as an "allied effort" to the "1619 Project." See Samuel T. Livingston, "The Site of Memory: The 1526 Project and Why It Matters," November 22, 2021, <https://facultyblog.morehouse.edu/blog-posts/link-to-article-25740-en.html>, published..
- 34 See Andrés Reséndez, *A Land So Strange: The Epic Journey of Cabeza de Vaca* (New York, 2009).
- 35 Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México* (Mexico City, 1972), 210.
- 36 Peru: from viceroy's census of 1614—10,386 Africans; 9,616 Spaniards in Fernando Montesinos, *Anales del Perú*, vol. 2 (Madrid, 1906), 197. Panama City: from 1610 census—3,500 Africans; 1,007 whites in Luis Torres de Mendoza, *Colección de Documentos Inéditos* vol. 9 (Madrid, 1868), 90–91; Cartagena at beginning of seventeenth century: 3,500 Africans; 2,000 Spaniards from Maria Cristina Navarrete, "Cotidianidad y cultura material de los negros de Cartagena en el siglo XVII," *América Negra* 7 (1994): 67–68.
- 37 Isabelo Macías Domínguez, *Cuba en la primera mitad del siglo XVII* (Sevilla, 1978), 20–25.
- 38 Malyn Newitt, *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion 1400–1668* (London, 2004), 168. The TSTD estimates that an average of more than 6,100 Africans arrived in Brazil every year between 1600 and 1625, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>. [Accessed on November 19, 2022]
- 39 John Rolfe to Sir Edward Sandys, January 1619/20 in Susan Myra Kingsbury, ed. *The Records of the Virginia Company of London* (Washington, 1933), 3:243.
- 40 <https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>. [Accessed on November 19, 2022]

- 41 For more on West Central Africans in the Americas, see Linda M. Heywood, ed., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformation in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge, 2002); James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003); Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean: Transcending Space, Transforming Culture* (Mona, Jamaica, 2003); Jason Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2007); Roquinaldo Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World: Angola and Brazil During the Era of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge, 2012); Ras Michael Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry* (Cambridge, 2012).
- 42 Engel Sluiter, “New Light on the ‘20 and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (1997): 395–98; Linda Heywood and John Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585–1660* (Cambridge, 2007).
- 43 See John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1998); Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998); James Sidbury, *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (Oxford, 2007); Ada Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, 2014); Herman Bennett, *African Kings and Black Slaves: Sovereignty and Dispossession in the Early Modern Atlantic* (Philadelphia, PA, 2019); Vincent Brown, *Tacky’s Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Boston, MA, 2020); Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, PA, 2020).

considered in a historiography that emphasizes European colonies and nation-states.⁴¹

... the project reduces Black people’s claims for freedom, democracy, justice, and reparations to the history of the United States.

Those interested in 1619 might consider the conjunctural histories of enslaved Africans in the Americas. If, for example, nearly all of Virginia’s earliest Africans hailed from Angola, did they share histories with the more than a quarter million Central Africans that arrived in the Americas between 1600 and 1625? What might the Angolans in Virginia have had in common with those in Cartagena or northeastern Brazil? Claudine Rankine’s poem “The White Lion” reminds us that “two English ships” pirated the Portuguese ship *São João Bautista* and “split up its human cargo” (3–4). *The White Lion* delivered the small contingent of Africans to Virginia, but *The 1619 Project* tells us nothing about the fates of the three hundred fifty shipmates, friends, and family who originally boarded with them in Luanda. In fact, twenty four ended up in Jamaica, twenty nine in Bermuda, and one hundred twenty two in Mexico.⁴² By thinking of Jamestown’s West Central Africans not as incipient Americans, but rather as people with a common Angolan homeland and scattered kin across Latin America and the Caribbean, we endow them with a different set of “national” histories and future imaginaries, etched in African-Atlantic cultures and politics.⁴³

When viewed from the larger context of the Atlantic world, *The 1619 Project* telescopes the experiences of African Americans in ways that obscure histories outside the nation-state. As a consequence, the project reduces Black people’s claims for freedom, democracy, justice, and reparations to the history of the United States (and vice versa). But African Americans were never bound by the constraints of a nation-state that firmly rejected them. This was as true in the twentieth century as it was under slavery. In her concluding chapter on justice and reparations, Hannah-Jones provides the book’s only meaningful reference to Marcus Garvey.⁴⁴ Garvey, a Jamaican, built the largest, most far-reaching mass movement of African-descended people the world has ever known. At the core of his “race first” philosophy was a fierce self-determination that resulted in the creation of Black-owned newspapers, schools, restaurants, laundries, grocery stores, and a steamship company. These businesses stretched from Garvey’s headquarters in New York City to Cuba, Jamaica, Panama, Costa Rica, and elsewhere across the Atlantic world. Garvey’s dream was to liberate the world’s scattered Africans, like the descendants of those that traveled on the *São João Bautista* in 1619, and return them to Africa.

In a contradictory misreading of Garvey, Hannah-Jones writes, “The Black nationalist Marcus Garvey [called] for reparations in the 1910s and for Black Americans to leave this country and resettle in a Black one.”⁴⁴ Just as with the Africans at Jamestown, Hannah-Jones reduces Garvey and Garveyites to Americans, effectively erasing the shared struggles against racism and oppression of African-descended peoples across the Atlantic world. Perhaps even more notably, she misrepresents Garvey’s staunch economic nationalism as a call for reparations. Garvey bemoaned Europe’s pillaging of Africa and called on Black people to seize control of the continent’s oil, rubber, and mineral deposits. But he was also crystal clear: Black people needed nothing from white people—not money, not affirmation, and definitely not belonging in their nations or empires. Rather, Black people needed to control their own legal, financial, and political destinies, establishing an independent nation in Africa.

While I applaud *The 1619 Project* for its singular commitment to challenging the triumphalist narrative of American democracy, such an approach ultimately reifies the very nation that systematically excluded African Americans for the majority of its history. African Americans cultivated many other “nations.” They did not simply react to white folks’ exclusionary politics. At the same time, the “nation” itself was not a historical monolith. Indeed, the United States only became a nation 157 years after the British introduced African slavery to Virginia. The “origins” of American slavery reside in Britain. This has important implications for contemporary reparations demands. By focusing narrowly on the US government’s debt to African Americans, *The 1619 Project* misses an opportunity to link up with scholars and activists in the British West Indies, who have been particularly effective in formulating reparations demands, not merely at the national level but as a regional movement. Their demands extend well beyond the British government to include the corporate heirs of knowable, nameable slave holders.⁴⁵

Ironically, for a book so rightfully critical of the narrative of American exceptionalism, *The 1619 Project* seems to fall into the trap of replacing one form of American exceptionalism for another. A broader consideration of the multiple, overlapping meanings of belonging and “nation” might have hewn more closely to African American history. However, it is precisely in the revelation of white America’s persistent exclusions, hypocrisies, and acts of violence that the project gains its political potency. This narrative of American history is no less legitimate or complete than the heroically white, male one it challenges. At bottom, the project is an urgent demand for national inclusion. If people read it this way, our politics might look different.

44 Garvey is mentioned only by his first name in Hannah-Jones’s Introduction (xviii).

45 *The 1619 Project*, 463.

46 See Hilary McD. Beckles, *Britain’s Black Debt: Reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide* (Kingston, 2013). For the reparations demands of various countries in the Caribbean, see the work of the CARICOM Reparations Commission: <https://caricomreparations.org/>.

1619 in the Middle East

... while Virginia writes itself colonial,
filling its first property
ledger with *twenty* and *odd*
of the uprooted twelve million
including Anthony and Isabella
who, out of the *White Lion*'s hold,
step into the whole of history
to give birth to the first child
to take the first steps, provisionally,
Toward African American
in Virginia ...⁴⁷

Although we learn only a few names of the African people who first landed in North America in the early seventeenth century, we encounter ancestors, both heroes and victims, throughout *The 1619 Project*. The book builds on a pantheon of the distinguished: those most effective in defending the rights of Black people in the United States as well as their foes, those most committed to racism. As this parade of people marched through the essays that make up the project, I wondered how their Middle Eastern counterparts could fit into the panoply. As a historian who studies the history and legacy of slavery in the Middle East, I have come to rely on certain chroniclers whose memories of the enslaved in their lives, or of their own enslavement, resonate with a tragic sense of power and loss. *The 1619 Project* is itself a polyvalent exploration of destruction—those millions of lives violently embezzled in the pursuit of others' wealth—and the power of African American survival, perseverance, and creativity. Along the way, the project's authors have also relied on certain people as guides and truth tellers through the four centuries of sorrow they recount: Phyllis Wheatley, Benjamin Banneker, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, and George Floyd, to name only a few. This has inspired me to imagine a similar canonical temple in how enslavement has been remembered in the countries that once made up the Ottoman Empire.

I would like to say first that *The 1619 Project* is an important literary, political, and cultural monument for Americans in this point in our history. The photographs used in the project are unique, sometimes spell-binding in their clarity and power. The poems coordinate flexibly and easily with the essays. The materials make clear that learning history is absolutely crucial to American survival. The date, 1619, becomes the new origin point, so much older than 1776 in the scope of American history. In the history of the Middle East, however, 1619 is not a new year in the

47 Claudia Rankine, "The White Lion," *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (New York, 2021), 4.

history of slavery, but a year in which many forms of the slave trade and slavery had already taken shape, or were shifting into new territories. Slaves were part of the great armies of the Ottomans and the Mamluks, as they had been in earlier Islamic empires like the Fatimids and the Abbasids. Slaves married or lived as concubines with Ottoman royalty and made up the ruling classes of Egypt. Slaves cleaned houses, fed children, protected wives, and guarded cities. The newly enslaved also found themselves dragged into middle passages, but these were usually across mountains or deserts (via dhows, not the custom-made ships of the transatlantic trade).⁴⁸ Many decades before 1619, Ottoman sultans embraced the use of a new category of formerly enslaved Sudanese or Ethiopian eunuchs who would, for years to come, take charge of the royal households: the chief Black Agha.⁴⁹ Although we do not know for certain, it is presumed they did this because miscegenation with forbidden women was easier to discover if their caretakers were from Africa.

Ali Mubarak Pasha expressed no shame about the slaves he owned or those owned by others—this was no William Lloyd Garrison, worrying about the moral stain of slavery

1619 is about race: the project teaches us how the idea of race changed transatlantic enslavement forever, making skin color the defining measure of who could be enslaved. This too happened for certain groups of enslaved people, such as Ottoman eunuchs, but the historical genealogy of racism would be seen differently by my imagined observers. I wonder what Ali Pasha Mubarak would think of finding an origin point in the year 1619. The nineteenth-century Egypt in which he lived—as a scholar, reformer, engineer, historian, and architect—had a history of slavery stretching back much further. But in the hundreds of years of Egyptian history that he tried to encapsulate in his multi-volume topography, *Al-Khitat al-Tawfiqiyya al-jadida li-Misr al-Qahira wa-muduniha wa-biladiha al-qadima wa-l-shahira*, Ali Mubarak Pasha always used the Arabic terms for black and white to describe the different kinds of slaves in Egypt.⁵⁰ He would have known that in 1619, the Ottoman Empire was centered in Istanbul and reached as far east as Persia and as far west as the Balkans, as far south as upper Egypt and as far north as the Baltic Sea. In the Ottoman Empire, there were at least two such systems: the devshirme and the mamluk. The devshirme was a kind of tax, or levy, on Balkan towns, whose strongest and most talented children would be sent to Istanbul, converted to Islam, and trained for military service or drafted into government work. The Mamluk system, centered in Palestine, Syria, and Egypt, was also built on levies of male children, who would join the elite regiments of soldiers who ruled the region for hundreds of years.

48 For more information about slavery in various parts of the Middle East, please see Terence Walz, *Trade Between Egypt and Bilad As-Sudan, 1700–1820* (Cairo, 1978); Imad Ahmad Hilal, *Al-Raqiq fi Miṣr fī al-qarn al-tāsi* ‘*ashar*’ (Cairo, 1999); Madeline Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (New York, 2010); Matthew Hopper, *Slaves of One Master: Globalization in the Age of Empire* (New Haven, CT, 2015).

49 Jane Hathaway, *The Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Harem: From African Slave to Power Broker* (Cambridge, 2018).

50 Ali Mubarak Pasha, *Al-khitat al-tawfiqiyya al-jadida* (A New Topography for Egypt and Cairo, under the Khedive Tawfiq), (Cairo), 1886–89.

I do not know if you could meet a man like Ali Pasha Mubarak in Cairo today (or in any city for that matter). Assigned by the Egyptian ruler to tear down major arteries of Cairo in the 1860s and 70s, he recorded the past of streets and avenues on which slaves of all kinds—military, Balkan, Circassian, Ethiopian, Sudanese—did the kinds of work that made Cairo a great city. Alert to all signs of racial difference, Ali Mubarak Pasha expressed no shame about the slaves he owned or those owned by others—this was no William Lloyd Garrison, worrying about the moral stain of slavery. In Ali Mubarak Pasha’s life, the idea of Egypt as a nation was gaining strength as part of a cultural and political reaction to both the Ottoman and British empires.

My second chronicler would be Halide Edib Adivar, a renowned intellectual whose childhood and early adulthood occurred during the late Ottoman Empire, but whose later life was spent in the republic of Turkey—and for a time, in exile. An elite woman whose father was medic to an Ottoman sultan, she attended the first English-language school in Istanbul and became a writer, teacher, reformer, and politician. Her ideas for the new Turkish republic as it emerged from the Ottoman Empire ran afoul of Turkey’s new president, Atatürk, and in the mid-1920s she wrote her memoirs in English while living in New York City and teaching classes in sociology at Columbia University. Halide not only wrote about her fears that she was the child of a Black slave; she also delved deeply into her own relationship with a young Ethiopian girl who was given to her when they both were children. In Halide’s Istanbul, rumors abounded that children acquired the personality of their wetnurse—in her case, a Black woman. Irritable behavior was ascribed to this “genealogy,” as was her untamable hair. And yet, Halide watched her enslaved companion become fluent in Turkish and beautiful and talented, which taught her a different side of the shame of slavery in late Ottoman society.⁵¹ Halide was sensitive to the physical pain and psychological depression that afflicted many women in her society—most notably, in her eyes, enslaved women. And when it comes to race, which for her was of the utmost importance, I always wonder how she would have navigated Harlem, living nearby during the 1920s, being brave and curious. And what would she have made of the terms and epithets used in Harlem and elsewhere in the United States to describe Blackness?

Had she been able to read, I can imagine St. Josephine Bakhita absorbing every word of *The 1619 Project*. In chapter 13, “Church,” Anthea Butler describes the rise of the Black Church as a force in the creation of an African American sense of literacy, spirituality, and protest. St. Josephine Bakhita found herself in a very different church. Captured by slave raiders in eastern Sudan in the 1870s, she was sold several times to Ottoman, Egyptian, and Sudanese owners. When she was finally sold to an Italian consul, an uprising that would become known as the Mahdiyya had begun to challenge the authority of the Egyptian government, which had for years held much of Sudan as a colony. European diplomats who could escape, did, and Bakhita

51 Halide Edib Adivar, *Memoirs of Halide Edib* (Piscataway, NJ, 2004).

accompanied her owner to Italy, where she was sold again. She found herself and her calling in the convent of the Canossian Daughters of Charity, in Venice; struggling with Italian and the Venetian dialect, she made it clear to everyone present that she wanted to be a nun, not a slave. The sheer force of her charisma converged with the Catholic Church's growing support for abolition: Bakhita won her freedom and remained a sister until her death in 1947. She was beatified in 1992 and canonized in 2000.⁵²

Every member of my canon of the history of slavery was concerned with the voices of the enslaved, their roles in history, and their identities, but St. Bakhita also represents an issue with naming in much of the Middle East. Bakhita (which means "lucky" in Arabic) was the name she was given when first captured, and Josephine was the name the Catholic Church bestowed on her many years later. Eve L. Ewing touches on issues of disguised origins in her beautiful poem about Phyllis Wheatley in chapter 3, titled "proof [dear Phillis]": "Foremother, your name is the boat that brought you" (93). Although the enslaved peoples of the Middle East lived, worked, and sometimes protested their conditions far from those who populate *The 1619 Project*, there are hints of their cultures in this book. In her poem "Daughters of Azimuth", in chapter 1, Nikky Finney extends a hand to the other worlds in which the enslaved grew up:

I lead my sisters into the woods on Sundays when Missus goes to town.

We don't have long but have long enough. I am Mintu from the world

before, not Mindy, from now.

Mintu retains her connections to other celestial beings, to another North. Her words in this poem are about preventing births that were the result of rape. This is a process begun by older women for the young:

They will cramp and swell, float about like a pod of baby whales, for seven days until they get their bearings. In Arabic, I will recite the old

poetry ending with *altitude is never the same as azimuth*.

The sounds and poems of other slaveries whisper through *The 1619 Project*, hinting at non-English memories and languages of enslaved ancestors. I hope that this powerful compendium of essays, poetry, and photography will be read and understood outside of the United States, where slavery was expressed in a different vocabulary but existed all the same.

52 Eve M. Troutt Powell, *Tell This in My Memory: Stories of Enslavement from Egypt, Sudan and the Ottoman Empire* (Stanford, CA, 2012), ch. 6.

Revisiting Religion, Race, and Place in the Islamic World with *The 1619 Project*

Although Amazigh, which means both white and free people, and black are an oxymoron, they are co-constitutive of my story of origins.

—Brahim El Guabli⁵³

The 1619 Project proposes to write a new history of the United States not merely by assigning a new temporal point of origin—when did this history, in fact, begin?—but also by envisaging new originators: Who *made* this history? Its premise is that the very people who were brought by force to what would become the United States are those who, by constructive and creative action, have fashioned the terms of that becoming. Similar historiographical interventions have been deployed in studying the “Islamic world,” particularly its earlier period (roughly AD 600–1200), histories of which long highlighted a heavily Arabized and Sunni narrative core. In this account, Islamic civilization begins with Muhammad, descends through caliphs, and devolves into imperial and provincial entities no longer united under universal religiopolitical leadership. In his pathbreaking 1994 book, *Islam: The View from the Edge*, Richard W. Bulliet offers an alternative story, anchoring this leadership with pious academicians from predominantly Iranian lands. For centuries, they expounded from the periphery the prophetic traditions that authenticated caliphs’ epistemological and genealogical significance.⁵⁴

Unlike with *The 1619 Project*’s insistence that Black Americans are the “most American of all” (36), Bulliet does not go so far as to render his learned figures epitomes of Muslimness. Many newly converted Muslims at the “edges” he explores—distinguished by ethnicity and geography as well as chronology—cautiously traced spiritual and biologized lineages that would foreordain their arrival to Islam but also establish their secondary, supporting roles in a community emanating outward from Muhammad. Some Persian Muslims adduced kinship with the prophet Isaac, some African Muslims did likewise with Muḥammad’s companion, Bilāl, and so on.⁵⁵ Thus, Bulliet’s claim to “complement, not replace, the view from the center” rings true to how various historical actors articulated their own positionality—a consideration often in tension with revisionist approaches.⁵⁶ In *What Is Islam?*, Shahab Ahmed

53 Brahim El Guabli, “My Amazigh Indigeneity (the Bifurcated Roots of a Native Moroccan),” *Jadaliyya*, September 20, 2021, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/43343>.

54 Richard W. Bulliet, *Islam: The View from the Edge* (New York, 1994).

55 Sarah Bowen Savant, “Isaac as the Persian’s Ishmael: Pride and the Pre-Islamic Past in Ninth and Tenth Century Islam,” *Comparative Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2006): 5–25; Michael Gomez, *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa* (Princeton, NJ, 2018), 70.

56 Bulliet, *Islam*, 7.

presents a bolder provocation when he avers that Moshe ben Maimon / Mūsā ibn Maymūn, also known as Maimonides, is best understood as an “Islamic Jewish” thinker, because “if we put aside the category of ‘religion’ and focus on *meaning*,” then a Jew steeped in and building on Islamic hermeneutics must be said to be Islamic.⁵⁷

Thus, even as widely accepted historiography sidelined multiple groups in the Islamic world’s making, the field’s counternarratives have not posited them as apotheoses. Rather, they become emblems of “aporetic” possibility, per Mana Kia—of multimodal belonging within a transregional religiopolitical matrix rather than a delimited nation-state.⁵⁸ But these counternarratives risk romanticizing mutable identities as such, and thus eliding lived and discursive histories of violence. Ahmed embraces Maimonides’s capacity to make Islamic contributions from within a different faith despite the sage’s own life being beset with the threat of forced conversion from a Muslim polity. Kia contends that premodern Muslim societies were preracial because of their aforementioned flexible biosocial logics, though manipulating this malleability to reproduce power structures lies at the heart of histories of racialization. This is perhaps why I found the most illuminating parts of *The 1619 Project* for my own purposes to be those that unflinchingly engaged the complex and shifting relationships between Indigenous Americans and diasporic Africans in what has become the United States. These sections add texture to the project’s overall structurally and analytically linear account of origins not just of the United States but of its systems of racial caste and their (global?) totalization, resonating with interrogations into socialities beyond and before the modern West.⁵⁹ These sections help us think about how to trouble seemingly clear-cut narratives of identity construction while being attentive to power dynamics within Islamic history as well.

In the chapter “Dispossession,” Tiya Miles outlines how, despite significant overlap in their historical and present struggles against white supremacy, Black and Native Americans have “struggled to find solidarity” (139). Recurrently, Black people were collateral damage and bargaining devices in warfare and treaties between Native Americans and European settlers. Deracinated Black people were forced to work Native Americans’ plundered land while their expelled peers were called on to “civilize,” redoubling their losses through projects of cultural annihilation. Laws and record-keeping techniques that quantified race through hypodescent (the “one-drop rule”) erased Native presences as Black and Native people built families together. The two groups were divided and conquered, and yet the totalizing success of colonial stratagems is belied by the ongoing generation of Afro-Native coalitions and kinships. Elsewhere, Miles also expresses hope for their growing mutual accountability in spaces made by and for Afro-Native communities.⁶⁰

Indigeneity and diaspora signal sui generis ways of communal seeing and being, which white supremacists routinely misappropriate or exploit.⁶¹ Diaspora and Indigeneity are also often portrayed as

57 Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ, 2015), 448–49.

58 Mana Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin before Nationalism* (Stanford, CA, 2020).

59 Projects on premodern racialization frequently combat anxieties around presentism and around visiting exceptionally US American notions on others’ pasts. Feisal G. Mohamed, “On Race and Historicism: A Polemic in Three Turns,” *ELH* 89, no. 2 (2022): 377–405, esp. 379. Counter to this, transregional Afro-Asian histories of race model ways of provincializing Euro-American thought and history. Most recently, Guangtian Ha, “From Baghdad to Baghpūr: Sailors and Slaves in Global Asia,” in *Who Is the Asianist? The Politics of Representation in Asian Studies*, ed. Will Bridges, Nitasha Tamar Sharma, and Marvin D. Sterling (New York, 2022), 53–74, at 56–57.

60 Tiya Miles and Sharon P. Holland, eds., *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country* (Durham, NC, 2006), xviii.

61 Suzanne Conklin Akbari, “Race, Environment, Culture: Medieval Indigeneity, Race, and Racialization,” in *A Cultural History of Race*, vol. 2, *In the Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas Hahn (London, 2021), 47–66, here 62–63.

ineluctably linked, with diaspora the result of dislocating and divesting Indigenous peoples from the space qua culture maker to which they had been rooted. More rarely do we attend to how the two proliferate causal chains. A resettled diasporic presence might threaten Indigenous formations; claims on Indigeneity by some can discursively perpetuate others' diasporic identities. The ontic status of being present in a particular place at a particular time transforms into the social status of being Indigenously of a place through dynamics of coercion and domination, which likewise catalyze constructions of diaspora.⁶² At the same time that many self-distinguishing tribes across a vast territory were racialized into white intelligibility as "Indians" and "Natives" in the United States, many self-distinguishing peoples from vastly different parts of Africa likewise were geo-culturally dislocated and became "Black."

The experiences of peoples identified as Berber and Black throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and the Sahel are strikingly consonant with those that Miles assembles. I will only sketch aspects of these experiences, though Miles's deft treatment can be read alongside numerous others. As the sphere of Arabian conquests and horizon of Arab Islamic geopolitical influence extended throughout the seventh through ninth centuries and native North and Saharan Africans became subject to war and enslavement, the standard account—concisely encapsulated by Ramon Harvey—states, "many Berber slaves converted to Ibādism—possibly in part due to its egalitarian vision—and then these new Ibādīs, in turn, became slavers of populations in Sudan."⁶³ Phrased differently, these peoples became responsible, under a clever if survivalist maneuver, for a forced diaspora of enslaved sub-Saharan Africans into central Islamic lands.⁶⁴ Unpacking this statement necessitates unraveling mutable signifiers: slave, egalitarian, Berber, Sudan.

From its outset, Islamic law sought to proscribe Muslims from enslaving one another, meaning that Muslims enslaved others at their fluctuating geocultural peripheries. As groundwork for mass commodification, enslavability was predicated not on individual professions of faith but on perceptions of entire populations as Islamized or not—though individuals could contest wrongful enslavement. The belief that Arabia's denizens all constituted Islam's first community, for example, conduced to rulings stating that no one with Arabian tribal standing could be enslaved.⁶⁵ Manumitted persons entered into a new tier of unfreedom entailing legal dependency on their former owners, whose genealogical bona fides could insulate the socially precarious, non-Arab people they had owned.

Challenges to the classed primacy of Arabian genealogies and the import of genealogical sciences thus oriented many early "egalitarian" movements. The Ibādī form of Islam to which many native to North Africa and the Sahel converted early on duly emphasized that piety rather than prestigious lineage or kinship with Muḥammad shaped an individual's worldly and cosmic standing in Islam. Positioned as at once heterodox and Muslim, these populations would become decreasingly

62 Audra Simpson, "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship," *Junctures*, no. 9 (December 2007): 67–80, here 69.

63 Ramon Harvey, "Slavery, Indenture, and Freedom: Exegesis of the 'mukātaba Verse' (Q. 24:33) in Early Islam," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 21, no. 2 (2019): 68–107, here 75.

64 This narrative is hotly contested. Willow Smith recently drew fire for an apparent reference to the trans-Saharan slave trade in an excerpt from her forthcoming novel (co-authored with Jess Hendl) that simultaneously seemed to parrot stereotypes about Amazigh and Muslim "savagery." Ghufrane Mounir, "Black Shield Maiden: Willow Smith's New Book Lambasted over Representation of Muslims," *Middle East Eye*, February 21 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/discover/black-shield-maiden-willow-smith-book-lambasted-muslim-representation>.

65 Harvey, "Slavery, Indenture, and Freedom," 72.

enslavable. They designated themselves—in several related languages that have merged elements with Arabic to varying degrees⁶⁶—through discrete yet layered endonyms for families, tribes, and larger federations that in Arabic became terms like Sanhaja, Zenata, Masmuda, and Kutama. However, these native North Africans also were gradually amalgamated under the moniker Berbers (*barābira*, referring to unintelligible speech and related to the Greek *barbaroi*). This process has been historicized by Ramzi Rouighi as following the routes of Arab Muslims' westward and northward expansions. As they progressed along the African coast and thence across the Mediterranean, "Berbers" also moved through these routes and participated alongside them.⁶⁷

As groundwork for mass commodification, enslavability was predicated not on individual professions of faith but on perceptions of entire populations as Islamized or not—though individuals could contest wrongful enslavement.

The existence of "Black" people, too, was an evolving construct. In the efflorescence of Arabic geographic writing in the tenth century, the "Lands of the Blacks" (*bilād al-sūdān*)—the "Sudan" to which Harvey refers, as distinct from the modern state—reified and racialized an ecumene to the Islamic world's far south, particularly the Sahel, sub-Saharan Africa, and territories in the eastern Indian Ocean as well. This trans-regional space's profound internal diversity and interconnectedness was discursively flattened into a shared biosocial trajectory prescribed by the created order and issuing via prehistoric, prophetic lineages and earthly climes. Though as supposed common descendants of Ham, son of Noah, "Berbers" were grouped with "Blacks" in certain contexts, the former were also cast as latecomers to their region. Some authors preserved traditions ascribing Berber as a name given by Yemeni rulers to Canaanites who had remained in Palestine through antiquity and were then brought (*atā bihim*) into North Africa.⁶⁸ In this narrative, Berbers were more proximate to Arabs in temperament, in the old sense of the word in Greco-Roman and subsequently Islamic thought as a subjectivity bound to the climate and the four humors. The same epistemologies of race and religion that posited Berber and Black peoples as kindred were modified via the agency of conquered populations who adopted new social roles. Muslim "Berber" intermediaries were made distinct from a pagan "Black" periphery, prefiguring today's fanciful racial partitioning of Africa at the Sahara.⁶⁹ Yet the territorial and ethnocultural interpenetration of Berbers and their Black peers is latent in long-

66 Lameen Souag, "Berber," in *Arabic and Contact-Induced Change*, eds. Christopher Lucas and Stefano Manfredi (Berlin: Language Science Press, 2019), 403–418.

67 Ramzi Rouighi, *Inventing the Berbers: History and Ideology in the Maghrib* (Philadelphia, 2019), esp. 49–51.

68 al-Ṭabarī, *Tā' rīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk*, vol. 1, ed. Ṣidqī Jamīl al-'Aṭṭār (Beirut, 1995), 263; al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 3, trans. William Brinner (Albany, 1991), 98.

69 As Black families Islamized, they at times dropped out of the historical record as such by phasing into or devising Arab and/or Berber lineages. Ousmane Oumar Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslims in West Africa* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 63.

established patterns of Saharan movement that propelled the Islamic world's Black diaspora, which Katia Schörle describes as “multidirectional,” and archipelagic, rather than following a strict south-north progression.⁷⁰ Medieval Arabic geographies talk of different African peoples as enslaving others because of their proximity, raiding and trading with neighbors rather than across an estranging desert waste.⁷¹

Ultimately, in early Arabic usage, “Berber” did not signal African Indigeneity, nor did “Black.” Per Bruce S. Hall, these identities were not framed in such terms until collectives such as the Tuareg in French Sudan made targeted “racial arguments” vying for recognition under colonization, albeit based on long intellectual traditions.⁷² Moreover, in understandings that traversed medieval and early modern Afro-Eurasia, perceived autochthony scarcely correlated with stewardship of the land; often, it implied the opposite. Jennifer L. Morgan describes depictions of Africans imperfectly harnessing and peopling their land in English writings, indicating their “disregard for the proper value of things” and indeed for each other. Some sourced these strategic representations in the Italian writings of the sixteenth-century Morocco-based traveler Leo Africanus, himself versed in Arabic geographic traditions.⁷³ Claire Weeda traces European metrics of rational land use in assigning property and peoplehood yet earlier, to logics of temperament honed by both medieval Muslims and Christians, writing, “It is hazardous to underestimate the combined influence of the rhetoric of environmental determinism, religion and culture in [Euro-American colonial] pursuits as well, which are so often framed as rational, capitalist endeavors.”⁷⁴ As Miles notes, too, perceived autochthony never encoded entitlement to land in what became the United States; supposedly, more civilized Native Americans would demand less space and have more disciplined etiquettes regarding its use (145–46).

Today, though, Indigeneity articulates a sovereign, knowledgeable relationship to land in a variety of postcolonial movements that lay claim to authentic narratives of precolonial origins. Paul A. Silverstein discusses such contested claims and emergent solidarities among minoritized groups in modern Northwest Africa, and particularly Morocco, where the most visible Indigenous activism is led by those raced as Berber who have reclaimed an Amazigh (free person, *pl.* Imazighen) identity in the civic sphere. Various Amazigh thinkers take up global discourses of Indigeneity while also highlighting local accounts of their pastoralism and mobility, with agrarian connections to the land earning less emphasis. Those recognized in Northwest Africa as Haratin (often glossed as “freed people,” *sg.* Hartani), a population raced as Black and read as formerly enslaved from points farther south, are meanwhile evicted from discourses of Indigeneity and understood as diasporic despite having deeply historical agricultural bonds with the land.⁷⁵ As Cristina Moreno-Almeida and Paolo Gerbaudo demonstrate, white supremacist ideologies like “Moorish” revanchism alleging “the superiority of the Arab, light-skinned, heterosexual, and male

70 Katia Schörle, “Saharan Trade in Classical Antiquity,” in *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa*, ed. James McDougall and Judith Scheele (Bloomington, IN, 2012), 58–72, here 67.

71 For example, al-Ya‘qūbī, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. Muḥammad Amīn Dinnāwī (Beirut, 2001), 183.

72 Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1960* (Cambridge, 2011), esp. 176–208.

73 Jennifer L. Morgan, *Reckoning with Slavery: Gender, Kinship, and Capitalism in the Early Black Atlantic* (Durham, NC, 2021), 83–84.

74 Claire Weeda, *Ethnicity in Medieval Europe, 950–1250: Medicine, Power and Religion* (Woodbridge, UK, 2021), 252.

75 Paul A. Silverstein, “The Racial Politics of the Amazigh Revival in North Africa and Beyond,” *POMEPS Studies*, no. 44 (September 2021): 49–54, here 51–52. The meaning of Haratin is discussed alongside other categories of Black Moroccan, which also have resonances in neighboring countries such as Mali and Mauritania, in Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam* (Cambridge, 2013), 4–5.

conservative Moroccan”—the Moroccan Far Right—do not meaningfully distinguish between the two identities, hate-mongering against a nebula of minorities that includes Imazighen, Black Moroccans, and recent sub-Saharan African migrants.⁷⁶ Much as in the United States, the subversive potentials of coalition building work against the flattening lens of hegemonic whiteness.

By centering antiracism, mutual accountability, and the clashing causalities that bracket Indigenous and diasporic interactions under the pressures of conquest and assimilation, *The 1619 Project* is attentive to futures as much as to pasts. Similarly, against a standard account that takes for granted Berber/Amazigh and Black division along a systematically exploited ethnoreligious fault line, historians can speak to entanglements. Pre- and postcolonial epistemologies of religion, race, and place, and claims and counterclaims to belonging within the three, are sites of continuous narrative evolution.

Alan Mikhail

1619, Islam, and Other Possible Histories

Narrating the origin story of her new origin story, Nikole Hannah-Jones writes of receiving from her public high school teacher Mr. Ray Dial in Waterloo, Iowa, *Before the Mayflower* by Lerone Bennett, Jr. (xvii–xix). The passage she credits as first putting her on the path toward 1619 speaks of a “Dutch man of War” that arrived in Jamestown with its, in Bennett’s words, “momentous cargo.”⁷⁷ The source for this is John Smith’s 1624 *Generall Historie of Virginia*, in which he writes of 1619 that “about the last of August came in a dutch man of warre that sold us twenty Negars.”⁷⁸ Because of its importance for Hannah-Jones and the project she would steer—but even more for what it tells us about the early modern world that produced this ship transporting enslaved persons off the North American coast—it is worth dwelling on this passage.⁷⁹ The “Dutch man of War” was the *White Lion*, an English privateering ship that sailed under a Dutch letter of marque.⁸⁰ More specifically, as the Jamestown secretary John Pory elaborated in a letter to the English envoy of The Hague in 1619, the ship sailed under the auspices of Flushing in Zeeland.⁸¹ Flushing and England had developed a particular bond thanks to the English garrison in the Dutch port, a concession to the crown for allowing its troops to serve in the Dutch army. Both England and the Netherlands were at war with Spain at various points in the decades around 1600. England negotiated peace in 1604; the Netherlands concluded a temporary truce in 1609. Both

- 76 Cristina Moreno-Almeida and Paolo Gerbaudo, “Memes and the Moroccan Far-Right,” *International Journal of Press/Politics* 26, no. 4 (2021): 882–906, here 883.
- 77 Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America*, 5th ed. (New York, 1984), 28–29.
- 78 John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles* (London, 1624), 126.
- 79 To be true to Bennett’s text, he later writes that these “first black immigrants ... were not slaves. This is a fact of critical importance in the history of Black America. They came, these first blacks, the same way that many, perhaps most, of the first whites came—under duress and pressure.” Bennett, *Before the Mayflower*, 34–35. He continues, “The first black settlers fell into a well-established socioeconomic groove which carried with it no implications of racial inferiority. That came later” (35). The 1619 generation were “the black founding fathers and mothers” (35), “the Jamestown experience was an open experience which provided unusual opportunities for individual blacks” (37), and “the colony’s power structure made little or no distinction between black and white servants” (39). There is much one could critique, dispute, correct, and debate in these passages. I cite them here to give a fuller sense of this key text for Hannah-Jones, to show some of the ways its tone differs from that of *The 1619 Project*, and to highlight that Bennett saw the 1619 origin of Black America as a source of pride and strength to be recovered for its potential exigencies in his mid-twentieth-century present (the book was first published in 1962).
- 80 Philip D. Morgan, “Virginia Slavery in Atlantic Context, 1550 to 1650,” in *Virginia 1619: Slavery and Freedom in the Making of English America*, ed. Paul Musselwhite, Peter C. Mancall, and James Horn (Chapel Hill, NC, 2019), 85.

of these cessations of hostilities made privateering, a major industry in port cities like Flushing, technically illegal. With their prospects quickly drying up, many privateers sought out other means of livelihood. The line between privateering and piracy had always been a thin one, and so many embraced the latter, raiding and trading, especially against their favorite Iberian enemies. The privateer who captained the *White Lion*, John Jope, was one such individual, and in July 1619, he rendezvoused with another ship whose crew shared a similar status, the *Treasurer*.⁸² Together, in the Bay of Campeche, these two ships raided a Portuguese slaver, the *São João Bautista*, which had seized 350 Africans from Luanda, on the Angolan coast, to sell in Veracruz, which, with Cartagena, was one of the two legal points of slave importation in the Spanish colonies.⁸³ After this theft, the two ships sailed north out of the Caribbean through the Florida straits. Eventually separated at sea, the *Treasurer* arrived to the minor port of Jamestown several days after the *White Lion*, adding a few slaves to what the colonist John Rolfe termed that ship's "20. and odd Negroes."⁸⁴

As even this brief account of the history of the ships that brought the first enslaved Africans to Jamestown shows, the story of 1619 is not simply an English one, or an African one, or an American one. The full history of 1619 is far more complex, involving Luanda and Kongo, the Portuguese and Spanish, the Dutch and English, the Powhatan and Paspahegh, the Caribbean, and, as I will focus on later, Islam. Given the spirit of *The 1619 Project*'s use of 1619 as a heuristic, most of the book's chapters understandably speed on rather quickly, after a paragraph or two, or none at all, from the events of 1619 to examine how the histories of American slavery trace through to the present. This is effective and powerful. Here I will dwell more on the moment of 1619 itself. My hope is to continue in the book's inspiring vein to show how a more expansive and inclusive history of 1619 may help to seed an even more holistic sense of the past and the possibilities for a more just present.

Breaking the standard teleology of English colonies to United States is the first step, as the story of the *White Lion* itself helps to do. Beyond bringing in Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese histories, the necessary next step, of course, is to turn our attention to the enslaved Africans on board the ships and to acknowledge that the vast continents they were being forced to remained an overwhelmingly Native space. As generations of Black and Indigenous scholars, and others, have shown, any honest and robust history of America must reckon with the twin stories of Black enslavement and Native dispossession.

The "20. and odd Negroes" at the center of *The 1619 Project* were actually probably around thirty-two—seventeen women and fifteen men, twenty-nine from the *White Lion*, the rest from the *Treasurer*.⁸⁵ We can go beyond just numbers, though, to tell a more nuanced story about the Africans on board the two vessels. As John Thornton has shown, they were most likely shipped from the Portuguese colonial city of Luanda.⁸⁶ The campaigns of the Portuguese officer Mendes de

81 Lyon Gardiner Tyler, ed., *Narratives of Early Virginia, 1606–1625* (New York, 1907), 282–83, also quoted in Engel Sluiter, "New Light on the '20. and Odd Negroes' Arriving in Virginia, August 1619," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (1997): 395–98, here 395, 397–98.

82 Morgan, "Virginia Slavery in Atlantic Context, 1550 to 1650," 85; Sluiter, "New Light on the '20. and Odd Negroes' Arriving in Virginia, August 1619."

83 Morgan, "Virginia Slavery in Atlantic Context, 1550 to 1650," 85; Sluiter, "New Light on the '20. and Odd Negroes' Arriving in Virginia, August 1619," 397–98; John Thornton, "The African Experience of the '20. and Odd Negroes' Arriving in Virginia in 1619," *William and Mary Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (1998): 421–34, here 421–22.

84 This phrase appears in a letter Rolfe sent to Sir Edwin Sandys in January 1620. For a copy of the letter, see Susan Myra Kingsbury, ed., *The Records of the Virginia Company of London*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC, 1933), 243. See also the reproduction and discussion of the relevant sections of the letter in Sluiter, "New Light on the '20. and Odd Negroes' Arriving in Virginia, August 1619," 395–96.

85 Morgan, "Virginia Slavery in Atlantic Context, 1550 to 1650," 86.

Vasconcelos and his Imbangala allies against the kingdom of Ndongo in 1618 and 1619 produced vast numbers of slaves, and the *São João Bautista* was just one of thirty-six slave ships that left Luanda in 1619 with an asiento, a contract authorizing the direct shipment of slaves from Africa to Spanish colonies in the Americas.⁸⁷ These clues help to teach us something about the cultural background of the Africans who arrived in Jamestown. Glossing Engel Sluiter, Thornton writes, “they were not seasoned slaves of many origins brought from the Caribbean” but rather “a much more ethnically coherent group just recently enslaved in Africa.”⁸⁸ They were from sophisticated urbanized centers and likely had some knowledge of Christianity.⁸⁹ They brought what Thornton calls “a certain Angolan touch to the early Chesapeake,” a shared cultural and linguistic background that likely lessened the impacts of the brutalities they experienced, providing whatever modicum of strength and support familiarity could afford in the face of so violent a rupture.⁹⁰ Even if the 1619 Project itself does not narrate the military and cultural history of Angola, it opens the door for including this larger African history.

Native American history likewise begs for more attention in the story of 1619, a point suggested to us by the very correspondence surrounding the arrival of the ships to Jamestown. John Rolfe, who penned the crucial letter that used the phrase “20. and odd Negroes,” was the widower of Pocahontas, who had died two years earlier in 1617, probably not yet twenty-one, while the couple visited England.⁹¹ The ship that took them to England had kidnapped her from her family years earlier—none other than the *Treasurer*.⁹² Even these stray snippets of biography embedded in the story of Black enslavement in 1619 point to the omnipresence of Indigenous dispossession, English violence, and how Native women’s bodies, we might say from Malinche forward, served as one of the paths along which trod European colonization.⁹³ The “ties that bind” Native and Black history have been brilliantly analyzed by Tiya Miles throughout her career and here in a chapter for this volume.⁹⁴ For over a century before 1619, mostly in the Caribbean, Native land dispossession fueled the importation of enslaved Africans to work that land. Indeed, from the earliest decades of the European colonization of the Western Hemisphere, the Spanish had imported West Africans to work on plantations built on island land cleared of many of its Native inhabitants through flight or death from disease or attack. The prominence of a colonist who had married a Native woman in the contemporary moment of 1619 shows just how important this entwined, wrenching Black and Native history was in the Americas, to the specific history of 1619 and beyond, and some of the gendered dimensions of colonization.

There is, of course, an enormous body of scholarship that casts colonial American history in its wider European, Indigenous, African, Atlantic, and Caribbean contexts. I have only hinted at it here. There is still yet a new perspective to offer, though, one that is perhaps less

86 Thornton, “The African Experience of the ‘20. and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia in 1619.”

87 Thornton, “The African Experience of the ‘20. and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia in 1619,” 430–31; Sluiter, “New Light on the ‘20. and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia, August 1619,” 398.

88 Thornton, “The African Experience of the ‘20. and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia in 1619,” 421; Sluiter, “New Light on the ‘20. and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia, August 1619,” 396–98.

89 Thornton, “The African Experience of the ‘20. and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia in 1619,” 431–34.

90 Thornton, “The African Experience of the ‘20. and Odd Negroes’ Arriving in Virginia in 1619,” 434.

91 On her visit to England and death there, see Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Pocahontas and the English Boys: Caught between Cultures in Early Virginia* (New York, 2019), 113–40.

92 Camilla Townsend, *Pocahontas and the Powhatan Dilemma* (New York, 2004), 96–106, 120–23, 135–38; Kupperman, *Pocahontas and the English Boys*, 112–13.

93 Refusing to paint Pocahontas only as victim, Townsend’s excellent study centers her agency and political, social, and interpersonal acumen.

94 See Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Berkeley, CA, 2005). Miles’s is the book’s only chapter to address Native American history explicitly. Some of the other authors do offer brief mentions.

95 There are a very few mentions of Islam (or anything even remotely close to it) in *The 1619 Project*. The most sustained consideration is Khalil Gibran Muhammad's discussion of the role of Muslims in the knowledge and spread of sugar refinement (75). Anthea Butler notes in passing that some slaves were Muslim (340). Terrance Hayes's luminous poem employs the Arabic and Persian form of the ghazal (67–68), and Kiese Laymon mentions Jesse Jackson's efforts to include Arab Americans in his Rainbow Coalition (413).

96 On these and related topics, see, in English, Erica Heinsen-Roach, *Consuls and Captives: Dutch-North African Diplomacy in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Rochester, NY, 2019); Gerald MacLean and Nabil Matar, *Britain and the Islamic World, 1558–1713* (Oxford, 2011); Jonathan I. Israel, *Conflicts of Empires: Spain, the Low Countries and the Struggle for World Supremacy, 1585–1713* (London, 1997); Andrew C. Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier: A History of the Sixteenth-Century Ibero-African Frontier* (Chicago, 1978); Maartje van Gelder, "The Republic's Renegades: Dutch Converts to Islam in Seventeenth-Century Diplomatic Relations with North Africa," *Journal of Early Modern History* 19, nos. 2–3 (2015): 175–98; Alexander H. de Groot, "Ottoman North Africa and the Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée*, no. 39 (1985): 131–47; and Jerome Bruce Weiner, "Fitna, Corsairs, and Diplomacy: Morocco and the Maritime States of Western Europe, 1603–1672" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1976).

97 Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York, 1999), 98.

98 Alan Mikhail, *God's Shadow: Sultan Selim, His Ottoman Empire, and the Making of the Modern World* (New York, 2020), 103–22.

99 Mikhail, *God's Shadow*, 123–35.

obvious, less central, but, as I will argue now, no less formative of all that 1619 was and is crucial to consider for its potential to open up new areas of research. This is the story of the role of Islam in the history of the European colonization of the Atlantic world, the history of the transatlantic slave trade, colonial American history, and indeed the general history of the Americas since 1492.⁹⁵ The history of Islam in the Americas is a consistent and constant story that one could trace in multiple ways. In fact, Islamic elements thread through the stories I have already related. In the history of English and Dutch war and peace with Spain, we could note the role of the Ottoman Empire and North African states in alliance making and in distracting Spanish forces in the Mediterranean, or the large number of Dutch and English seamen captured by North African ships.⁹⁶ We could note that the *Mayflower* itself plied the waters of the Ottoman eastern Mediterranean before it ever crossed the Atlantic.⁹⁷ Islam was present as well in the story of the European encounter with Native peoples in the Americas. In the first instance, Columbus instigated his voyages in part to get around Muslim power in the Mediterranean and to fund a crusade to "retake" Jerusalem from Muslim hands.⁹⁸ From the first generation of conquistadores to John Smith and beyond, Europeans filtered their encounters with Native America through one of the most extreme forms of difference they could muster—Islam.⁹⁹ Thus, among the countless examples one could give, Columbus described the scarves of Taino women as *almaizares*, "Moorish veils"; Hernán Cortés compared Montezuma to a sultan; and John Smith likened some Native practices to what "the Turkes doe."¹⁰⁰ In the history of the transatlantic slave trade, Islam was again present from the beginning. Even as the Spanish feared, and therefore tried to prevent, the "export" of Islam to the Americas, some of the earliest slaves they brought to Hispaniola and other Caribbean islands in the first few decades of colonization were West African Muslims.¹⁰¹ One of the first enslaved Africans to touch the soil of mainland North America was a Moroccan named Estevanico who accompanied Cabeza de Vaca in 1527 across what is today northern Mexico and southwestern Texas, who was almost certainly born Muslim, and whom Cabeza de Vaca described as "an Arabic-speaking black man."¹⁰² And Muslims continued to be among the enslaved Africans brought to the American South in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁰³ Because Islam was so central to medieval and early modern European history, it proved foundational to the ways Europe colonized the Americas, in turn forging American history in profound and lasting directions.

In fact, we do not even need to stray from Jamestown in 1619 to find Islam. In the bottom right-hand corner of Smith's 1612 map of Virginia, one of the first produced of the colony, we find his seal.¹⁰⁴ Zooming in on the seal, one sees the severed turbaned heads of three Turks, a style of heraldry with a long pedigree. Smith had been captured in 1602 by Ottoman armies during his time as a soldier for hire in what is today Romania and was held as a slave for two years before

managing to escape. This experience clearly marked him, becoming a part of his chosen symbolic identity. The three heads were supposedly those of Turks he had killed in eastern Europe. “The lamentable noise of the miserable slaughtered *Turkes* was most wonderfull to heare,” he wrote.¹⁰⁵ The governor who received the enslaved persons at the heart of the 1619 Project had spent years fighting and then as a captive of a Muslim state and brought this experience with him to the Americas, displaying it for all to see on one of the first maps of Virginia.

Spotlighting the place of Islam in the early modern Atlantic is not an argument that everything should be about every thing, that everything should be about Islam. The 1619 Project is not meant to be about Islam—nor should it be. It is about the importance of Black history and of slavery to the history of the United States. Inspired both by the expansive history embedded in the moment of 1619 that I have referenced and the heuristic function of 1619, I see the potential for the history of Islam to play a similar dual role. It brings attention to the many ways a fundamental force of world history shaped a place whose historiography has mostly ignored it and how the politics of suppressing, disregarding, or otherwise diminishing this history continues to exercise political power in the present, a present in which the Muslim world has been the primary theater of war for the United States since Vietnam and Muslims one of the most vilified groups in America today. Thinking about Islam in the story of 1619—in the story of America—is important not simply to fill in a missing part of the story, to add something new. More fundamentally, it helps us to see that one of the deepest threads running through the history of the Americas, in fits and starts and crooked paths from the first moments of Spanish colonialization to today (consider Trump’s Muslim ban), has been the European colonial investment in ridding itself in the Americas of the Old World scourge of Islam. By reproducing an Islamless story of colonial America, we historians have thus been complicit in furthering this project.¹⁰⁶ It is, to borrow Hannah-Jones’s words about 1619, “not an innocuous omission” (xix). Recognizing this, even half a millennium later, is the necessary first step in overcoming it.

For those of us interested in opening up new avenues for historical inquiry, the 1619 Project thus serves as a model in several regards—of how conceptual blinders keep us from seeing manifest historical realities; of how a differently orientated lens can refract a completely new vision of American history; of the massive effort and fortitude required to change dominant triumphalist narratives; of some of the ways professional historians can engage a broader American public; of how ambitious and provocative books that gain a wide audience provoke resistance, predictably and disappointingly, from those entrenched in the ideas they challenge and attempt to overcome, or those who simply do not

- 100 Christopher Columbus, *Select Letters of Christopher Columbus, with Other Original Documents Relating to His Four Voyages to the New World*, ed. R. H. Major, 2nd ed. (Farnham, UK, 2010), 127–28; Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago, 1991), 86, 90; Hernán Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, ed. and trans. Anthony Pagden (New Haven, CT, 2001), 112; Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles*, 34.
- 101 Mikhail, *God’s Shadow*, 148–64.
- 102 Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, *The Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca*, ed. and trans. Rolena Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz (Lincoln, 2003), 176. Through force or otherwise, Estevanico became a Christian. See also Hsain Ilahiane, “Estevan De Dorantes, the Moor or the Slave? The Other Moroccan Explorer of New Spain,” *Journal of North African Studies* 5, no. 3 (2000): 1–14.
- 103 Michael A. Gomez, “Muslims in Early America,” *Journal of Southern History* 60, no. 4 (1994): 671–710.
- 104 Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 51–60. See also Kupperman, *Pocahontas and the English Boys*, 179–80.
- 105 John Smith, *The True Travels, Adventures, and Observations of Captaine Iohn Smith, in Europe, Asia, Affrica, and America from Anno Domini 1593 to 1629* (London, 1630), 8.
- 106 See the following important works: Michael A. Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas* (Cambridge, 2005); Gomez, “Muslims in Early America”; Sylviane A. Diouf, *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas*, 2nd ed. (New York, 2013); and Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America: From the New World to the New World Order* (Cambridge, 2010).

comprehend. Nikole Hannah-Jones and the authors of the chapters of *The 1619 Project* have succeeded in getting politicians, journalists, the *American Historical Review*, school boards, high school students, and so many others to wrestle with ideas of Black history as American history and global history. This is an enormous accomplishment by any measure, one to be recognized and celebrated.

Erika Denise Edwards

From Pain to Purpose

Shared Histories of *Black America*

The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story unapologetically centers Black life, love, and labor as the wellspring of the United States' founding. This book disseminates crucial knowledge to Americans with an "outdated and vague sense of the past" by exposing them to historical evidence and ideas that professional historians, the book's editor Nikole Hannah-Jones argues, have known for years (xxi). Combining journalism, criticism, poetry, and history, *The 1619 Project's* framework provides an interwoven account of the past and the present, demonstrating that the past continues to inform the present, and the present continues to propel the study of the past. To know *how* we got here, the book suggests, we must ask *why*.

I am a Latin Americanist who studies race making, the African diaspora, and Black erasure. I cannot stress enough that this book does much more than center Black life in the United States. I see parallels with my work and find myself asking new questions, such as: why is "African American" employed as an exclusive concept? Having read about related struggles across the Atlantic World, why are we resistant to see a larger diasporic connection? The year 1619 marks the disembarkation of "20. and odd Negroes" in Virginia, but it can also be viewed as an integral part of a well-established transatlantic slave trade that had existed for more than a hundred years. Historians Linda Heywood and John Thornton have revealed, Angolan captives who disembarked in "Point Comfort were captured on the high seas from a Portuguese vessel making its way from Luanda, Angola, to Vera Cruz Mexico," a prominent slave port during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Moreover, they stress, this was not a unique occurrence— "all colonies of northern Europeans" procured slaves this way.¹⁰⁷ The abrupt shift in their trajectory in 1619 made these Angolan captives more than just slaves; as David Wheat has argued for the Spanish Caribbean, they became some of the first

107 Linda Heywood and John Thornton, "In Search of the 1619 African Arrivals: Enslavement and Middle Passage," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 127, no. 3 (2019): 200.

settlers of British North America.¹⁰⁸ The stories in *The 1619 Project* are not unique. Instead, they speak to how Africans and their descendants shaped, molded, and formed colonies, republics, and their respective nations throughout the Americas.

In this review, I highlight *The 1619 Project's* emphasis on the race-making process—its legalization, categorization, and the meanings assigned to Blackness—and Black erasure in the chapters titled “Race,” written by Dorothy Roberts, and “Dispossession,” written by Tiya Miles. These chapters explain why Blackness equated to enslavement, poverty, and marginalization, while whiteness equated to freedom, wealth, and inclusion in the United States. The authors of these chapters also trace how laws, policies, and codes from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries continue to promote Black erasure today. The chapter “Race,” struck me how British North American policies made to solidify the institution of slavery paralleled the Spanish-American experience. One of the first occurrences took place with the implementation of *partus sequitur ventrem* in 1662. Roberts locates the origins of this doctrine in Roman law and notes its meaning: “the offspring follows the belly” (50). Although Roberts emphasizes the law determined ownership of animals, a connection with Spanish America cannot be ignored. Spanish America had already implemented this policy prior to 1662. The British used the doctrine to effectively shift their inheritance laws to ensure the propagation of their slave populations and—as in Spanish America—to engender the race-making process. Black women became integral to defining Blackness and maintaining enslaved populations throughout the Americas by way of a law that regulated the status of their offspring.

Moreover, the timeline provided in the book stresses that this policy “incentivizes the rape of enslaved Black women” (38). The law’s denial of Black women’s protection and personhood continued throughout the making of the republic. The law also disrupted Black fatherhood throughout the Americas. According to Camillia Cowling—a historian of Brazil and Cuba’s Free Womb Acts—by bestowing ownership of Black women’s bodies and their progeny to white slaveholders, the law erased the legal claims available to Black fathers. Though the sexual abuse suffered by Black men is underexamined—cloaked in issues of shame and (de)masculinization—it too represents a shared Black American experience.¹⁰⁹

Marriage further regulated the race making process. In 1682, the House of Burgesses made interracial marriage punishable by imprisonment in the North American colonies. Shortly after the 1691 criminal law prohibited Negro, mulatto, and Indian men from marrying white women. A clear attempt to curb such marriages and protect whiteness, Spanish America enacted these policies as well. The Royal Pragmatic of 1776 discouraged marriages between unequal pairings; its 1805 revision prohibited marriages between Spaniards (of “pure origins”) and the descendants of Africans. Although the punishment was less severe,

108 David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean 1570–1640* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2016).

109 Camillia Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom: Women of Color, Gender, and the Abolition of Slavery in Havana and Rio de Janeiro* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2013).

the threatened loss of inheritance in Spanish America had a chilling effect. Within both the British and Spanish systems, laws preventing interracial marriage aimed to uphold and protect “whiteness” and the privileges afforded to it.

The results of engendering Blackness and curbing interracial marriage, Roberts argues, created a rigid system of racial classification that defined Blackness by the end of the eighteenth century in Britain’s North American colonies. This system “determined whether a person was entitled to freedom or subjected to enslavement” (51). It also occurred in Spanish America with the *sistema de castas*. Both systems defined and protected whiteness as an inclusive privileged status while relegating a vast population of enslaved people to a *Black* status that justified their present enslavement and future exclusion from the promises of republics and nations.

Roberts further stresses that Black women were crucial to the racial-classification system established by white colonists. I want to take this further and emphasize that Black women remain central to our understandings of race throughout the Americas. The children of Black women carried a stigma of Blackness that legal policies and customs regulated for generations. Whether governing authorities grouped all their descendants together, as in the British system, or created new racial categories to account for mixture, as did the French, Spanish, and Portuguese, the association of Blackness led to marginalization and degradation during slavery and after.

The chapter “Dispossession,” by Tiya Miles, opens a wider discussion of race making that focuses on Black and Indian relations. In particular, she notes that the “shared circumstances of enslavement led to the merger of families, cultures, and fates,” resulting in intermarriages between Africans and Indigenous peoples (143). Such pairings occurred throughout Spanish America as well, with progeny assigned to yet another category, called *zambos*. By contrast, Miles argues, governing authorities recorded mixed-raced children as “negro” in the United States (143). The difference in labeling allowed for the recognition of mixed-race individuals in Spanish America; in British America, by contrast, they became Black, “rendering them virtually invisible to historical researchers” (143).

Black and Indigenous relations also detailed racialized citizenship. By adopting certain “civilizing measures” of whiteness— such as owning 8,000 enslaved Black people—the Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Choctaw tribes helped to reframe citizenship. The early republican period provides stark differences between Indigenous and Black citizenship: “whereas Native nations were citizens of their own countries, deserving, at least on paper, human and political rights, African Americans were citizens of nowhere and underserving even of the rights of personhood” (139). However, in Spanish America, “civilizing measures” did not allow some Indigenous people to adopt measures of whiteness. Instead, after independence, many Indigenous people lost a “protected” status of the

Spanish Crown and relegated to the antithesis of “civilization” during the nineteenth century. Some Blacks adhered to civilizing measures of whiteness by rejecting their Blackness and adopting different racial labels or dissociating themselves from stereotyped Black culture and behavior during the nineteenth century.¹¹⁰

The relabeling of mixed-raced Indian and Black people in the archive, combined with the silence surrounding Indigenous peoples owning Black bodies, allows Black erasure to proliferate and continues to skew Black and Indigenous shared histories and alliances in both the United States and Latin America. Miles remains hopeful of a Black and Indigenous solidarity that existed previously and has grown over the last decade. When Seminole, Creek, and Black people “waged a prolonged defensive war against American soldiers” in the early nineteenth century, American military commanders “expressed particular consternation because of its interracial character” (144). Black and Indian peoples ran away together in the British, Portuguese, and Spanish Americas as well. In Mexico, the Caribbean, Brazil, and Colombia, they formed maroon societies that nurtured the crucial Black and Indian alliances that successfully fended off British, Spanish, and Portuguese encroachment. These lessons of solidarity remain a cornerstone to recognizing that these groups can indeed come together.

This review is an opportunity for me to write a bit more about what it means to be a historian of racialized Blackness, who focuses on questions of Black erasure in Argentina. *The 1619 Project* reveals the ways that Black erasure benefits others. The erasure is based on white supremacy, which constructs and controls national memory because, as Peter Wood argues in the book’s preface, “nations keep their shape by shaping their citizens’ understanding of the past” (xxviii). This could not be truer for Argentina. To be *Black* in Argentina is to embody a direct antithesis to the nation’s European immigrant origin story. Personally, experiencing this Black erasure while doing field work in Argentina allowed me to better understand the harm of not seeing Blackness. Such willfully impaired vision ignores identity and personhood, rendering you “other” in your own country.

Because Hannah-Jones has unapologetically centered Black lives in US history, she has received countless critiques and personal attacks—accusations that she and others who participated in the project represent a “woke mob” bent on rewriting American history to fit an “agenda.” I am hopeful that readers will see through these accusations and understand this project not as a result of the “woke,” but rather a realization of the awakened.

The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story provides methods and ideas that will propel connections to understanding the Black experience throughout the Americas, the race-making process, and Black erasure. These connections should push us to expand the definition of “African American,” a term that generally refers to Blacks from the United States. It is a label that defines a shared identity for descendants that arrived as early as 1619 along with various Black immigrants. But the exclusivity of the label has perpetuated an exceptional history of African American arrival, enslavement,

110 Erika Denise Edwards, *Hiding in Plain Sight: Black Women, the Law, and the Making of a White, Argentine Republic*, Tuscaloosa, AL 2020.

abolition, discrimination, and triumphs as unique and isolated experiences in comparison to the rest of the Americas. It is time to expand the category to a more inclusive, larger *Black America* that encompasses the diasporic experience—a diversified, complex, and comprehensive study of Black people—that highlights Black resilience and excellence throughout the Americas, from the boat to the ballot box, from erasure to visibility, from pain to purpose: knowing, seeing, and being Black.

Danielle Terrazas Williams

Latin America and Sugar in 1619

The 1619 Project endeavored to start a conversation with a wide spectrum of the US audience—no easy task. As a historian of the African diaspora in colonial Mexico, I was eager to read Khalil Gibran Muhammad’s contribution on sugar and how 1619 would speak to the earlier periodization of the Spanish realm. Offering a well-researched and accessible piece by engaging with the historiography’s most prominent scholars, Muhammad distills an expansive history that resulted in sugar’s arrival to what became the United States and connects historical legacies to present-day marginalization. Most importantly, his piece attempts to decenter the histories of tobacco and “King Cotton” and instead introduce the reader to the world of “Queen Sugar.”

Muhammad offers readers a place and time to orient themselves—an eighteenth-century sugar plantation later converted into the Whitney Plantation Museum. I wonder how many readers have since now visited the museum after reading about it in *The 1619 Project*—perhaps more would have had COVID-19 not stunted many travel plans in the United States. In 2016, I, too, visited the Whitney, with my colleague and dear friend Tamika Nunley. As we embarked on the tour, I was especially moved and troubled by the re-creations of children in the restored slave cabins. Their likeness immediately brought to mind *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby*, an exhibition by esteemed artist Kara Walker presented in the Domino Sugar Refinery in New York City. During my visit in 2014, I observed how many people made a beeline to the monumental figure of what appeared to be an unclothed Black woman’s body in a “sphinx” pose. Instead, what captured my attention were the “molasses children”. The small (but many life-size) representations of Black children carried large baskets and offered expressive stances. Reading *The 1619 Project*, I was taken back to these images as Muhammad described how “children toiled like factory workers with assembly-line precision and discipline under the constant threat

of boiling-hot kettles, open furnaces, and grinding rollers” (83). In Walker’s piece, the floor stained with “their molasses” reminded the viewer that in addition to allusions of the sexual exploitation of enslaved women as represented by the centerpiece, Black children—for generations—suffered, too, under the weight of the global boom in cane sugar.

The Whitney Plantation Museum and *A Subtlety* could work as companion pieces to *The 1619 Project*—all three trying to tell visceral stories of the violence that sugar slavery had wreaked on the fertile lands of Louisiana and beyond. They also serve as a critical reminder that public history is a collective effort—a constellation of sources and experiences. It is, as the publication at hand self-proclaims, “a project.” While I would have wanted general readers to learn more about various topics given discrete and more substantive nods, such as the history of children’s labor, Muhammad impressively establishes a solid macrohistory of sugar and manages to foreground the history of people.

As a complement to Muhammad’s chapter, I encourage readers to delve into Juan Francisco Manzano’s *The Autobiography of a Slave*, the only slave narrative produced before the abolition of slavery in Cuba in 1886. Long published as a Spanish–English edition, the autobiography reveals a childhood filled with glimpses of hope but often with despair at the dawn of a post–Haitian Revolution world that prolifically advanced Cuba’s sugar production. A poet of many talents, Manzano was beaten, abused, and psychologically traumatized for years but still bravely named his abusers, most prominently María de la Concepción, the Marquesa del Prado Ameno.

This feature of Manzano’s autobiography – naming – is a vital practice also executed by Muhammad’s work for *The 1619 Project*, which humanizes the oppressed and holds accountable perpetrators in the only way that we can today. For those who had only heard of the 2013 Oscar-winning movie *12 Years a Slave*, perhaps *The 1619 Project* propelled their interest in reading Solomon Northrup’s similarly named 1853 memoir about his abduction from New York to the cane fields of Louisiana. Muhammad also includes the stories of lesser-known people. We hear the words of a formerly enslaved Black woman named Mrs. Webb, who recalls the details of the torture practices of her slave owner named Valsin Marmillion. We learn of the harrowing experience of an unnamed Black woman, only noted in the records as “number 83,” who was raped by William Cooney aboard a slave ship in 1753 (79). Muhammad allows us to bare witness to the history of Mary Pugh, a white woman who “rejoiced” after the massacre of dozens of Black people in 1887 (85). Muhammad’s decision to specify that it was Marie Azélie Haydel who “became one of Louisiana’s most successful planters” (82) now rings like a subtle call to the greater public that *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (2019) by Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers should be high on their reading list lest we believe that terror, violence, and cruelty were perpetuated only by white male slave owners. The narrative choice to

name is a political act, one that Muhammad does in great service to his contribution.

To his credit, even within a public history piece, Muhammad does not shy away from the graphic. The horrors of the Middle Passage were manifold, such as the sexual violence perpetrated by English traders against Black women and the suffocating atmosphere of slave ships rife with communicable diseases that ravaged the bodies of women, men, and children. However, Muhammad's inclusion of sections on slave resistance was equally important to help reorient the reader by emphasizing that even with the threat of torture meant to break the mind and body, enslaved Africans still fought for their dignity in many small ways and sometimes were able to engage in large demonstrations of their rejection of a system that sought to steal their sense of self.

I think many historians would agree that readers would have benefited from more contextualization about the centrality of Saint-Domingue and the monumental shifts precipitated by the Haitian Revolution that moved sugar slavery from the French dominion to Cuba and the US South. Such thoroughly researched topics can be found in Ada Ferrer's *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution*, Julius S. Scott's *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution*, and Laurent Dubois's *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*—just to name a few. In the case of Cuba, Ferrer asserts that Cuban planters “remade their society” in an attempt to absorb the global market share left available with the destruction of many of Saint-Domingue's sugar plantations.¹¹¹ Louisiana, as Scott argues, did not sit immune to “the lengthening shadow cast by the revolt in Saint-Domingue,” exciting dread as the Gulf territories feared a similar fate.¹¹² As Dubois notes, planters and politicians became frightened by the prospect that some Black people had already learned to answer “in one voice.”¹¹³ On both the economic and social landscapes, the Haitian Revolution transformed the region and did more than displace enslaved expert sugar workers to Louisiana—these same laborers brought revolutionary ideas, on-the-ground experiences, and a diasporic sense of community.

After more than a decade teaching at various institutions, I have learned to leverage the expectations driven by fantasies of US exceptionalism to underscore the long and irrefutable linkages between the United States and Latin America. As someone who researches slavery in Latin America, I found Muhammad's brief notes on the Atlantic islands, the Greater Antilles, Mexico, and Brazil to be triumphant. I lingered on the word “Mexico,” feeling optimistic that readers of the *New York Times* or the book would perhaps pause to consider how the country fit into the puzzle. The Caribbean and Brazil, for many, are perhaps obvious corollaries to the US sugar conversation, but Mexico? I hope that if it prompted even one person to perform a cursory search, it moved the

111 Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, 2014), 17.

112 Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (London, 2018), 186.

113 Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 99.

needle to increase awareness that Mexico's history with slavery began in 1519 and its investment in sugar that soon followed.

For scholars of slavery studies, we know well the histories of African bodies mangled by pressing machines, insatiable European appetites, and wealth generated by cane sugar. But for general readers with connections to Latin America and the Caribbean, the narrative also likely felt hauntingly familiar. As Muhammad notes, "But if sugar is killing all of us, it is killing Black people faster," noting that "sugar has been linked in the United States to diabetes, obesity, and cancer" (74). For the world's largest sugar producers in the Global South, these trends run similar trajectories.

Mexico ranks ninth in the world for production (estimated to produce upwards of 6.3 million metric tons between 2022 and 2023).¹¹⁴ However, Mexico started cultivating sugarcane with enslaved African labor as early as the sixteenth century in central Veracruz. Preeminent Mexican scholar of Afro-Mexican studies Adriana Naveda Chávez-Hita published her 1987 book, *Esclavos negros en las haciendas azucareras de Córdoba, Veracruz, 1690–1830*, to highlight how the investment in this highly desired product shaped Mexico's involvement in the slave trade for centuries. From the colonial era to the present, the state of Veracruz has remained Mexico's top sugar producer.¹¹⁵ According to a June 2021 article from Nasdaq.com, "Mexico is the largest supplier of imported sugar to the United States."¹¹⁶ Sugar, cultivated, cut, and pressed in haciendas once operated by African and African-descended slaves in Mexico, is now exported to lands where, as noted by Muhammad, it is a veritable death sentence for Black people (74). The histories of Afro-Mexicans and African Americans, it seems, do not only offer important colonial parallels, but they are presently intertwined in each other's health crises.

The food deserts of the north mirror those of the south, as Mexico has likewise witnessed the horrors of sugar's transformation into "a toxic foodstuff for the masses" (74). A 2017 NPR piece wryly noted, "Coca-Cola is practically the national drink in Mexico."¹¹⁷ The mass production of sugary drinks and easily accessible processed foods in grocery stores and local shops has driven a medical catastrophe that has resulted in one and six adults now living with diabetes in Mexico, with an estimated 30 percent of the adult population in Mexico classified as obese.¹¹⁸

Some fifteen years ago, I was visiting Yanga, the proclaimed "first free town of the Americas," located in central Veracruz. During the town's celebration of carnival, the municipality sought to offer more educational programming during the day, and I attended a session on the health concerns of the community. Curious to know about the impact of living in the middle of one of the hemisphere's oldest sugarcane sites, I asked a member of the community whether she knew anyone with diabetes. Alice lived in Los Mangos, an enclave of the municipality and just a ten-minute bus ride away from Yanga.

114 USDA, "Sugar: World Markets and Trade," May 2022, <https://apps.fas.usda.gov/psdonline/circulars/sugar.pdf>.

115 USDA, "Sugar Annual," April 15, 2021, https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Sugar%20Annual_Mexico%20City_Mexico_04-15-2021.

116 Marcelo Teixeira, "Mexico Sugar Output below Expectation, Exports Seen Down—Report," Nasdaq, June 15, 2021, <https://www.nasdaq.com/articles/mexico-sugar-output-below-expectation-exports-seen-down-report-2021-06-15>.

117 Jason Beaubien, "How Diabetes Got to Be the No. 1 Killer in Mexico," NPR, April 5, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2017/04/05/522038318/how-diabetes-got-to-be-the-no-1-killer-in-mexico>.

118 Marco D. DiBonaventura, Henrik Meincke, Agathe Le Lay, Janine Fournier, Erik Bakker, and Allison Ehrenreich, "Obesity in Mexico: Prevalence, Comorbidities, Associations with Patient Outcomes, and Treatment Experiences," *Diabetes, Metabolic Syndrome and Obesity: Targets and Therapy* 11 (2018): 1–10.

Her immediate reaction was to respond no, but after a moment, she started listing an ever-expanding number of people in Los Mangos and surrounding areas who she knew personally who were trying to manage their type 2 diabetes. Alice's anecdotal survey of her community tracks. According to a report published by INEGI in November 2021, Veracruz is not only home to some of the highest percentages of people living with diabetes, but it also is home to one of the highest mortality rates associated with the disease.¹¹⁹ These rates are not dissimilar from those presented for African Americans in *The 1619 Project*. For many in the still booming sugar zones that emerged intact from the colonial era, the past is partially the present and the future holds little hope for change. The death toll of sugar across the Americas over the past half millennia is incalculable, and the end to the devastating reign of Queen Sugar appears nowhere in sight. A tragic assessment of a tragic legacy.

How to engage the public about the traumas of slavery that haunt the bodies, minds, and landscapes of so many? For those who have been entrusted to tell the tale of the Whitney Plantation, the choice was a museum that continues to grow and develop. For Kara Walker's *A Subtlety*, perhaps it was the juxtaposition of scale—small children carrying weighty objects, a “towering” woman left exposed. In “Sugar,” Khalil Gibran Muhammad exposes the painful threads of the past to shed light on current mechanisms of alienation. I hold these three projects in conversation because of the provocation of *The 1619 Project*, an intellectual incitement for which I am grateful.

As historians, we are called to make connections for our audiences. We work in concert, always. My hope is that new “projects” can more fully integrate the voices of the African diaspora, a tall order knowing it will be “no easy task,” but writing history never is.

Indrani Chatterjee

An Attempt to Decolonize Historiography

Every time I teach a class on slavery in South Asia, I have to address the limits of my students' high school history courses, which have ignored non-African slavery in the Indian Ocean region. Through ca. 800–1800, polities in the Indian subcontinent purchased slaves from Central Asia—captives seized by indigenous warring clans, famine-affected self-sold victims—as well as purchasing children and young adults from Africa and West Asia.¹²⁰ Male slaves of all origins rose to command armies, officiate at courts, run bureaucracies, and even become sultans.

119 INEGI, “Estadísticas a propósito del Día Mundial de la Diabetes,” November 12, 2021, https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/saladeprensa/aproposito/2021/EAP_Diabetes2021.pdf.

120 Sunil Kumar, “When Slaves Were Nobles: The Shamsi Bandagān in the Early Delhi Sultanate,” *Studies in History* 10 (1994): 23–51; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Between Eastern Africa and Western India, 1500–1650: Slavery, Commerce, and Elite Formation,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 61, no. 4 (2019): 805–34; Indrani Chatterjee, “A Slave's Quest for Selfhood in Eighteenth-Century Hindustan,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 37, no. 1 (2000): 53–86; Indrani Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton, eds., *Slavery and South Asian History* (Bloomington, IN, 2006); Jessica Hinchy and Girija Joshi, “Towards a More Varied Picture of Slavery,” *Journal of Global Slavery* 6, no. 2 (2021): 249–61.

Miniature paintings made in seventeenth-century Mughal royal ateliers show African courtiers in full regalia along with identifiable, hat-wearing European visitors.¹²¹ As with Renaissance paintings in Europe of the same period, so in Mughal ateliers, the color “black” did not represent indignity. Since US school curricula have largely left this history out, my students associate slavery with Africans alone, and with the condition that Orlando Patterson summed up as a state of “permanent dishonor.” In *The 1619 Project*, Nikole Hannah-Jones explains the origins of both ideas. She reminds readers that African slaves—not the European colonists who established the republic in 1776—were the founders of modern American prosperity. Her history begins in 1619, when English colonists first purchased twenty African slaves from a Dutch ship.

The date chosen by Hannah-Jones is a century *after* Spanish traders enslaved indigenous Americans (in 1493) and West Africans (in 1518), using them to people the Spanish Caribbean islands and coastal America.¹²² Spaniards were bearers of Continental aristocratic values, an amalgam of (Catholic) piety and ritual conformity initially aimed at excluding Jews and Muslims, socially exclusionary endogamous marital strategies, genealogies establishing blood-based descent as qualifiers for nobility, and private ownership of lands, herds, and people. Established in the Iberian colonies in Asia and the Americas during the sixteenth century, this aristocratic regime placed the peninsular Iberians—endowed with rights to demand labor and tribute from other indigenous or imported ethnic groups—at the pinnacle of the political-economic hierarchy. When large numbers of African slaves were added to this hierarchy, *blanco* (white) came to represent assured status, the dignity of titles like *Don* and other high offices, and the freedom to practice skilled professions, while *negro* (black) signified the burden of laboring without dignity or reward. While these were the two ends of the *casta* hierarchy, there were many separate rungs for groups identified as the products of inter-ethnic sex between indigenous Americans, Spaniards, Africans, and combinations thereof (*mestizo/a*, *castizo/a*, *pardo-mulatto/a*, *quinteron*, and so on). Each group bore some disabilities, against which each requested exemptions periodically from the Crown.¹²³ The language of *castas* distilled notions of blood-based descent (*raza* or “race”), sumptuary and linguistic styles (“culture”), liability to taxes, work, and property ownership (“class”) into one symbolic order, where any one term could be a synecdoche for the others.

Chapter 2 of this volume—titled “Race” and written by Dorothy Roberts—highlights the legislative process by which the intervening *castas* of the Iberian colonies were invisibilized in the Protestant English colonies from 1630 onwards. The first move was to punish interracial sex. By 1662, the Virginia legislators had passed a statute that the child of a female slave, regardless of the color or legal condition of the father, “followed the womb” (*partus sequitur ventrem*). The Virginia statute disregarded English patrilineal practice for freeborn Englishmen and women (50). It became an invitation to all white men to rape enslaved

121 Kenneth X. Robbins and John McLeod, eds., *African Elites in India: Habsbi Amrat* (Mumbai and Singapore, 2006); compare with Joaneath Spicer, ed., *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe* (Baltimore, MD, 2013)

122 Erin W. Stone, *Captives of Conquest: Slavery in the Early Modern Spanish Caribbean* (Philadelphia, PA, 2021).

123 Ann Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies* (Stanford, CA, 2015), 3–84.

Black women, incentivized the compulsory natalism of African female slaves, and guaranteed masters and mistresses of female slaves a large number of *further* slaves. Adapting the Iberian *casta* hierarchy allowed a heterogeneous population of indentured and convict workers, farmers, favored royalists, religious refugees, and merchants to imagine themselves as part of a homogenous “white” settler society. An emergent binary of “white” versus “black” granted the weakest classes the privilege of amnesia necessary to founding the American “nation” in the eighteenth century.

Though the authors may not have intended it, “Race” and “Dispossession” (chapters 2 and 5, the latter by Tiya Miles) offer points of comparison and historical connections between English-governed colonies in North America and South Asia, where female slaves provided a variety of household, temple, and palace-centered services. If children were born to these women and acknowledged to be their master’s progeny, the slave-mother joined the ranks of mothers in a larger household, and the children were treated as junior kin, a practice resembling Indigenous American and pre-colonial African systems.¹²⁴ Furthermore, household forms of property management ensured that slaves shared in some of the economic profits earned from commercial or landed property. Many successful slaves and freedmen used their earnings to dedicate buildings for worship, or for small philanthropic projects.¹²⁵ In other words, in precolonial South Asia, slaves of substantial households were not the lowest-ranked, most impoverished members of their societies. In contemporary plantation economies of the European Atlantic, anti-Black legislation designed for them precisely that fate.

After 1776, such legislation provided a model for Englishmen who clung to the riches of the Indian colony. English governors and judges sent to India devised doctrines of “natural sonship” and “illegitimacy” that were novel to both Brahmanic and Muslim legal practices. English officers and civilians separated their children born from Indian mothers and put them in residential schools that were precursors of the institutions that removed children from their Indigenous American parents in the US mainland. Doctrines of “illegitimacy” subsequently degraded the status of junior kin of Mughal-era households in eastern and northern India as well. Chapters 2 and 5 suggest both a colonial and a ‘white’ racist genealogy for the loaded terms of “caste” and “tribe” that framed all British knowledge (and ignorance) about South Asian social formations.

Chapter 18, “Justice,” written by Hannah-Jones herself, provides the *raison d’être* of the volume: reparations for the continued economic exploitation of both the formerly unfree and the free Black people in North America. As workers, they generated “extravagant riches for European colonial powers, the white planter class, and all the ancillary white people, from Midwestern farmers to bankers to sailors, to textile workers, who earned their living and built their wealth from that free Black labor and the products that labor produced ... Though our

- 124 Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1999); Indrani Chatterjee and Sumit Guha, “Slave-Queen, Waif-Prince: Slavery and Social Poverty in Eighteenth Century India,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 36, no. 2 (1999): 165–86; Indrani Chatterjee, “Colouring Subalternity: Slaves, Concubines and Social Orphans in Early Colonial India,” in *Subaltern Studies* vol. 10, ed. Gautam Bhadra, Susie Tharu, and Ajay Skaria (Delhi, 1999), 49–97.
- 125 Indrani Chatterjee, “Afro-Asian Capital and Its Dissolution,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 38, no. 2 (2018): 310–29, here 311.

high school history books seldom make this plain, slavery and the hundred-year period of racial apartheid and racial terrorism known as Jim Crow were, above all else, systems of economic exploitation” (458). From the eighteenth century onward, emancipated African men and women have struggled for some compensation for the labors of their ancestors, to no avail. The leaders of such struggles were punished. Few emancipated slaves received the forty acres promised in the 1860s. In the 1920s, Black entrepreneurs and bankers were burnt out of their homes and businesses. Hannah-Jones argues that the federal government should distribute the gains of modern American prosperity to the descendants of all these groups.

What stands in the way of such redistribution? This volume cannot answer that question because it does not distinguish the racism of the early twentieth century (based on ideas of eugenics and scientificity exported to many parts of the British Empire) from the racism of the post-Civil Rights era, in which we currently reside.¹²⁶ The former enabled the nativism of the American nationalist imagination, consolidating anti-Asian, anti-Mexican, anti-Semitic, and anti-Muslim racisms into one. Post-Civil Rights racism thrives in a different national and global order. US prosperity from the 1950s to the 1990s was connected with the financial imperialism of the World Bank, the IMF, and the military-industrial complex undergirding politics of the Cold War. Together, these institutions and policies enabled the United States to assume the leadership of the “free world” and made universal suffrage and immigration reform possible in the same year: 1965. But this moment also generated what Bobo, Kluegel and Smith named “laissez faire racism”.¹²⁷ There were four key ideas in this form of racism. The first was that after 1965–1975, the United States had become a racial meritocracy (or as an Obama-era slogan put it, a “post-racial” society). The second is that individual Americans do not “see” race or are personally “color-blind.” The third is that all racial and ethnic inequalities are outcomes of individual choice or group-level “cultural traits.” The first three ideas result in the fourth—that democratic governments do not need to attempt systematic interventions to redress inequities. Since the 1960s, these ideas have led labor unionism, ‘colorblind liberalism’ and ‘colorblind conservatism’ to oppose affirmative action policies in employment and schools.¹²⁸ The volume inhibits recognition of real hurdles in the path of redistribution of wealth and justice when it blurs the distinction of times and types of racism,

Other silences in the volume are also worth pondering. The focus on anti-Black racism by a white-identifying public precludes us from seeing relations of enslaved workers with other exploited, nominally “free” laborers, such as the twenty thousand Asian men who built the first transcontinental railroad and later worked in the American West. Black and Latinx convict labor gangs of the later nineteenth century were also unpaid. Did African slaves or freedmen establish solidarities with these

126 Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (London, 2001); Maria Krysan and Amanda E. Lewis, eds., *The Changing Terrain of Race and Ethnicity* (New York, 2004).

127 Lawrence Bobo, J. R. Kluegel, R. A. Smith, “Laissez-Faire Racism: The Crystallization of a ‘Kinder, Gentler’ Anti-Black Ideology”, in Steven A. Tuch and J.K. Martin eds., *Racial Attitudes in the 1990s: Continuity and Change* (Westport, CT, 1997).

128 Dennis Deslippe, *Protesting Affirmative Action: The Struggle for Equality after the Civil Rights Revolution* (Baltimore, Md, 2012).

co-creators of American prosperity? How did the latter respond to the Immigration Acts passed in 1891 and 1952, which marked Asians, Latinate, and Mexican communities as “aliens” on tracts of ceded lands that were historically home to their own ancestors. Does an argument for reparations extend to these communities?¹²⁹

Notwithstanding the silences, this volume’s arguments resonate in the public sphere. The H.R.40 Bill introduced in the 117th session of Congress in 2021-2022 accepted that slavery in the thirteen American colonies began in 1619, and asked that a commission be established to study and develop reparation proposals for African Americans.¹³⁰ Clearly, *The 1619 Project* belongs in a professional and popular coalition with a long history of antiracist struggles in the United States. Such struggles have also brought many white, brown, and Black scholars and communities to acknowledge that the homes in which they live, pipelines on which they depend, and schools they attend are built on unceded lands of Indigenous Americans. This volume, like those produced by scholars of Indigenous Americans, also decolonizes the history of American capitalism and democracy when it re-centers African slaves and formerly enslaved peoples in the making of the First World. It needs to be read as part of a wider reckoning about the uneven burdens that capitalism, colonialism, and nationalism place on ever-shifting groups of vulnerable people. That is the reason that all of us should engage its arguments seriously.

Jeannette Eileen Jones

Exploring “American” Slavery

A Review of *The 1619 Project* and
1619education.org

When Nikole Hannah-Jones and her colleagues launched the 1619 Project in 2019, they achieved a feat that few scholars have. They brought discussions of American slavery and its legacies into the public forum. As Hannah-Jones notes in the preface to *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, many Americans remained unaware of the complex history of slavery in the American colonies and in the United States. Moreover, quoting Jelani Cobb, she explains that there exists a “gap between the academy and the world” regarding this history and its lack of controversy among historians (xxi). Historians of slavery, particularly those

129 Roy L. Brooks, *When Sorry Isn't Enough: The Controversy Over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustice* (New York, 1999).

130 <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/40/text>, accessed 11/18/2022.

focusing on the enslavement of Africans and their descendants in the thirteen colonies and the United States, do not cast doubt on the major thesis guiding *The 1619 Project*. Slavery played a vital role in the American Revolution and the history of the nation through the Civil War.

Hannah-Jones's response to a "small group of historians" who "publicly attempted to discredit the project" is thoughtful (xxv), backed by a revision to one key paragraph in the project and by citations of key historical works that supported her claim that maintaining slavery motivated some colonists to fight for independence from the British Empire. Citing Benjamin Quarles, Eric Foner, Annette Gordon-Reed, and Alan Taylor, Hannah-Jones holds her ground with the insertion of "some" to qualify her statement about the colonial revolutionaries. In addition, Hannah-Jones, Caitlin Roper, Ilena Silverman, and Jake Silverstein have edited a book that features essays, including two from Hannah-Jones herself, notes, and scholars that add more nuance to the arguments underlying the original *New York Times* online document.¹³¹ Poems, fiction, and a monologue add texture to the book's eighteen chapters. The audiobook version of the text allows the listener to hear the voices of Hannah-Jones and select scholars who have chosen to record their own essays. The audiobook and print versions of *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, the 1619 podcast, and the educational curriculum materials comprise the "major multimedia project" led by Hannah-Jones (xxvi). This review focuses on the teacher resources available on the Pulitzer Center website as part of the center's partnership with the 1619 Project and the *New York Times*.

For the English inhabitants of the Virginia Colony, 1619 was just another year in the short history of the settlement. Chartered in 1606, by 1607, the colony had a somewhat stable population of 104 men and boys. Over the next three years, the settlers would endure the Starving Time and strained relationships with Indigenous peoples. Wars with the Powhatan Confederacy in 1609 disrupted the settler colonialist aims of the British Empire in this part of mainland North America. With the first war ending in 1614, the settlers began to rebuild, arguably aware that they would need more laborers—European indentured servants—to sustain the colony and Jamestown settlement.

Slavery and indentured servitude were already institutionalized in what Europeans referred to arrogantly as the New World. Enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples and indentured Europeans were mainstays of unfree colonial labor regimes in the Americas and the Caribbean. Thus, the arrival of the *White Lion* in Jamestown in 1619 with twenty-two enslaved Africans on board was part of an over-one-hundred-year history of slave trading across the Atlantic, as well as across the colonial possessions of the British, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, Danish, and Swedish. In this historical context, 1619 derives its singularity from reading backward from 1776 or 1789. In other words,

131 These scholars are Dorothy Roberts, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Leslie Alexander, Michelle Alexander, Tiya Miles, Matthew Desmond, Jamelle Bouie, Martha S. Jones, Carol Anderson, Bryan Stevenson, Trymaine Lee, Linda Villarosa, Anthea Butler, Wesley Morris, Jeneen Interlandi, Kevin M. Kruse, and Ibram X. Kendi.

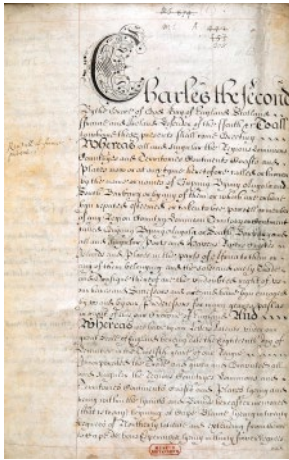


Figure 3. Charter granted to the Company of Royal Adventurers of England Trading into Africa, 1663. Courtesy of the British Library.

while the sight of the twenty-two Africans may have surprised the Jamestown settlers, slavery in the Americas—what we can call “American slavery”—was not anomalous. The financial transactions that commodified African bodies were all too familiar to many settler colonists. The enslavement of Africans and their “creole” American descendants (those Blacks born on stolen lands) would become a central feature of European imperialism in the Americas.

The 1619 Project rightfully points out that those twenty-two Africans were integral to Virginia’s transformation from a backwater colonial settlement to a major producer of tobacco for the Atlantic world market. In addition, institutionalized slavery—enslavement codified in colonial laws and upheld in colonial courts—allowed men like Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, and James Madison to amass wealth at the expense of African freedom, as they declared themselves revolutionaries fighting against the political and economic tyranny of Great Britain. It was this glaring contradiction of freedom derived from the unfreedom of Africans and African Americans coterminous with the genocide and displacement of Indigenous peoples and nations that animates *The 1619 Project*. Accordingly, it explores this history and relevant historiography to make them accessible to both the broader public and educators.

As a historian trained in US history, African American history, and precolonial African history, with expertise in the United States and the world, the history of race and representation, the long nineteenth century, and digital humanities, I would like to offer some thoughts on the 1619 Project’s teaching resources, specifically Amanda E. Vickery’s teacher’s guide for *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*.

The “Essential Questions,” posed by Vickery, prompt students to consider the major arguments and concepts driving the project. The section asks students to “consider these questions posed by Hannah-Jones in the book’s preface: ‘What would it mean to reframe our understanding of U.S. history by considering 1619 as our country’s origin point ... How might that reframing change how we understand the unique problems of the nation *today* ... How would looking at contemporary American life through this lens help us better appreciate the contributions of Black Americans—not only to our culture but also to our democracy itself?’” Hannah-Jones states in the preface that the book takes up the issues of settler colonialism and the oppression of Indigenous peoples. In this vein, the “Essentials Questions” could pull back to prompt students to consider the ongoing colonial displacement of and war with the Powhatan, the founding of the Virginia General Assembly, and the arrival of the *White Lion*, all in 1619. Asking students to reflect on the intertwining histories of settler colonialism, slavery, indentured servitude, and colonial politics avoids the elision of Indigenous perspectives in considering 1619’s impact on enslaved Africans and their descendants in Virginia.

As noted previously, 1619’s significance to US history is most evident when we read backward from 1776 or 1789. However, ask students to



Figure 4. John Greenwood, English (born colonial North America), 1727–1792; *Sea Captains Carousing in Surinam*, c.1755–58; oil on bed ticking; 37 3/4 x 75 inches; Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum Purchase 256: 1948.

consider 1619 on its own temporal terms. That is, ask them to make sense of 1619 in an Atlantic world context that includes slave trading to various parts of the Americas and the Caribbean? For example, students should learn about the founding of other British colonies, such as Barbados in 1627, built on Indigenous removal and the enslavement of Africans. Such an exploration does not detract from the overall argument of the 1619 Project. Rather, it begs students to question American exceptionalism narratives, the very ones that Hannah-Jones critiques and challenges. The independence of the thirteen colonies was not a foregone conclusion of British imperialism in the Americas. Early histories of Africans in the thirteen colonies attest to the movement of enslaved and freed Africans across European colonial possessions. For example, one could walk the streets of Manhattan Island and hear Africans and African “creoles” speaking several African and European languages. Sojourner Truth spoke Dutch and English. She was not the exception to the rule. Many American colonists in the seventeenth century were polyglot. These individuals embodied the interimperial histories of American colonization and transatlantic slave trading, bringing into sharp relief the devastation and breadth of racial slavery.

The “Classroom Activities” section includes outstanding primary sources for student work and reflection. The majority of the sources are from the nineteenth century. Exceptions include excerpts from a 1662 Virginia law and *Sea Captains Carousing in Surinam*, painted by John Greenwood, circa 1752–58. These are great sources. However, more sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can help students trace the history of slavery and slave trading in the English colonies that would become the United States. For example, the 1663 charter King Charles II granted to the Royal African Company is a great

source. The 1772 *Somerset v. Stewart* case decided in England is enlightening as it was cited in US court cases involving freedom suits. Such sources reveal slavery to be a transimperial and intercolonial institution before the founding of the United States.

I would like to make a strong plea for digital humanities and digital history projects as resources for further reading and research for educators. Over the last twenty years, several digitally born projects, in the form of websites, have furthered our understanding of the histories of slavery in the Americas, including the United States. Among them are projects that explore the voyage of a particular slave ship, an African American burial ground, and a set of early nineteenth century freedom suits filed in the Washington D.C. Circuit Court, Maryland state courts, and the U.S. Supreme Court.

Voyage of the Slave Ship Sally, 1764–1765, includes documents and a map of the ill-fated voyage of a slave ship that sailed from Providence, Rhode Island, to West Africa to procure enslaved Africans. Of the 196 kidnapped Africans aboard, 109 died.

The National Park Service website dedicated to the African Burial Ground in Manhattan.

The Mattatuck Museum’s Fortune’s Story, a “community-based project” reconstructing the history of Fortune, an African American man “enslaved in Waterbury during the eighteenth century.” A local doctor had legal ownership of him, and when Fortune died, the doctor kept his skeleton, bequeathing it to his heirs. The museum received Fortune’s remains from the doctor’s descendants in the early twentieth century.

O Say Can You See: Early Washington, D.C., Law & Family, includes digitized primary sources related to freedom suits filed in DC courts between 1800 and 1862.

A great resource for additional digital projects and collections is Brown University Library’s guide to the syllabus for Captive Voices: Atlantic Slavery in the Digital Age.

The 1619 Project’s digital platforms and books provide readers and users with important sources for pushing forward public conversations about the histories of race, freedom, slavery, citizenship, and anti-Blackness and their legacies. These sources add to the ongoing work of scholars committed to social justice, racial justice, and truth and reconciliation.

A Beginning Worth Continuing

The 1619 Podcast

The 1619 podcast begins with the sound of crashing waves and the squawking of seagulls. Against this sonic backdrop, project creator and host Nikole Hannah-Jones and producer Adizah Eghan reflect on the site then known as Point Comfort and the enslaved people who arrived there in 1619. Hannah-Jones considers what it might have been like for the twenty to thirty enslaved people, most likely captured from the Kingdom of Ndongo, in southwestern Africa, to endure the journey across the Atlantic Ocean. Which loved ones would they have left behind? What would they have done once they realized that everything and everyone they knew was gone? What relationships would they have forged during this tortuous voyage? Versions of these thoughts swim through Nikole Hannah-Jones's mind as she imagines these individuals coming to the heartbreaking realization that "the teal eternity of the Atlantic Ocean had severed them so completely that it was as if nothing had ever existed before, that everything they ever knew had simply vanished from the earth" (episode 1, 2:50). Emotional dialogue between Hannah-Jones and Eghan builds to the thought-provoking question, "What happened here?" Despite the answer being almost unknowable, the listener receives a response reflecting the historical research Hannah-Jones and her team drew from: along the shores of the Chesapeake Bay in present-day Hampton, Virginia, a site originally known as Point Comfort is where the first Africans to be enslaved in the British colonies arrived on the pirate ship the *White Lion*. Slavery in the British North American colonies begins here, and so, too, does the 1619 podcast.

The 1619 podcast is a limited-series audio program that is a companion to the project that the *New York Times Magazine* released in August 2019. The first episode premiered on August 23, and five subsequent episodes were released (roughly) weekly until October 11, 2019. The podcast is not a mirror image of the text, but instead tackles some of the main themes of the articles with either Hannah-Jones or a producer interviewing a 1619 contributor or interviewee whose personal story reflects a topic of the project. Also included in the audio series are readings from authors Jesmyn Ward and Yaa Gyasi, whose literary contributions appear in the text.

The audio series has a rich soundscape filled with theme music and recordings from historical sources, including oral history interviews, speeches, and radio and film excerpts. For example, as a teacher of African

American history, I am familiar with *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936–1938*, which includes over 2,300 oral history interviews with formerly enslaved people. The digitized project, stewarded by the Library of Congress and available online, includes an interview with Fountain Hughes, the audio from which is one of the few surviving sound recordings of a formerly enslaved person. Hughes was interviewed in 1949 when he was 101 years of age. The 1619 podcast includes excerpts from Hughes's interview, including the moment when he explains the dehumanizing impact of chattel slavery. In Hughes's voice, one hears the emotional toll and understands that though slavery had been abolished many decades prior, the pain remained.

This is the power of the 1619 podcast: each episode leverages emotion, personal narratives, historical analysis, and captivating storytelling to bring its main points closer to home. Episode 1, "The Fight for a True Democracy," lays out the main themes and questions of the 1619 Project, including the meaning of democracy, and how, in the United States, it is yet to be fully realized; the institution of slavery as a defining characteristic of life and culture in the United States; and the work of Black people throughout history to make real the promises of democracy despite their continued exclusion.

Episode 2, "The Economy That Slavery Built," features an interview with sociologist Matthew Desmond, author of the 1619 essay and corresponding book chapter "Capitalism." In the episode, Hannah-Jones and Desmond discuss the cotton plantation and suggest that as this country's first big business, it may have more in common with modern-day multinational corporations than we might typically consider. The production of cotton was incredibly violent and brutal under chattel slavery, and this culture of violence, brutality, and inequality pulses through American capitalism, according to Desmond, as a continuing and defining legacy of slavery.

Episode 3, "The Birth of American Music," is different from the other episodes in that while Nikole Hannah-Jones introduces the episode, it is narrated entirely by *New York Times* critic Wesley Morris, author of the 1619 essay and corresponding book chapter "Music." Through a winding sound journey that begins with "yacht rock" and ends with Motown, Morris establishes how "thoroughly atomized into American culture" Black music has become.

Episode 4, "How the Bad Blood Started," features Nikole Hannah-Jones in conversation with *New York Times* editorial board member and staff writer Jeneen Interlandi, author of the 1619 essay and corresponding book chapter "Healthcare." Hannah-Jones and Interlandi discuss the long history of race-based health disparities and Black people's insistence on making health care accessible for all by highlighting the work of two Black health-care pioneers: Rebecca Lee Crumpler and William Montague Cobb.

Episode 5, "The Land of Our Fathers," rounds out the series and focuses on Black land loss and dispossession by following the story of

June and Angie Provost, sugarcane farmers in Louisiana. The two-part episode features a gripping interview with the Provosts, who narrate the prosperity of their family farm and its downfall due to discriminatory lending practices by a local bank. Lest one think that what the Provosts endured was a string of bad luck, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, author of the 1619 essay and corresponding book chapter “Sugar,” provides context, illustrating how persistent and widespread efforts have been to disenfranchise Black farmers and divest them of their land.

After discussing the plight of Black farmers, the 1619 podcast series ends where it began—with the sound of lapping waves and seagulls and a conversation between Nikole Hannah-Jones and Adizah Eghan. In this conversation, Hannah-Jones reflects on a major realization that she has had since she began working on 1619: four hundred years later, the wounds of slavery are still raw, especially for Black people, because “there’s never been a reckoning for what was done,” making it “hard to move on” (episode 5, 34:10). The wounds fester. The pain lingers. Ignored and untreated. Of all the points of the 1619 Project, this is one that comes through strongest with the podcast series: the reverberating impact of slavery in every area of American life—culture, politics, economics, health, the law—and the social, cultural, economic, and emotional impact of this on Black people then and now.

There is no doubt that the 1619 podcast is effective, but after listening, I am left with questions about the podcast series itself, including its ultimate goals and aims, the stories contained therein, and the series’ relationship to the overall project. In terms of the podcast series’ ultimate goals and aims, this was hard to ascertain because, unlike with other podcasts, there was not much information on the podcast, including why it was created and the vision for it. Therefore, I concluded that the podcast is a companion to the magazine version of the 1619 Project, providing the listening public an opportunity to learn about the project’s main themes and questions through another medium. Because each episode is no more than forty-five minutes, there is not time to cover each topic in depth, one reason why the podcast series is not necessarily a stand-alone project, although some listeners might only listen to the podcast and not engage the corresponding essays. Each episode has its own page on the *New York Times* website and links to the corresponding 1619 essay on the topic. Unfortunately, the articles are (as of June 2022) behind a paywall. Additionally, as I listened, I wondered the rationale for the topics and stories chosen. While the stories chosen were compelling, listeners had no sense of why what was there was there and how it fit into the series beyond knowing that the episodes were connected by 1619 in some way. Each episode, then, was a bit of surprise. Listeners should not expect a narrative through line that connects each episode. As I finished the series, I wanted more: more episodes, more discussions, more stories. But as a public historian, educator, and podcast producer and host, I know this is easier said than done. The tremendous behind-the-scenes and production effort it took to pull

this off was apparent in the quality of the series and cannot be taken for granted.

This series gave me the opportunity to reflect on history podcasts and the role they can play in contributing to an accessible historical curriculum for the general public, especially on topics that are under-taught, understudied, and misunderstood. Podcasts, in conjunction with other public history outlets and platforms (including historic sites, museums, and other social and digital mediums), really have the potential to advance the public's knowledge of the past, as well as historical methods. History content creators have a responsibility to not just tell good stories but also to expose how historians develop their conclusions about the past, which includes engaging with a variety of primary sources; considering change over time; and taking into account complex perspectives. To me, this aspect of a history podcast program is just as important as narrative development and production quality. A relatively new podcast that does a successful job of doing both is *Seizing Freedom*, hosted by historian Kidada Williams, which explores Black people's efforts to create and define freedom for themselves during the Reconstruction period and thereafter. While the 1619 Project partnered with the Pulitzer Center to create an educational curriculum that draws from the essays and podcast series, this partnership is not readily apparent via the podcast's web page. The Pulitzer Center developed an extensive podcast listening guide connecting the content of the podcast to questions and ideas listeners could consider. A link to the Pulitzer content is not available on the podcast's website, unfortunately.

In all, the 1619 limited-series podcast is thought-provoking and affective, providing another entry point from which a listener can begin their study of the important topics and questions the project raises, but it is just a beginning—one that I (perhaps selfishly) wish Nikole Hannah-Jones and the production team would consider continuing.

Faith J. Day

From Academia to America

Using Digital Platforms to Remediate Public History

In August 2019, the *New York Times Magazine* published a collection of projects created and curated by staff writer and reporter Nikole Hannah-Jones that marked the anniversary of the beginning of slavery. Like

many newspapers and magazines published in the twenty-first century, this issue was made available in print and digital formats. When entering the digital version of the 1619 Project, the viewer is introduced to a stark black-and-white image of the sea, photographed by Dannielle Bowman, overlaid with a white script font and the statement that reads,

“In August of 1619, a ship appeared on this horizon, near Point Comfort, a coastal port in the English colony of Virginia. It carried more than 20 enslaved Africans, who were sold to the colonists. No aspect of the country that would be formed here has been untouched by the years of slavery that followed. On the 400th anniversary of this fateful moment, it is finally time to tell our story truthfully.”¹³²

This reference to storytelling and how the story of America is told (and by whom) is one of the most significant contributions that the 1619 Project has made to the public understanding of American history and culture. Contrasting with the widely held belief that America’s story began in the year 1776, which foretells a heroic narrative of freedom and liberation, from the moment that a reader enters the digital platform of the 1619 Project, they are encouraged to dive deeper into the dichotomous nature of the nation’s history through uncovering the enduring legacy of slavery.

For many, history is only made to exist in the past. Especially when it comes to the violent history of the American empire, there is even more impetus to forget that history moving forward. However, the rise of the internet and digital platforms in particular have created new methods of collecting and sharing narratives and perspectives on history. As an innovative form of digital journalism, the 1619 Project defies the linearity and intuition of shared history through web and user experience design. While most American readers are familiar with the traditional up-and-down scrolling of a web page, there are also moments in which the site usurps that familiar narrative by pushing the user to read from side to side. However, each essay is introduced using the same unifying format, images overlaid with a quote.

As a visual aesthetic, this format plays on the black-and-white binary of American history, with each quote and image uncovering the stories behind the truth of America’s early days in juxtaposition to its founding. Through telling her own family’s story, in the first essay of the project, Nikole Hannah-Jones writes that “the United States is a nation founded on both an ideal and a lie.”¹³³ In this sense, the authors also introduce what Black Americans know to be true about their history in contrast to the most commonly reproduced narration of those events. Therefore, the 1619 Project exists at the unique intersection of academic inquiry and investigative journalism. By uncovering the hidden histories of America’s past and connecting them to the present, the collection of written works curated across multiple digital platforms is also

132 “The 1619 Project,” *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html?searchResultPosition=3>.

133 Nikole Hannah-Jones, “America Wasn’t a Democracy, Until Black Americans Made It One,” *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html>.

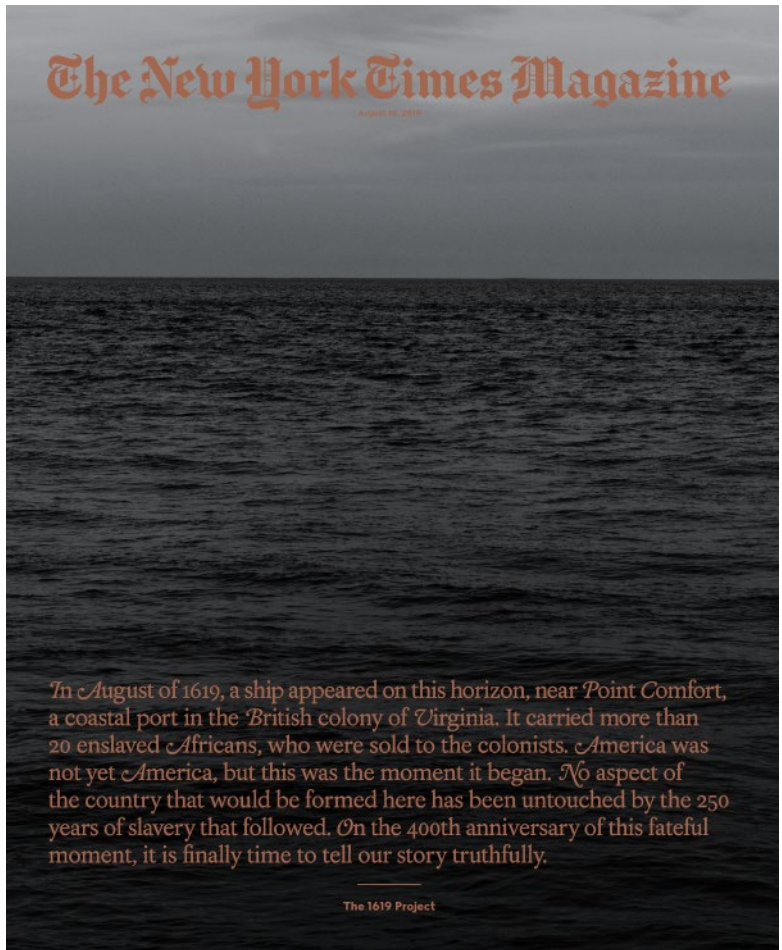


Figure 5. Original cover *The New York Times Magazine* when The 1619 Project first appeared on August 18, 2019. Courtesy of *The New York Times Magazine*.

an example of the potential of public history to combat cultural amnesia and promote new methods of shared memory and meaning-making.

In the article “Public History and the Study of Memory,” David Glassberg writes about the lack of scholarship on the relationship between public history and memory (7–9).¹³⁴ Referencing Benedict Anderson’s definitions of “shared history” and the “imagined community,” Glassberg notes that while an imagined community is expected to share similar memories of historical events and timelines, it is also expected to share in what the community does not remember (11). This collective remembering and forgetting makes it easier for communities or nations to view themselves as one whole instead of separate parts. However, Glassberg argues that the way we tell and teach the public history is inherently political, and any “approach that emphasizes public history’s role in holding political society together tends to overlook how dissenting voices view experience, [and] the historical visions of minorities” (12–13).

134 David Glassberg, “Public History and the Study of Memory,” *Public Historian* 18, no. 2 (1996): 7–23.

Consequently, Glassberg sees the purpose of public historians as creating “spaces for dialogue about history and for the collection of memories, and to insure that various voices are heard in those spaces” (14). One method of accomplishing this form of public history is through media and popular culture. And while Glassberg critiques the one-sided nature of the historical film and televised media for their inability to allow for interaction between the viewer and the public historian, the internet and social media make this exact type of dialogue possible. Therefore, the 1619 Project is an example of a twenty-first-century public history project that remediates more traditional methods of sharing historical narratives and artifacts.

Although the primary digital platform of the 1619 Project does not offer a section for commentary, each contribution ends with quick links to share the content via Twitter and Facebook. By linking to various social media platforms and hosting its composite materials on an interactive website, as well as delivering history through a podcast and curriculum, the project offers multiple ways for the public to engage with its content and its contributors. By engaging with the project online, readers and critics have also contributed to the shared history and memory of the 1619 Project, which has become just as well known for its articles as for the political conversations it sparked. Therefore, in historicizing the project and its significance, it is essential to note the cultural landscape of American history and the reception of the project by the American public.

From social media accounts to the *New York Times*, the mediated reception of the 1619 Project has created multiple avenues for discussions centering on the meaning and merits of making history outside the constraints of traditional academic research. Following the publication of the project, five historians crafted their response to the curation focused on the “factual errors in the project and the closed process behind it.”¹³⁵ Bringing to light the difference between academic scholarship and journalism, this letter to the *New York Times Magazine* editor generated even more online discourse around who can write history and how they are allowed to write it. The controversy continued online as historians, educators, and even the White House used social media to criticize the project for its representation of the historical record and its focus on African Americans (to the exclusion of other groups and perspectives).¹³⁶

However, this critique speaks against the political goals of public history and digital journalism. Instead of working toward a shared version of history that is written only by academics, the project’s goal is to give voice to narratives that come from not only historians but also ethnographers, poets, photographers, journalists, and musicians. As *New York Times Magazine* editor Jake Silverstein writes in his response to the letter, “We are not ourselves historians, it is true. We are journalists, trained to look at current events and situations and ask the question: Why is this the way it is?”¹³⁷ Offering a perspective in which African

135 “We Respond to the Historians Who Critiqued the 1619 Project,” *New York Times Magazine*, December 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/20/magazine/we-respond-to-the-historians-who-critiqued-the-1619-project.html>.

136 “What Trump Is Saying about 1619 Project, Teaching U.S. History,” narrated by Judy Woodruff, *PBS News Hour*, September 17, 2020, video, 6:34, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/what-trump-is-saying-about-1619-project-teaching-u-s-history>.

137 “We Respond to the Historians Who Critiqued the 1619 Project,” *New York Times Magazine*, December 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/20/magazine/we-respond-to-the-historians-who-critiqued-the-1619-project.html>.

Americans read themselves into the telling of American history, each contribution to the project centers on slavery as not just a bygone historical era but a framework for viewing our current time. By making these connections, the contributions in the project also demonstrate that making history is not just reflecting on the past but recording and archiving the lived experience of communities in the present.

In this sense, the 1619 Project promotes a standpoint logic, which introduces the possibility of multiple timelines and shared histories of America that change depending on one's identity and cultural background.¹³⁸ Like a digital platform that offers different content and perspectives depending on how the algorithm reads the user, socio-cultural programming and lived experience greatly influence how someone reads this project while expanding the scope of the project's contributions. Consequently, the creative contributions to the project include unique readings of American history through the lens of the Black experience, such as the sixteen poems and literary works by contributors such as Clint Smith, or the photo essay of Howard University graduates by Djeneba Aduayom.¹³⁹ Compared to the initial essay, these photographs and literary works are rarely mentioned in the project's reception. However, they serve as the most convincing argument for using digital platforms and design to represent public history. This is because each contribution engages in a form of rememory work that fills in the gaps of African American history through a literary timeline of stories and images that play with the formation of the cultural imagination around past and present events.¹⁴⁰

At the same time, this connection between digital journalism, public history, and how audiences receive the 1619 Project also speaks to our collective understanding of the role that African Americans play in recording their own stories. After the 1619 Project premiered as a publication and website, the project continued to expand to its own social media platform and podcast. The 1619 podcast, hosted by Nikole Hannah-Jones, includes six podcast episodes that blend music, sound, and audio narration to give aural context to the original essays through interviews and storytelling.¹⁴¹ The podcast format is also reminiscent of oral history, a method commonly employed when archiving the experiences of African Americans. Similar to the photographs used in the original publication, the 1619 podcast offers another medium for audience members to engage with the text and another method of public history. With each episode, the podcast also offers a rereading of the essays and listening guides for students and educators that build on the living archive of the 1619 Project.¹⁴²

The Twitter platform for the project also acts as a living archive, by managing the virtual historical record of the project and offering additional resources to share with the public.¹⁴³ Tweets under the hashtag #1619Project keep the work alive by raising awareness around political issues and documenting the discourse around the project and its influence on social media platforms. Twitter accounts, such as @The1619Project,

138 Sandra Harding, "Standpoint Theories: Productively Controversial," *Hypatia* 24, no. 4 (2009): 192–200, esp. 193.

139 Clint Smith, "August 1619," *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/african-american-poets.html>; Djeneba Aduayom, "Their ancestors were enslaved by law. Now they're lawyers," *New York Times Magazine*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/howard-university-law-school.html>.

140 Jody Norton, "History, Rememory, Transformation: Actualizing Literary Value," *Centennial Review* 38, no. 3 (1994): 589–602.

141 Nikole Hannah-Jones, *1619*, podcast, *New York Times*, January 23, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/23/podcasts/1619-podcast.html>.

142 Donnalie Jannah, "The 1619 Podcast Listening Guide," Pulitzer Center, June 23, 2021, <https://pulitzercenter.org/builder/lesson/1619-podcast-listening-guide>; Stuart Hall, "Constituting an Archive," *Third Text* 15, no. 54 (2001): 89–92.

143 Tamara Rhodes, "A Living, Breathing Revolution: How Libraries Can Use 'Living Archives' to Support, Engage, and Document Social Movements," *IFLA Journal* 40, no. 1 (2014): 5–11.

share the discourse surrounding the project, including a quote from Nikole Hannah-Jones, stating, “The burden of wrking [sic] for racial justice is laid on the very people bearing the brunt of the injustice, and not the powerful people who maintain it.”¹⁴⁴ As another example of standpoint logic, this statement points out the project’s role in contributing to movements that reckon with racial injustice by challenging the status quo. Therefore, Twitter users engage with the project by employing the language of activism and abolition to demonstrate the many ways that the 1619 Project publication is just the beginning of the story.

In concert with the collective understanding of shared history, the internet is both ephemeral and eternal. While some of the information we find online has the longevity to be cited for years to come, other texts can disappear as soon as they are posted. Using the medium of journalism, the 1619 Project has proven its staying power and the many benefits of using a digital platform for public history. As an overt commentary on race relations in America, the 1619 Project acts as a guide and a resource to chart the relationship between past oppression and present-day politics. Therefore, academics and public audiences benefit from the project by engaging in conversations about shared history and national belonging, even amid critical reception and cultural controversy.

Through a collection of essays, multiple projects, and creative forms, the 1619 Project fits into a long legacy of public history that uses media and politics to create space for diverse voices and perspectives. With each new platform, readers are introduced to purposeful choices in the design and experience of the project’s contributions and user-generated content that mobilizes the public to explore the matrices of history, journalism, and creative storytelling. Hence, the digital platforms of the 1619 Project, and its reception online, exist as a living archive that will continue to inform how the public and historians view the role of African Americans reading themselves into the historical record.

Jake Silverstein

Response from the *New York Times Magazine*

As the editor in chief of the *New York Times Magazine*, which first published the 1619 Project as a special issue in August 2019; and as one of the four coeditors of the book version of the project, which was published in November 2021; and as a colleague of the creator of the project and its principal voice, Nikole Hannah-Jones, I write in response to the collection of reviews of the project assembled by the *American*

¹⁴⁴ The 1619 Project (@The1619Project), Twitter, accessed November 15, 2022, <https://twitter.com/The1619Project>.

Historical Review. I do not intend to respond to specific reviews, but rather to simply offer some context, as we appreciate the forum the *AHR* has provided for readers to learn more about our work.

The sixteen essays engage with various aspects of project, which has taken many forms since its initial publication (those include not only the original magazine issue, subsequent book, multiepisode podcast series, and educational curricula, all of which are taken up in these reviews, but also a special section of the newspaper offering a visual history of slavery, a photo essay of sites where slave auctions took place, a children's book, numerous events, and, most recently, a television docuseries). We are grateful for the attentive consideration of these scholars. Some have praise for the project, others criticism. This range of reactions is familiar to us. Since the 1619 Project was first introduced to the world three years ago, it has been an almost constant subject of discussion and debate. The project has been celebrated, lambasted, awarded, and decried; it has stimulated symposia, reading groups, and at least five books attacking it; and it has been a resource for teachers in all fifty states trying to inspire their students to take an interest in the nation's past and the subject of thousands of letters that have poured into the *New York Times* and to Ms. Hannah-Jones's inbox expressing gratitude. At the same time, numerous state legislatures have referred to it by name in bills that would restrict the teaching of so-called divisive concepts, and there have been various campaigns to remove it from public libraries.

What is it that has caused this outsize response?

The 1619 Project is a work of journalism. Ms. Hannah-Jones conceived of it as a way of using history to help explain the persistent racial inequalities that mar contemporary American society. Though it includes the work of academic historians, its principal audience is not a scholarly one. It was created for general readers, and its goal was to press people to think critically about the country's mythologies and hierarchies by posing an alternate starting point for our story in 1619. There were many directions that a project like this could have taken and countless subject areas and topics it could have covered. It was not intended to be a comprehensive, encyclopedic work of history. Rather, it marshals history to explain aspects of the present.

Since the project was first published, millions of readers have found its narration of the country's history, particularly the way it places slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the center of the American story, to be revelatory. This is not the narrative that most Americans grew up with. And so, as the project's reach has grown, it has come to function like a work of public history, introducing to a general audience the decades of existing historical scholarship on which it is built. For many readers, it has been their first encounter with certain disconcerting facts and perspectives about slavery and its aftermath. As such, the project has come to play a part in an ongoing reimagination of the nation's public history.

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inequalities that mar contemporary American society.

We are proud that the 1619 Project has contributed to this reimagination, and we are grateful for the many readers, including the reviewers assembled by the *AHR*, who have engaged deeply with the work. The extensive critique, discussion, and debate the project has engendered are signs of a healthy discourse; sadly, these have been accompanied by numerous efforts to silence the project, to fire teachers who would speak to students about its themes, and to ban it from the public sphere. These we regard as deeply troubling.

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