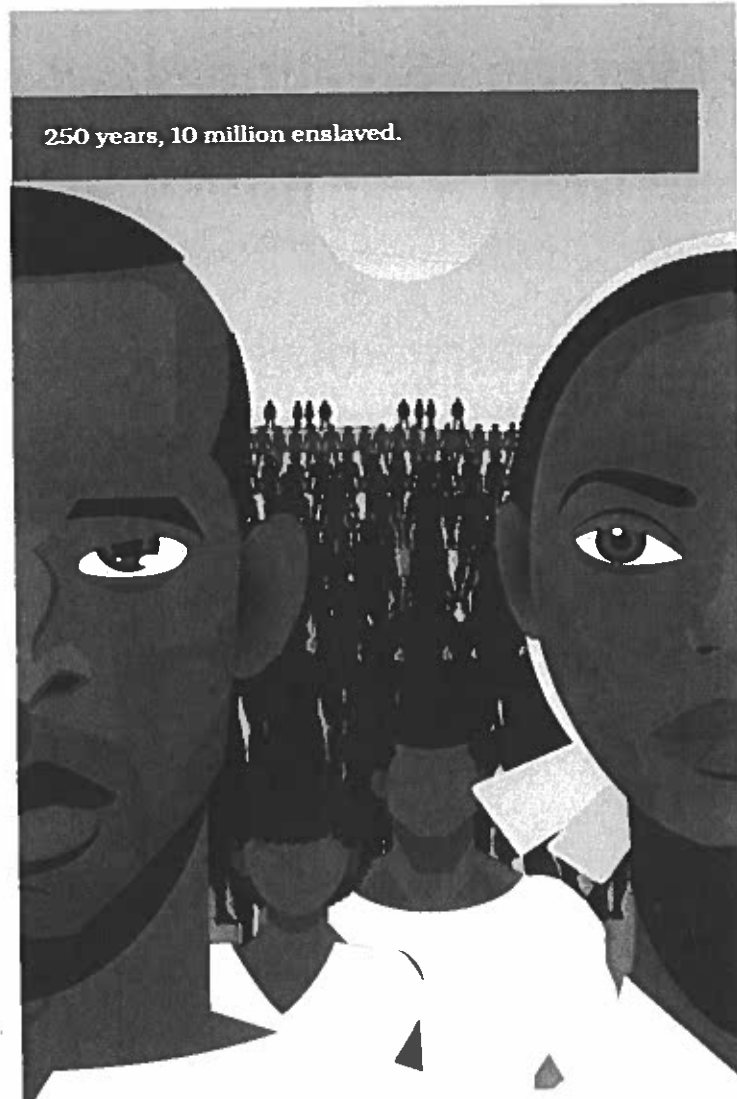


1619 Project Discussion Article Packet





Contributors

Nikole Hannah-Jones, Page 14



Wesley Morris, 60



Nikole Hannah-Jones, Page 14 is a staff writer for the magazine. A 2017 MacArthur fellow, she has won a National Magazine Award, a Peabody Award and a George Polk Award.

Jeneen Interlandi, Page 44 is a member of The Times's editorial board and a staff writer for the magazine. Her last article for the magazine was about teaching in the age of school shootings.

With creative works from:

Barry Jenkins
Jacqueline Woodson

Khalil Gibran Muhammad, 70



Trymaine Lee, Page 82 is a Pulitzer Prize- and Emmy Award-winning journalist and a correspondent for MSNBC. He covers social-justice issues and the role of race in politics and law enforcement.

Wesley Morris, Page 60 is a staff writer for the magazine, a critic at large for The New York Times and a co-host of the podcast "Still Processing." He was awarded the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for criticism.

Jesmyn Ward
Rita Dove
Reginald Dwayne Betts
Yusef Komunyakaa

Trymaine Lee, 82



Dannielle Bowman, 98



Linda Villarosa, 58



Lynn Nottage, Page 84 is a playwright and screenwriter. She has received two Pulitzer Prizes and a MacArthur fellowship, and she is currently an associate professor at Columbia School of the Arts.

Khalil Gibran Muhammad, Page 70 is a Suzanne Young Murray professor at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University and author of "The Condemnation of Blackness."

Camille T. Dungy
Yaa Gyasi
Eve L. Ewing
Darryl Pinckney

Lynn Nottage, 84



Jeneen Interlandi, 44



Jamelle Bouie, 50



Dannielle Bowman, Page 98 is a visual artist working with photography. She is an artist in residence at Baxter Street Camera Club of New York, where she will have a solo show in January.

Linda Villarosa, Page 58 directs the journalism program at the City College of New York and is a contributing writer for the magazine. Her feature on black infant and maternal mortality was a finalist for a National Magazine Award.

Kiese Laymon
Clint Smith
ZZ Packer

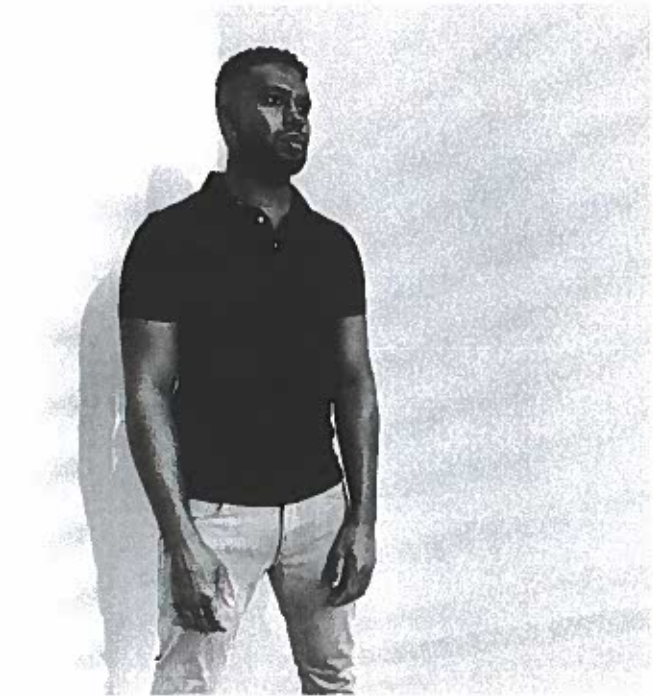
Bryan Stevenson, 80



Djeneba Aduayom, 86



Adam Pendleton, 14



Tyehimba Jess, 58



Joshua Bennett, 79



Kevin M. Kruse, 48



Jamelle Bouie, Page 50 is a Washington-based New York Times opinion columnist and a political analyst for CBS News. He covers campaigns, elections, national affairs and culture.

Bryan Stevenson, Page 80 is the executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative and the author of "Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption."

Djeneba Aduayom, Page 86 is a photographer in Los Angeles known for her portraiture inspired by her career as a dancer.

Adam Pendleton, Page 14 is an artist known for conceptually rigorous and formally inventive paintings, collages, videos and installations that address history and contemporary culture.

Tyehimba Jess, Page 58 is a poet from Detroit who teaches at the College of Staten Island. He is the author of two books of poetry, "Leadbelly" and "Olio," for which he received the 2017 Pulitzer Prize.

Joshua Bennett, Page 79 is an assistant professor of English and creative writing at Dartmouth College and the author of "The Sobbing School." His poetry book "Owed" will be published in 2020.

Kevin M. Kruse, Page 48 is a professor of history at Princeton University and the author of "White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism."

Contributors' bios continue on Page 95.

Special thanks:

To bring The 1619 Project to non-Times subscribers, we have printed hundreds of thousands of additional copies of this issue, as well as of today's special newspaper section, for distribution at libraries, schools and museums. This would not have been possible without the generous support of donors: Wilson Chandler, John Legend on behalf of the Show Me Campaign, Ekpe Udoh, Gabrielle Union, Fund II Foundation and the N.A.A.C.P. Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

America Wasn't a Democracy, Until Black Americans Made It One

nytimes.com

My dad always flew an American flag in our front yard. The blue paint on our two-story house was perennially chipping; the fence, or the rail by the stairs, or the front door, existed in a perpetual state of disrepair, but that flag always flew pristine. Our corner lot, which had been redlined by the federal government, was along the river that divided the black side from the white side of our Iowa town. At the edge of our lawn, high on an aluminum pole, soared the flag, which my dad would replace as soon as it showed the slightest tatter.

My dad was born into a family of sharecroppers on a white plantation in Greenwood, Miss., where black people bent over cotton from can't-see-in-the-morning to can't-see-at-night, just as their enslaved ancestors had done not long before. The Mississippi of my dad's youth was an apartheid state that subjugated its near-majority black population through breathtaking acts of violence. White residents in Mississippi lynched more black people than those in any other state in the country, and the white people in my dad's home county lynched more black residents than those in any other county in Mississippi, often for such "crimes" as entering a room occupied by white women, bumping into a white girl or trying to start a sharecroppers union. My dad's mother, like all the black people in Greenwood, could not vote, use the public library or find work other than toiling in the cotton fields or toiling in white people's houses. So in the 1940s, she packed up her few belongings and her three small children and joined the flood of black Southerners fleeing North. She got off the Illinois Central Railroad in Waterloo, Iowa, only to have her hopes of the mythical Promised Land shattered when she learned that Jim Crow did not end at the Mason-Dixon line.

Grandmama, as we called her, found a house in a segregated black neighborhood on the city's east side and then found the work that was considered black women's work no matter where black women lived — cleaning white people's houses. Dad, too, struggled to find promise in this land. In 1962, at age 17, he signed up for the Army. Like many young men, he joined in hopes of escaping poverty. But he went into the military for another reason as well, a reason common to black men: Dad hoped that if he served his country, his country might finally treat him as an American.

The Army did not end up being his way out. He was passed over for opportunities, his ambition stunted. He would be discharged under murky circumstances and then labor in a series of service jobs for the rest of his life. Like all the black men and women in my family,

he believed in hard work, but like all the black men and women in my family, no matter how hard he worked, he never got ahead.

So when I was young, that flag outside our home never made sense to me. How could this black man, having seen firsthand the way his country abused black Americans, how it refused to treat us as full citizens, proudly fly its banner? I didn't understand his patriotism. It deeply embarrassed me.

I had been taught, in school, through cultural osmosis, that the flag wasn't really ours, that our history as a people began with enslavement and that we had contributed little to this great nation. It seemed that the closest thing black Americans could have to cultural pride was to be found in our vague connection to Africa, a place we had never been. That my dad felt so much honor in being an American felt like a marker of his degradation, his acceptance of our subordination.

Like most young people, I thought I understood so much, when in fact I understood so little. My father knew exactly what he was doing when he raised that flag. He knew that our 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.

In August 1619, just 12 years after the English settled Jamestown, Va., one year before the Puritans landed at Plymouth Rock and some 157 years before the English colonists even decided they wanted to form their own country, the Jamestown colonists bought 20 to 30 enslaved Africans from English pirates. The pirates had stolen them from a Portuguese slave ship that had forcibly taken them from what is now the country of Angola. Those men and women who came ashore on that August day were the beginning of American slavery. They were among the 12.5 million Africans who would be kidnapped from their homes and brought in chains across the Atlantic Ocean in the largest forced migration in human history until the Second World War. Almost two million did not survive the grueling journey, known as the Middle Passage.

Before the abolishment of the international slave trade, 400,000 enslaved Africans would be sold into America. Those individuals and their descendants transformed the lands to which they'd been brought into some of the most successful colonies in the British Empire. Through backbreaking labor, they cleared the land across the Southeast. They taught the colonists to grow rice. They grew and picked the cotton that at the height of slavery was the nation's most valuable commodity, accounting for half of all American exports and 66 percent of the world's supply. They built the plantations of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, sprawling properties that today attract thousands of visitors from across the globe captivated by the history of the world's greatest democracy. They laid the foundations of the White House and the Capitol, even placing with their unfree hands the Statue of Freedom atop the Capitol dome. They lugged the heavy wooden tracks of the railroads that crisscrossed the South and that helped take the cotton they picked to the

Northern textile mills, fueling the Industrial Revolution. They built vast fortunes for white people North and South — at one time, the second-richest man in the nation was a Rhode Island “slave trader.” Profits from black people’s stolen labor helped the young nation pay off its war debts and financed some of our most prestigious universities. It was the relentless buying, selling, insuring and financing of their bodies and the products of their labor that made Wall Street a thriving banking, insurance and trading sector and New York City the financial capital of the world.

But it would be historically inaccurate to reduce the contributions of black people to the vast material wealth created by our bondage. 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.

The United States is a nation founded on both an ideal and a lie. Our Declaration of Independence, approved on July 4, 1776, proclaims that “all men are created equal” and “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” But the white men who drafted those words did not believe them to be true for the hundreds of thousands of black people in their midst. “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” did not apply to fully one-fifth of the country. Yet despite being violently denied the freedom and justice promised to all, black Americans believed fervently in the American creed. Through centuries of black resistance and protest, we have helped the country live up to its founding ideals. And not only for ourselves — black rights struggles paved the way for every other rights struggle, including women’s and gay rights, immigrant and disability rights.

Without the idealistic, strenuous and patriotic efforts of black Americans, our democracy today would most likely look very different — it might not be a democracy at all.

The very first person to die for this country in the American Revolution was a black man who himself was not free. Crispus Attucks was a fugitive from slavery, yet he gave his life for a new nation in which his own people would not enjoy the liberties laid out in the Declaration for another century. In every war this nation has waged since that first one, black Americans have fought — today we are the most likely of all racial groups to serve in the United States military.

My father, one of those many black Americans who answered the call, knew what it would take me years to understand: that the year 1619 is as important to the American story as 1776. That black Americans, as much as those men cast in alabaster in the nation’s capital, are this nation’s true “founding fathers.” And that no people has a greater claim to that flag than us.

In June 1776, Thomas Jefferson sat at his portable writing desk in a rented room in Philadelphia and penned these words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." For the last 243 years, this fierce assertion of the fundamental and natural rights of humankind to freedom and self-governance has defined our global reputation as a land of liberty. As Jefferson composed his inspiring words, however, a teenage boy who would enjoy none of those rights and liberties waited nearby to serve at his master's beck and call. His name was Robert Hemings, and he was the half brother of Jefferson's wife, born to Martha Jefferson's father and a woman he owned. It was common for white enslavers to keep their half-black children in slavery. Jefferson had chosen Hemings, from among about 130 enslaved people that worked on the forced-labor camp he called Monticello, to accompany him to Philadelphia and ensure his every comfort as he drafted the text making the case for a new democratic republic based on the individual rights of men.

At the time, one-fifth of the population within the 13 colonies struggled under a brutal system of slavery unlike anything that had existed in the world before. Chattel slavery was not conditional but racial. It was heritable and permanent, not temporary, meaning generations of black people were born into it and passed their enslaved status onto their children. Enslaved people were not recognized as human beings but as property that could be mortgaged, traded, bought, sold, used as collateral, given as a gift and disposed of violently. Jefferson's fellow white colonists knew that black people were human beings, but they created a network of laws and customs, astounding for both their precision and cruelty, that ensured that enslaved people would never be treated as such. As the abolitionist William Goodell wrote in 1853, "If any thing founded on falsehood might be called a science, we might add the system of American slavery to the list of the strict sciences."

Enslaved people could not legally marry. They were barred from learning to read and restricted from meeting privately in groups. They had no claim to their own children, who could be bought, sold and traded away from them on auction blocks alongside furniture and cattle or behind storefronts that advertised "Negroes for Sale." Enslavers and the courts did not honor kinship ties to mothers, siblings, cousins. In most courts, they had no legal standing. Enslavers could rape or murder their property without legal consequence. Enslaved people could own nothing, will nothing and inherit nothing. They were legally tortured, including by those working for Jefferson himself. They could be worked to death, and often were, in order to produce the highest profits for the white people who owned them.

Yet in making the argument against Britain's tyranny, one of the colonists' favorite rhetorical devices was to claim that *they* were the slaves — to Britain. For this duplicity, they faced burning criticism both at home and abroad. As Samuel Johnson, an English writer and Tory

opposed to American independence, quipped, "How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes?"

Conveniently left out of our founding mythology is the fact that one of the primary reasons the colonists decided to declare their independence from Britain was because they wanted to protect the institution of slavery. By 1776, Britain had grown deeply conflicted over its role in the barbaric institution that had reshaped the Western Hemisphere. In London, there were growing calls to abolish the slave trade. This would have upended the economy of the colonies, in both the North and the South. The wealth and prominence that allowed Jefferson, at just 33, and the other founding fathers to believe they could successfully break off from one of the mightiest empires in the world came from the dizzying profits generated by chattel slavery. In other words, we may never have revolted against Britain if the founders had not understood that slavery empowered them to do so; nor if they had not believed that independence was required in order to ensure that slavery would continue. It is not incidental that 10 of this nation's first 12 presidents were enslavers, and some might argue that this nation was founded not as a democracy but as a slavocracy.

Jefferson and the other founders were keenly aware of this hypocrisy. And so in Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence, he tried to argue that it wasn't the colonists' fault. Instead, he blamed the king of England for forcing the institution of slavery on the unwilling colonists and called the trafficking in human beings a crime. Yet neither Jefferson nor most of the founders intended to abolish slavery, and in the end, they struck the passage.

There is no mention of slavery in the final Declaration of Independence. Similarly, 11 years later, when it came time to draft the Constitution, the framers carefully constructed a document that preserved and protected slavery without ever using the word. In the texts in which they were making the case for freedom to the world, they did not want to explicitly enshrine their hypocrisy, so they sought to hide it. The Constitution contains 84 clauses. Six deal directly with the enslaved and their enslavement, as the historian David Waldstreicher has written, and five more hold implications for slavery. The Constitution protected the "property" of those who enslaved black people, prohibited the federal government from intervening to end the importation of enslaved Africans for a term of 20 years, allowed Congress to mobilize the militia to put down insurrections by the enslaved and forced states that had outlawed slavery to turn over enslaved people who had run away seeking refuge. Like many others, the writer and abolitionist Samuel Bryan called out the deceit, saying of the Constitution, "The words are dark and ambiguous; such as no plain man of common sense would have used, [and] are evidently chosen to conceal from Europe, that in this enlightened country, the practice of slavery has its advocates among men in the highest stations."

With independence, the founding fathers could no longer blame slavery on Britain. The sin became this nation's own, and so, too, the need to cleanse it. The shameful paradox of

continuing chattel slavery in a nation founded on individual freedom, scholars today assert, led to a hardening of the racial caste system. This ideology, reinforced not just by laws but by racist science and literature, maintained that black people were subhuman, a belief that allowed white Americans to live with their betrayal. By the early 1800s, according to the legal historians Leland B. Ware, Robert J. Cottrol and Raymond T. Diamond, white Americans, whether they engaged in slavery or not, "had a considerable psychological as well as economic investment in the doctrine of black inferiority." While liberty was the inalienable right of the people who would be considered white, enslavement and subjugation became the natural station of people who had any discernible drop of "black" blood.

The Supreme Court enshrined this thinking in the law in its 1857 Dred Scott decision, ruling that black people, whether enslaved or free, came from a "slave" race. This made them inferior to white people and, therefore, incompatible with American democracy. Democracy was for citizens, and the "Negro race," the court ruled, was "a separate class of persons," which the founders had "not regarded as a portion of the people or citizens of the Government" and had "no rights which a white man was bound to respect." This belief, that black people were not merely enslaved but were a slave race, became the root of the endemic racism that we still cannot purge from this nation to this day. If black people could not ever be citizens, if they were a caste apart from all other humans, then they did not require the rights bestowed by the Constitution, and the "we" in the "We the People" was not a lie.

On Aug. 14, 1862, a mere five years after the nation's highest courts declared that no black person could be an American citizen, President Abraham Lincoln called a group of five esteemed free black men to the White House for a meeting. It was one of the few times that black people had ever been invited to the White House as guests. The Civil War had been raging for more than a year, and black abolitionists, who had been increasingly pressuring Lincoln to end slavery, must have felt a sense of great anticipation and pride.

The war was not going well for Lincoln. Britain was contemplating whether to intervene on the Confederacy's behalf, and Lincoln, unable to draw enough new white volunteers for the war, was forced to reconsider his opposition to allowing black Americans to fight for their own liberation. The president was weighing a proclamation that threatened to emancipate all enslaved people in the states that had seceded from the Union if the states did not end the rebellion. The proclamation would also allow the formerly enslaved to join the Union army and fight against their former "masters." But Lincoln worried about what the consequences of this radical step would be. Like many white Americans, he opposed slavery as a cruel system at odds with American ideals, but he also opposed black equality. He believed that free black people were a "troublesome presence" incompatible with a democracy intended only for white people. "Free them, and make them politically and socially our equals?" he had said four years earlier. "My own feelings will not admit of this; and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of white people will not."

That August day, as the men arrived at the White House, they were greeted by the towering Lincoln and a man named James Mitchell, who eight days before had been given the title of a newly created position called the commissioner of emigration. This was to be his first assignment. After exchanging a few niceties, Lincoln got right to it. He informed his guests that he had gotten Congress to appropriate funds to ship black people, once freed, to another country.

"Why should they leave this country? This is, perhaps, the first question for proper consideration," Lincoln told them. "You and we are different races. ... Your race suffer very greatly, many of them, by living among us, while ours suffer from your presence. In a word, we suffer on each side."

You can imagine the heavy silence in that room, as the weight of what the president said momentarily stole the breath of these five black men. It was 243 years to the month since the first of their ancestors had arrived on these shores, before Lincoln's family, long before most of the white people insisting that this was not their country. The Union had not entered the war to end slavery but to keep the South from splitting off, yet black men had signed up to fight. Enslaved people were fleeing their forced-labor camps, which we like to call plantations, trying to join the effort, serving as spies, sabotaging confederates, taking up arms for his cause as well as their own. And now Lincoln was blaming them for the war. "Although many men engaged on either side do not care for you one way or the other ... without the institution of slavery and the colored race as a basis, the war could not have an existence," the president told them. "It is better for us both, therefore, to be separated."

As Lincoln closed the remarks, Edward Thomas, the delegation's chairman, informed the president, perhaps curtly, that they would consult on his proposition. "Take your full time," Lincoln said. "No hurry at all."

Nearly three years after that White House meeting, Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox. By summer, the Civil War was over, and four million black Americans were suddenly free. Contrary to Lincoln's view, most were not inclined to leave, agreeing with the sentiment of a resolution against black colonization put forward at a convention of black leaders in New York some decades before: "This is our home, and this our country. Beneath its sod lie the bones of our fathers. ... Here we were born, and here we will die."

That the formerly enslaved did not take up Lincoln's offer to abandon these lands is an astounding testament to their belief in this nation's founding ideals. 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." Black Americans had long called for universal equality and believed, as the abolitionist Martin Delany said, "that God has made of one blood all the nations that dwell on the face of the earth." Liberated by war, then, they did not seek vengeance on their oppressors as Lincoln and so many other white Americans feared. They did the opposite. During this nation's brief period of Reconstruction, from 1865 to 1877,

formerly enslaved people zealously engaged with the democratic process. With federal troops tempering widespread white violence, black Southerners started branches of the Equal Rights League — one of the nation's first human rights organizations — to fight discrimination and organize voters; they headed in droves to the polls, where they placed other formerly enslaved people into seats that their enslavers had once held. The South, for the first time in the history of this country, began to resemble a democracy, with black Americans elected to local, state and federal offices. Some 16 black men served in Congress — including Hiram Revels of Mississippi, who became the first black man elected to the Senate. (Demonstrating just how brief this period would be, Revels, along with Blanche Bruce, would go from being the first black man elected to the last for nearly a hundred years, until Edward Brooke of Massachusetts took office in 1967.) More than 600 black men served in Southern state legislatures and hundreds more in local positions.

These black officials joined with white Republicans, some of whom came down from the North, to write the most egalitarian state constitutions the South had ever seen. They helped pass more equitable tax legislation and laws that prohibited discrimination in public transportation, accommodation and housing. Perhaps their biggest achievement was the establishment of that most democratic of American institutions: the public school. Public education effectively did not exist in the South before Reconstruction. The white elite sent their children to private schools, while poor white children went without an education. But newly freed black people, who had been prohibited from learning to read and write during slavery, were desperate for an education. So black legislators successfully pushed for a universal, state-funded system of schools — not just for their own children but for white children, too. Black legislators also helped pass the first compulsory education laws in the region. Southern children, black and white, were now required to attend schools like their Northern counterparts. Just five years into Reconstruction, every Southern state had enshrined the right to a public education for all children into its constitution. In some states, like Louisiana and South Carolina, small numbers of black and white children, briefly, attended schools together.

Led by black activists and a Republican Party pushed left by the blatant recalcitrance of white Southerners, the years directly after slavery saw the greatest expansion of human and civil rights this nation would ever see. In 1865, Congress passed the 13th Amendment, making the United States one of the last nations in the Americas to outlaw slavery. The following year, black Americans, exerting their new political power, pushed white legislators to pass the Civil Rights Act, the nation's first such law and one of the most expansive pieces of civil rights legislation Congress has ever passed. It codified black American citizenship for the first time, prohibited housing discrimination and gave all Americans the right to buy and inherit property, make and enforce contracts and seek redress from courts. In 1868, Congress ratified the 14th Amendment, ensuring citizenship to any person born in the United States. Today, thanks to this amendment, every child born here to a European, Asian, African, Latin American or Middle Eastern immigrant gains automatic citizenship. The 14th

Amendment also, for the first time, constitutionally guaranteed equal protection under the law. Ever since, nearly all other marginalized groups have used the 14th Amendment in their fights for equality (including the recent successful arguments before the Supreme Court on behalf of same-sex marriage). Finally, in 1870, Congress passed the 15th Amendment, guaranteeing the most critical aspect of democracy and citizenship — the right to vote — to all men regardless of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

For this fleeting moment known as Reconstruction, the majority in Congress seemed to embrace the idea that out of the ashes of the Civil War, we could create the multiracial democracy that black Americans envisioned even if our founding fathers did not.

But it would not last.

Anti-black racism runs in the very DNA of this country, as does the belief, so well articulated by Lincoln, that black people are the obstacle to national unity. The many gains of Reconstruction were met with fierce white resistance throughout the South, including unthinkable violence against the formerly enslaved, wide-scale voter suppression, electoral fraud and even, in some extreme cases, the overthrow of democratically elected biracial governments. Faced with this unrest, the federal government decided that black people were the cause of the problem and that for unity’s sake, it would leave the white South to its own devices. In 1877, President Rutherford B. Hayes, in order to secure a compromise with Southern Democrats that would grant him the presidency in a contested election, agreed to pull federal troops from the South. With the troops gone, white Southerners quickly went about eradicating the gains of Reconstruction. The systemic white suppression of black life was so severe that this period between the 1880s and the 1920 and '30s became known as the Great Nadir, or the second slavery. Democracy would not return to the South for nearly a century.

White Southerners of all economic classes, on the other hand, thanks in significant part to the progressive policies and laws black people had championed, experienced substantial improvement in their lives even as they forced black people back into a quasi slavery. As Waters McIntosh, who had been enslaved in South Carolina, lamented, “It was the poor white man who was freed by the war, not the Negroes.”

Georgia pines flew past the windows of the Greyhound bus carrying Isaac Woodard home to Winnsboro, S.C. After serving four years in the Army in World War II, where Woodard had earned a battle star, he was given an honorable discharge earlier that day at Camp Gordon and was headed home to meet his wife. When the bus stopped at a small drugstore an hour outside Atlanta, Woodard got into a brief argument with the white driver after asking if he could use the restroom. About half an hour later, the driver stopped again and told Woodard to get off the bus. Crisp in his uniform, Woodard stepped from the stairs and saw the police waiting for him. Before he could speak, one of the officers struck him in his head with a billy club, beating him so badly that he fell unconscious. The blows to Woodard’s

head were so severe that when he woke in a jail cell the next day, he could not see. The beating occurred just 4½ hours after his military discharge. At 26, Woodard would never see again.

There was nothing unusual about Woodard's horrific maiming. It was part of a wave of systemic violence deployed against black Americans after Reconstruction, in both the North and the South. As the egalitarian spirit of post-Civil War America evaporated under the desire for national reunification, black Americans, simply by existing, served as a problematic reminder of this nation's failings. White America dealt with this inconvenience by constructing a savagely enforced system of racial apartheid that excluded black people almost entirely from mainstream American life — a system so grotesque that Nazi Germany would later take inspiration from it for its own racist policies.

Despite the guarantees of equality in the 14th Amendment, the Supreme Court's landmark *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896 declared that the racial segregation of black Americans was constitutional. With the blessing of the nation's highest court and no federal will to vindicate black rights, starting in the late 1800s, Southern states passed a series of laws and codes meant to make slavery's racial caste system permanent by denying black people political power, social equality and basic dignity. They passed literacy tests to keep black people from voting and created all-white primaries for elections. Black people were prohibited from serving on juries or testifying in court against a white person. South Carolina prohibited white and black textile workers from using the same doors. Oklahoma forced phone companies to segregate phone booths. Memphis had separate parking spaces for black and white drivers. Baltimore passed an ordinance outlawing black people from moving onto a block more than half white and white people from moving onto a block more than half black. Georgia made it illegal for black and white people to be buried next to one another in the same cemetery. Alabama barred black people from using public libraries that their own tax dollars were paying for. Black people were expected to jump off the sidewalk to let white people pass and call all white people by an honorific, though they received none no matter how old they were. In the North, white politicians implemented policies that segregated black people into slum neighborhoods and into inferior all-black schools, operated whites-only public pools and held white and "colored" days at the country fair, and white businesses regularly denied black people service, placing "Whites Only" signs in their windows. States like California joined Southern states in barring black people from marrying white people, while local school boards in Illinois and New Jersey mandated segregated schools for black and white children.

This caste system was maintained through wanton racial terrorism. And black veterans like Woodard, especially those with the audacity to wear their uniform, had since the Civil War been the target of a particular violence. This intensified during the two world wars because white people understood that once black men had gone abroad and experienced life outside the suffocating racial oppression of America, they were unlikely to quietly return to

their subjugation at home. As Senator James K. Vardaman of Mississippi said on the Senate floor during World War I, black servicemen returning to the South would “inevitably lead to disaster.” Giving a black man “military airs” and sending him to defend the flag would bring him “to the conclusion that his political rights must be respected.”

Many white Americans saw black men in the uniforms of America’s armed services not as patriotic but as exhibiting a dangerous pride. Hundreds of black veterans were beaten, maimed, shot and lynched. We like to call those who lived during World War II the Greatest Generation, but that allows us to ignore the fact that many of this generation fought for democracy abroad while brutally suppressing democracy for millions of American citizens. During the height of racial terror in this country, black Americans were not merely killed but castrated, burned alive and dismembered with their body parts displayed in storefronts. This violence was meant to terrify and control black people, but perhaps just as important, it served as a psychological balm for white supremacy: You would not treat human beings this way. The extremity of the violence was a symptom of the psychological mechanism necessary to absolve white Americans of their country’s original sin. To answer the question of how they could prize liberty abroad while simultaneously denying liberty to an entire race back home, white Americans resorted to the same racist ideology that Jefferson and the framers had used at the nation’s founding.

This ideology — that black people belonged to an inferior, subhuman race — did not simply disappear once slavery ended. If the formerly enslaved and their descendants became educated, if we thrived in the jobs white people did, if we excelled in the sciences and arts, then the entire justification for how this nation allowed slavery would collapse. Free black people posed a danger to the country’s idea of itself as exceptional; we held up the mirror in which the nation preferred not to peer. And so the inhumanity visited on black people by every generation of white America justified the inhumanity of the past.

Just as white Americans feared, World War II ignited what became black Americans’ second sustained effort to make democracy real. As the editorial board of the black newspaper *The Pittsburgh Courier* wrote, “We wage a two-pronged attack against our enslavers at home and those abroad who will enslave us.” Woodard’s blinding is largely seen as one of the catalysts for the decades-long rebellion we have come to call the civil rights movement. But it is useful to pause and remember that this was the second mass movement for black civil rights, the first being Reconstruction. As the centennial of slavery’s end neared, black people were still seeking the rights they had fought for and won after the Civil War: the right to be treated equally by public institutions, which was guaranteed in 1866 with the Civil Rights Act; the right to be treated as full citizens before the law, which was guaranteed in 1868 by the 14th Amendment; and the right to vote, which was guaranteed in 1870 by the 15th Amendment. In response to black demands for these rights, white Americans strung them

from trees, beat them and dumped their bodies in muddy rivers, assassinated them in their front yards, firebombed them on buses, mauled them with dogs, peeled back their skin with fire hoses and murdered their children with explosives set off inside a church.

For the most part, black Americans fought back alone. Yet we never fought only for ourselves. The bloody freedom struggles of the civil rights movement laid the foundation for every other modern rights struggle. This nation's white founders set up a decidedly undemocratic Constitution that excluded women, Native Americans and black people, and did not provide the vote or equality for most Americans. But the laws born out of black resistance guarantee the franchise for all and ban discrimination based not just on race but on gender, nationality, religion and ability. It was the civil rights movement that led to the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which upended the racist immigration quota system intended to keep this country white. Because of black Americans, black and brown immigrants from across the globe are able to come to the United States and live in a country in which legal discrimination is no longer allowed. It is a truly American irony that some Asian-Americans, among the groups able to immigrate to the United States because of the black civil rights struggle, are now suing universities to end programs designed to help the descendants of the enslaved.

No one cherishes freedom more than those who have not had it. And to this day, black Americans, more than any other group, embrace the democratic ideals of a common good. We are the most likely to support programs like universal health care and a higher minimum wage, and to oppose programs that harm the most vulnerable. For instance, black Americans suffer the most from violent crime, yet we are the most opposed to capital punishment. Our unemployment rate is nearly twice that of white Americans, yet we are still the most likely of all groups to say this nation should take in refugees.

The truth is that as much democracy as this nation has today, it has been borne on the backs of black resistance. Our founding fathers may not have actually believed in the ideals they espoused, but black people did. As one scholar, Joe R. Feagin, put it, "Enslaved African-Americans have been among the foremost freedom-fighters this country has produced." For generations, we have believed in this country with a faith it did not deserve. Black people have seen the worst of America, yet, somehow, we still believe in its best.

They say our people were born on the water.

When it occurred, no one can say for certain. Perhaps it was in the second week, or the third, but surely by the fourth, when they had not seen their land or any land for so many days that they lost count. It was after fear had turned to despair, and despair to resignation, and resignation to an abiding understanding. 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. These men and women from many different nations, all shackled together in the suffocating hull of the ship, they were one people now.

Just a few months earlier, they had families, and farms, and lives and dreams. They were free. They had names, of course, but their enslavers did not bother to record them. They had been made black by those people who believed that they were white, and where they were heading, black equaled "slave," and slavery in America required turning human beings into property by stripping them of every element that made them individuals. This process was called seasoning, in which people stolen from western and central Africa were forced, often through torture, to stop speaking their native tongues and practicing their native religions.

But as the sociologist Glenn Bracey wrote, "Out of the ashes of white denigration, we gave birth to ourselves." For as much as white people tried to pretend, black people were not chattel. And so the process of seasoning, instead of erasing identity, served an opposite purpose: In the void, we forged a new culture all our own.

Today, our very manner of speaking recalls the Creole languages that enslaved people innovated in order to communicate both with Africans speaking various dialects and the English-speaking people who enslaved them. Our style of dress, the extra flair, stems back to the desires of enslaved people — shorn of all individuality — to exert their own identity. Enslaved people would wear their hat in a jaunty manner or knot their head scarves intricately. Today's avant-garde nature of black hairstyles and fashion displays a vibrant reflection of enslaved people's determination to feel fully human through self-expression. The improvisational quality of black art and music comes from a culture that because of constant disruption could not cling to convention. Black naming practices, so often impugned by mainstream society, are themselves an act of resistance. Our last names belong to the white people who once owned us. That is why the insistence of many black Americans, particularly those most marginalized, to give our children names that we create, that are neither European nor from Africa, a place we have never been, is an act of self-determination. When the world listens to quintessential American music, it is our voice they hear. The sorrow songs we sang in the fields to soothe our physical pain and find hope in a freedom we did not expect to know until we died became American gospel. Amid the devastating violence and poverty of the Mississippi Delta, we birthed jazz and blues. And it was in the deeply impoverished and segregated neighborhoods where white Americans forced the descendants of the enslaved to live that teenagers too poor to buy instruments used old records to create a new music known as hip-hop.

Our speech and fashion and the drum of our music echoes Africa but is not African. Out of our unique isolation, both from our native cultures and from white America, we forged this nation's most significant original culture. In turn, "mainstream" society has coveted our style, our slang and our song, seeking to appropriate the one truly American culture as its own. As

Langston Hughes wrote in 1926, "They'll see how beautiful I am/And be ashamed —/I, too, am America."

For centuries, white Americans have been trying to solve the "Negro problem." They have dedicated thousands of pages to this endeavor. It is common, still, to point to rates of black poverty, out-of-wedlock births, crime and college attendance, as if these conditions in a country built on a racial caste system are not utterly predictable. But crucially, you cannot view those statistics while ignoring another: that black people were enslaved here longer than we have been free.

At 43, I am part of the first generation of black Americans in the history of the United States to be born into a society in which black people had full rights of citizenship. Black people suffered under slavery for 250 years; we have been legally "free" for just 50. Yet in that briefest of spans, despite continuing to face rampant discrimination, and despite there never having been a genuine effort to redress the wrongs of slavery and the century of racial apartheid that followed, black Americans have made astounding progress, not only for ourselves but also for all Americans.

What if America understood, finally, in this 400th year, that we have never been the problem but the solution?

When I was a child — I must have been in fifth or sixth grade — a teacher gave our class an assignment intended to celebrate the diversity of the great American melting pot. She instructed each of us to write a short report on our ancestral land and then draw that nation's flag. As she turned to write the assignment on the board, the other black girl in class locked eyes with me. Slavery had erased any connection we had to an African country, and even if we tried to claim the whole continent, there was no "African" flag. It was hard enough being one of two black kids in the class, and this assignment would just be another reminder of the distance between the white kids and us. In the end, I walked over to the globe near my teacher's desk, picked a random African country and claimed it as my own.

I wish, now, that I could go back to the younger me and tell her that her people's ancestry started here, on these lands, and to boldly, proudly, draw the stars and those stripes of the American flag.

We were told once, by virtue of our bondage, that we could never be American. But it was by virtue of our bondage that we became the most American of all.

Correction August 15, 2019

An earlier version of this article referred incorrectly to the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It was approved on July 4, 1776, not signed by Congress on that date. The article also misspelled the surname of a Revolutionary War-era writer. He was Samuel Bryan, not Byron.

Nikole Hannah-Jones is a staff writer for the magazine. A 2017 MacArthur fellow, she has won a National Magazine Award, a Peabody Award and a George Polk Award. **Adam Pendleton** is an artist known for conceptually rigorous and formally inventive paintings, collages, videos and installations that address history and contemporary culture.

American Capitalism Is Brutal. You Can Trace That to the Plantation.

nytimes.com interactive2d write ...

A couple of years before he was convicted of securities fraud, Martin Shkreli was the chief executive of a pharmaceutical company that acquired the rights to Daraprim, a lifesaving antiparasitic drug. Previously the drug cost \$13.50 a pill, but in Shkreli's hands, the price quickly increased by a factor of 56, to \$750 a pill. At a health care conference, Shkreli told the audience that he should have raised the price even higher. "No one wants to say it, no one's proud of it," he explained. "But this is a capitalist society, a capitalist system and capitalist rules."

This is a capitalist society. It's a fatalistic mantra that seems to get repeated to anyone who questions why America can't be more fair or equal. But around the world, there are many types of capitalist societies, ranging from liberating to exploitative, protective to abusive, democratic to unregulated. When Americans declare that "we live in a capitalist society" — as a real estate mogul told The Miami Herald last year when explaining his feelings about small-business owners being evicted from their Little Haiti storefronts — what they're often defending is our nation's peculiarly brutal economy. "Low-road capitalism," the University of Wisconsin-Madison sociologist Joel Rogers has called it. In a capitalist society that goes low, wages are depressed as businesses compete over the price, not the quality, of goods; so-called unskilled workers are typically incentivized through punishments, not promotions; inequality reigns and poverty spreads. In the United States, the richest 1 percent of Americans own 40 percent of the country's wealth, while a larger share of working-age people (18-65) live in poverty than in any other nation belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (O.E.C.D.).

Or consider worker rights in different capitalist nations. In Iceland, 90 percent of wage and salaried workers belong to trade unions authorized to fight for living wages and fair working conditions. Thirty-four percent of Italian workers are unionized, as are 26 percent of Canadian workers. Only 10 percent of American wage and salaried workers carry union cards. The O.E.C.D. scores nations along a number of indicators, such as how countries regulate temporary work arrangements. Scores run from 5 ("very strict") to 1 ("very loose"). Brazil scores 4.1 and Thailand, 3.7, signaling toothy regulations on temp work. Further down the list are Norway (3.4), India (2.5) and Japan (1.3). The United States scored 0.3, tied for second to last place with Malaysia. How easy is it to fire workers? Countries like Indonesia (4.1) and Portugal (3) have strong rules about severance pay and reasons for dismissal. Those rules relax somewhat in places like Denmark (2.1) and Mexico (1.9). They virtually disappear in the United States, ranked dead last out of 71 nations with a score of 0.5.

Those searching for reasons the American economy is uniquely severe and unbridled have found answers in many places (religion, politics, culture). But recently, historians have pointed persuasively to the gnatty fields of Georgia and Alabama, to the cotton houses and slave auction blocks, as the birthplace of America's low-road approach to capitalism.

Slavery was undeniably a font of phenomenal wealth. By the eve of the Civil War, the Mississippi Valley was home to more millionaires per capita than anywhere else in the United States. Cotton grown and picked by enslaved workers was the nation's most valuable export. The combined value of enslaved people exceeded that of all the railroads and factories in the nation. New Orleans boasted a denser concentration of banking capital than New York City. What made the cotton economy boom in the United States, and not in all the other far-flung parts of the world with climates and soil suitable to the crop, was our nation's unflinching willingness to use violence on nonwhite people and to exert its will on seemingly endless supplies of land and labor. Given the choice between modernity and barbarism, prosperity and poverty, lawfulness and cruelty, democracy and totalitarianism, America chose all of the above.

Nearly two average American lifetimes (79 years) have passed since the end of slavery, only two. It is not surprising that we can still feel the looming presence of this institution, which helped turn a poor, fledgling nation into a financial colossus. The surprising bit has to do with the many eerily specific ways slavery can still be felt in our economic life. "American slavery is necessarily imprinted on the DNA of American capitalism," write the historians Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman. The task now, they argue, is "cataloging the dominant and recessive traits" that have been passed down to us, tracing the unsettling and often unrecognized lines of descent by which America's national sin is now being visited upon the third and fourth generations.

They picked in long rows, bent bodies shuffling through cotton fields white in bloom. Men, women and children picked, using both hands to hurry the work. Some picked in Negro cloth, their raw product returning to them by way of New England mills. Some picked completely naked. Young children ran water across the humped rows, while overseers peered down from horses. Enslaved workers placed each cotton boll into a sack slung around their necks. Their haul would be weighed after the sunlight stalked away from the fields and, as the freedman Charles Ball recalled, you couldn't "distinguish the weeds from the cotton plants." If the haul came up light, enslaved workers were often whipped. "A short day's work was always punished," Ball wrote.

Cotton was to the 19th century what oil was to the 20th: among the world's most widely traded commodities. Cotton is everywhere, in our clothes, hospitals, soap. Before the industrialization of cotton, people wore expensive clothes made of wool or linen and dressed their beds in furs or straw. Whoever mastered cotton could make a killing. But cotton needed land. A field could only tolerate a few straight years of the crop before its soil

became depleted. Planters watched as acres that had initially produced 1,000 pounds of cotton yielded only 400 a few seasons later. The thirst for new farmland grew even more intense after the invention of the cotton gin in the early 1790s. Before the gin, enslaved workers grew more cotton than they could clean. The gin broke the bottleneck, making it possible to clean as much cotton as you could grow.

The United States solved its land shortage by expropriating millions of acres from Native Americans, often with military force, acquiring Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and Florida. It then sold that land on the cheap — just \$1.25 an acre in the early 1830s (\$38 in today's dollars) — to white settlers. Naturally, the first to cash in were the land speculators. Companies operating in Mississippi flipped land, selling it soon after purchase, commonly for double the price.

— The Limits of Banking Regulation · SIDE BAR BEGINS — — — —

(By Mehrsa Baradaran

| At the start of the Civil War, only states could charter banks. It wasn't until the National Currency Act of 1863 and the National Bank Act of 1864 passed at the height of the Civil War that banks operated in this country on a national scale, with federal oversight. And even then, it was only law in the North. The Union passed the bills so it could establish a national currency in order to finance the war. The legislation also created the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (O.C.C.), the first federal bank regulator. After the war, states were allowed to keep issuing bank charters of their own. This byzantine infrastructure remains to this day and is known as the dual banking system. Among all nations in the world, only the United States has such a fragmentary, overlapping and inefficient system — a direct relic of the conflict between federal and state power over maintenance of the slave-based economy of the South.

Both state regulators and the O.C.C., one of the largest federal regulators, are funded by fees from the banks they regulate. Moreover, banks are effectively able to choose regulators — either federal or state ones, depending on their charter. They can even change regulators if they become unsatisfied with the one they've chosen. Consumer-protection laws, interest-rate caps and basic-soundness regulations have often been rendered ineffectual in the process — and deregulation of this sort tends to lead to crisis.

In the mid-2000s, when subprime lenders started appearing in certain low-income neighborhoods, many of them majority black and Latino, several state banking regulators took note. In Michigan, the state insurance regulator tried to enforce its consumer-protection laws on Wachovia Mortgage, a subsidiary of Wachovia Bank. In response, Wachovia's national regulator, the O.C.C., stepped in, claiming that banks with a national charter did not have to comply with state law. The Supreme Court agreed with the O.C.C., and Wachovia continued to engage in risky subprime activity.

Eventually loans like those blew up the banking system and the investments of many

Americans — especially the most vulnerable. Black communities lost 53 percent of their wealth because of the crisis, a loss that a former congressman, Brad Miller, said “has almost been an extinction event.”

SIDE BAR ENDS

Enslaved workers felled trees by ax, burned the underbrush and leveled the earth for planting. “Whole forests were literally dragged out by the roots,” John Parker, an enslaved worker, remembered. A lush, twisted mass of vegetation was replaced by a single crop. An origin of American money exerting its will on the earth, spoiling the environment for profit, is found in the cotton plantation. Floods became bigger and more common. The lack of biodiversity exhausted the soil and, to quote the historian Walter Johnson, “rendered one of the richest agricultural regions of the earth dependent on upriver trade for food.”

As slave labor camps spread throughout the South, production surged. By 1831, the country was delivering nearly half the world’s raw cotton crop, with 350 million pounds picked that year. Just four years later, it harvested 500 million pounds. Southern white elites grew rich, as did their counterparts in the North, who erected textile mills to form, in the words of the Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner, an “unhallowed alliance between the lords of the lash and the lords of the loom.” The large-scale cultivation of cotton hastened the invention of the factory, an institution that propelled the Industrial Revolution and changed the course of history. In 1810, there were 87,000 cotton spindles in America. Fifty years later, there were five million. Slavery, wrote one of its defenders in *De Bow’s Review*, a widely read agricultural magazine, was the “nursing mother of the prosperity of the North.” Cotton planters, millers and consumers were fashioning a new economy, one that was global in scope and required the movement of capital, labor and products across long distances. In other words, they were fashioning a capitalist economy. “The beating heart of this new system,” Beckert writes, “was slavery.”

Perhaps you’re reading this at work, maybe at a multinational corporation that runs like a soft-purring engine. You report to someone, and someone reports to you. Everything is tracked, recorded and analyzed, via vertical reporting systems, double-entry record-keeping and precise quantification. Data seems to hold sway over every operation. It feels like a cutting-edge approach to management, but many of these techniques that we now take for granted were developed by and for large plantations.

When an accountant depreciates an asset to save on taxes or when a midlevel manager spends an afternoon filling in rows and columns on an Excel spreadsheet, they are repeating business procedures whose roots twist back to slave-labor camps. And yet, despite this, “slavery plays almost no role in histories of management,” notes the historian Caitlin Rosenthal in her book *Accounting for Slavery*. Since the 1977 publication of Alfred Chandler’s classic study, *The Visible Hand*, historians have tended to connect the development of modern business practices to the 19th-century railroad industry, viewing plantation slavery as precapitalistic, even primitive. It’s a more comforting origin story, one

that protects the idea that America's economic ascendancy developed not because of, but in spite of, millions of black people toiling on plantations. But management techniques used by 19th-century corporations were implemented during the previous century by plantation owners.

Planters aggressively expanded their operations to capitalize on economies of scale inherent to cotton growing, buying more enslaved workers, investing in large gins and presses and experimenting with different seed varieties. To do so, they developed complicated workplace hierarchies that combined a central office, made up of owners and lawyers in charge of capital allocation and long-term strategy, with several divisional units, responsible for different operations. Rosenthal writes of one plantation where the owner supervised a top lawyer, who supervised another lawyer, who supervised an overseer, who supervised three bookkeepers, who supervised 16 enslaved head drivers and specialists (like bricklayers), who supervised hundreds of enslaved workers. Everyone was accountable to someone else, and plantations pumped out not just cotton bales but volumes of data about how each bale was produced. This organizational form was very advanced for its time, displaying a level of hierarchal complexity equaled only by large government structures, like that of the British Royal Navy.

Like today's titans of industry, planters understood that their profits climbed when they extracted maximum effort out of each worker. So they paid close attention to inputs and outputs by developing precise systems of record-keeping. Meticulous bookkeepers and overseers were just as important to the productivity of a slave-labor camp as field hands. Plantation entrepreneurs developed spreadsheets, like Thomas Affleck's "Plantation Record and Account Book," which ran into eight editions circulated until the Civil War. Affleck's book was a one-stop-shop accounting manual, complete with rows and columns that tracked per-worker productivity. This book "was really at the cutting edge of the informational technologies available to businesses during this period," Rosenthal told me. "I have never found anything remotely as complex as Affleck's book for free labor." Enslavers used the book to determine end-of-the-year balances, tallying expenses and revenues and noting the causes of their biggest gains and losses. They quantified capital costs on their land, tools and enslaved workforces, applying Affleck's recommended interest rate. Perhaps most remarkable, they also developed ways to calculate depreciation, a breakthrough in modern management procedures, by assessing the market value of enslaved workers over their life spans. Values generally peaked between the prime ages of 20 and 40 but were individually adjusted up or down based on sex, strength and temperament: people reduced to data points.

This level of data analysis also allowed planters to anticipate rebellion. Tools were accounted for on a regular basis to make sure a large number of axes or other potential weapons didn't suddenly go missing. "Never allow any slave to lock or unlock any door," advised a Virginia enslaver in 1847. In this way, new bookkeeping techniques developed to

maximize returns also helped to ensure that violence flowed in one direction, allowing a minority of whites to control a much larger group of enslaved black people. American planters never forgot what happened in Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) in 1791, when enslaved workers took up arms and revolted. In fact, many white enslavers overthrown during the Haitian Revolution relocated to the United States and started over.

Overseers recorded each enslaved worker's yield. Accountings took place not only after nightfall, when cotton baskets were weighed, but throughout the workday. In the words of a North Carolina planter, enslaved workers were to be "followed up from day break until dark." Having hands line-pick in rows sometimes longer than five football fields allowed overseers to spot anyone lagging behind. The uniform layout of the land had a logic; a logic designed to dominate. Faster workers were placed at the head of the line, which encouraged those who followed to match the captain's pace. When enslaved workers grew ill or old, or became pregnant, they were assigned to lighter tasks. One enslaver established a "sucklers gang" for nursing mothers, as well as a "measles gang," which at once quarantined those struck by the virus and ensured that they did their part to contribute to the productivity machine. Bodies and tasks were aligned with rigorous exactitude. In trade magazines, owners swapped advice about the minutiae of planting, including slave diets and clothing as well as the kind of tone a master should use. In 1846, one Alabama planter advised his fellow enslavers to always give orders "in a mild tone, and try to leave the impression on the mind of the negro that what you say is the result of reflection." The devil (and his profits) were in the details.

The uncompromising pursuit of measurement and scientific accounting displayed in slave plantations predates industrialism. Northern factories would not begin adopting these techniques until decades after the Emancipation Proclamation. As the large slave-labor camps grew increasingly efficient, enslaved black people became America's first modern workers, their productivity increasing at an astonishing pace. During the 60 years leading up to the Civil War, the daily amount of cotton picked per enslaved worker increased 2.3 percent a year. That means that in 1862, the average enslaved fieldworker picked not 25 percent or 50 percent as much but 400 percent as much cotton than his or her counterpart did in 1801.

FIAT SIDES BAR BEGINS

Fiat Currency and the Civil War

By Mehrsa Baradaran

The Constitution is riddled with compromises made between the North and South over the issue of slavery — the Electoral College, the three-fifths clause — but paper currency was too contentious an issue for the framers, so it was left out entirely. Thomas Jefferson, like many Southerners, believed that a national currency would make the federal government too powerful and would also favor the Northern trade-based economy over the plantation economy. So, for much of its first century, the United States was without a national bank or a uniform currency, leaving its economy prone to crisis, bank runs and instability.

At the height of the war, Lincoln understood that he could not feed the troops without more money, so he issued a national currency, backed by the full faith and credit of the United States Treasury — but not by gold. (These bills were known derisively as “greenbacks,” a word that has lived on.) The South had a patchwork currency that was backed by the holdings of private banks — the same banks that helped finance the entire Southern economy, from the plantations to the people enslaved on them. Some Confederate bills even had depictions of enslaved people on their backs.

In a sense, the war over slavery was also a war over the future of the economy and the essentiality of value. By issuing fiat currency, Lincoln bet the future on the elasticity of value. This was the United States’ first formal experiment with fiat money, and it was a resounding success. The currency was accepted by national and international creditors — such as private creditors from London, Amsterdam and Paris — and funded the feeding and provisioning of Union troops. In turn, the success of the Union Army fortified the new currency. Lincoln assured critics that the move would be temporary, but leaders who followed him eventually made it permanent — first Franklin Roosevelt during the Great Depression and then, formally, Richard Nixon in 1971.

FIAT SIDEBAR ENDS

Today modern technology has facilitated unremitting workplace supervision, particularly in the service sector. Companies have developed software that records workers’ keystrokes and mouse clicks, along with randomly capturing screenshots multiple times a day. Modern-day workers are subjected to a wide variety of surveillance strategies, from drug tests and closed-circuit video monitoring to tracking apps and even devices that sense heat and motion. A 2006 survey found that more than a third of companies with work forces of 1,000 or more had staff members who read through employees’ outbound emails. The technology that accompanies this workplace supervision can make it feel futuristic. But it’s only the technology that’s new. The core impulse behind that technology pervaded plantations, which sought innermost control over the bodies of their enslaved work force.

The cotton plantation was America’s first big business, and the nation’s first corporate Big Brother was the overseer. And behind every cold calculation, every rational fine-tuning of the system, violence lurked. Plantation owners used a combination of incentives and punishments to squeeze as much as possible out of enslaved workers. Some beaten workers passed out from the pain and woke up vomiting. Some “danced” or “trembled” with every hit. An 1829 first-person account from Alabama recorded an overseer’s shoving the faces of women he thought had picked too slow into their cotton baskets and opening up their backs. To the historian Edward Baptist, before the Civil War, Americans “lived in an economy whose bottom gear was torture.”

There is some comfort, I think, in attributing the sheer brutality of slavery to dumb racism. We imagine pain being inflicted somewhat at random, doled out by the stereotypical white overseer, free but poor. But a good many overseers weren’t allowed to whip at will.

Punishments were authorized by the higher-ups. It was not so much the rage of the poor white Southerner but the greed of the rich white planter that drove the lash. The violence was neither arbitrary nor gratuitous. It was rational, capitalistic, all part of the plantation's design. "Each individual having a stated number of pounds of cotton to pick," a formerly enslaved worker, Henry Watson, wrote in 1848, "the deficit of which was made up by as many lashes being applied to the poor slave's back." Because overseers closely monitored enslaved workers' picking abilities, they assigned each worker a unique quota. Falling short of that quota could get you beaten, but overshooting your target could bring misery the next day, because the master might respond by raising your picking rate.

Profits from heightened productivity were harnessed through the anguish of the enslaved. This was why the fastest cotton pickers were often whipped the most. It was why punishments rose and fell with global market fluctuations. Speaking of cotton in 1854, the fugitive slave John Brown remembered, "When the price rises in the English market, the poor slaves immediately feel the effects, for they are harder driven, and the whip is kept more constantly going." Unrestrained capitalism holds no monopoly on violence, but in making possible the pursuit of near limitless personal fortunes, often at someone else's expense, it does put a cash value on our moral commitments.

Slavery did supplement white workers with what W.E.B. Du Bois called a "public and psychological wage," which allowed them to roam freely and feel a sense of entitlement. But this, too, served the interests of money. Slavery pulled down all workers' wages. Both in the cities and countryside, employers had access to a large and flexible labor pool made up of enslaved and free people. Just as in today's gig economy, day laborers during slavery's reign often lived under conditions of scarcity and uncertainty, and jobs meant to be worked for a few months were worked for lifetimes. Labor power had little chance when the bosses could choose between buying people, renting them, contracting indentured servants, taking on apprentices or hiring children and prisoners.

This not only created a starkly uneven playing field, dividing workers from themselves; it also made "all nonslavery appear as freedom," as the economic historian Stanley Engerman has written. Witnessing the horrors of slavery drilled into poor white workers that things could be worse. So they generally accepted their lot, and American freedom became broadly defined as the opposite of bondage. It was a freedom that understood what it was against but not what it was for; a malnourished and mean kind of freedom that kept you out of chains but did not provide bread or shelter. It was a freedom far too easily pleased.

In recent decades, America has experienced the financialization of its economy. In 1980, Congress repealed regulations that had been in place since the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act, allowing banks to merge and charge their customers higher interest rates. Since then, increasingly profits have accrued not by trading and producing goods and services but through financial instruments. Between 1980 and 2008, more than \$6.6 trillion was transferred to financial firms. After witnessing the successes and excesses of Wall Street,

even nonfinancial companies began finding ways to make money from financial products and activities. Ever wonder why every major retail store, hotel chain and airline wants to sell you a credit card? This financial turn has trickled down into our everyday lives: It's there in our pensions, home mortgages, lines of credit and college-savings portfolios. Americans with some means now act like "enterprising subjects," in the words of the political scientist Robert Aitken.

As it's usually narrated, the story of the ascendancy of American finance tends to begin in 1980, with the gutting of Glass-Steagall, or in 1944 with Bretton Woods, or perhaps in the reckless speculation of the 1920s. But in reality, the story begins during slavery.

Consider, for example, one of the most popular mainstream financial instruments: the mortgage. Enslaved people were used as collateral for mortgages centuries before the home mortgage became the defining characteristic of middle America. In colonial times, when land was not worth much and banks didn't exist, most lending was based on human property. In the early 1700s, slaves were the dominant collateral in South Carolina. Many Americans were first exposed to the concept of a mortgage by trafficking in enslaved people, not real estate, and "the extension of mortgages to slave property helped fuel the development of American (and global) capitalism," the historian Joshua Rothman told me.

COTTON SIDE BAR BEGINS

Cotton and the Global Market

By Mehrsa Baradaran

Cotton produced under slavery created a worldwide market that brought together the Old World and the New: the industrial textile mills of the Northern states and England, on the one hand, and the cotton plantations of the American South on the other. Textile mills in industrial centers like Lancashire, England, purchased a majority of cotton exports, which created worldwide trade hubs in London and New York where merchants could trade in, invest in, insure and speculate on the cotton—commodity market. Though trade in other commodities existed, it was cotton (and the earlier trade in slave-produced sugar from the Caribbean) that accelerated worldwide commercial markets in the 19th century, creating demand for innovative contracts, novel financial products and modern forms of insurance and credit.

Like all agricultural goods, cotton is prone to fluctuations in quality depending on crop type, location and environmental conditions. Treating it as a commodity led to unique problems: How would damages be calculated if the wrong crop was sent? How would you assure that there was no misunderstanding between two parties on time of delivery? Legal concepts we still have to this day, like "mutual mistake" (the notion that contracts can be voided if both parties relied on a mistaken assumption), were developed to deal with these issues. Textile merchants needed to purchase cotton in advance of their own production, which meant that farmers needed a way to sell goods they had not yet grown; this led to the invention of futures contracts and, arguably, the commodities markets still in use today.

From the first decades of the 1800s, during the height of the trans-Atlantic cotton trade, the sheer size of the market and the escalating number of disputes between counterparties was such that courts and lawyers began to articulate and codify the common-law standards regarding contracts. This allowed investors and traders to mitigate their risk through contractual arrangement, which smoothed the flow of goods and money. Today law students still study some of these pivotal cases as they learn doctrines like foreseeability, mutual mistake and damages.

COTTON SIDE BAR ENDS

Or consider a Wall Street financial instrument as modern-sounding as collateralized debt obligations (C.D.O.s), those ticking time bombs backed by inflated home prices in the 2000s. C.D.O.s were the grandchildren of mortgage-backed securities based on the inflated value of enslaved people sold in the 1820s and 1830s. Each product created massive fortunes for the few before blowing up the economy.

Enslavers were not the first ones to securitize assets and debts in America. The land companies that thrived during the late 1700s relied on this technique, for instance. But enslavers did make use of securities to such an enormous degree for their time, exposing stakeholders throughout the Western world to enough risk to compromise the world economy, that the historian Edward Baptist told me that this can be viewed as “a new moment in international capitalism, where you are seeing the development of a globalized financial market.” The novel thing about the 2008 foreclosure crisis was not the concept of foreclosing on a homeowner but foreclosing on millions of them. Similarly, what was new about securitizing enslaved people in the first half of the 19th century was not the concept of securitization itself but the crazed level of rash speculation on cotton that selling slave debt promoted.

As America’s cotton sector expanded, the value of enslaved workers soared. Between 1804 and 1860, the average price of men ages 21 to 38 sold in New Orleans grew to \$1,200 from roughly \$450. Because they couldn’t expand their cotton empires without more enslaved workers, ambitious planters needed to find a way to raise enough capital to purchase more hands. Enter the banks. The Second Bank of the United States, chartered in 1816, began investing heavily in cotton. In the early 1830s, the slaveholding Southwestern states took almost half the bank’s business. Around the same time, state-chartered banks began multiplying to such a degree that one historian called it an “orgy of bank-creation.”

When seeking loans, planters used enslaved people as collateral. Thomas Jefferson mortgaged 150 of his enslaved workers to build Monticello. People could be sold much more easily than land, and in multiple Southern states, more than eight in 10 mortgage-secured loans used enslaved people as full or partial collateral. As the historian Bonnie Martin has written, “slave owners worked their slaves financially, as well as physically from

colonial days until emancipation" by mortgaging people to buy more people. Access to credit grew faster than Mississippi kudzu, leading one 1836 observer to remark that in cotton country "money, or what passed for money, was the only cheap thing to be had."

Planters took on immense amounts of debt to finance their operations. Why wouldn't they? The math worked out. A cotton plantation in the first decade of the 19th century could leverage their enslaved workers at 8 percent interest and record a return three times that. So leverage they did, sometimes volunteering the same enslaved workers for multiple mortgages. Banks lent with little restraint. By 1833, Mississippi banks had issued 20 times as much paper money as they had gold in their coffers. In several Southern counties, slave mortgages injected more capital into the economy than sales from the crops harvested by enslaved workers.

Global financial markets got in on the action. When Thomas Jefferson mortgaged his enslaved workers, it was a Dutch firm that put up the money. The Louisiana Purchase, which opened millions of acres to cotton production, was financed by Baring Brothers, the well-heeled British commercial bank. A majority of credit powering the American slave economy came from the London money market. Years after abolishing the African slave trade in 1807, Britain, and much of Europe along with it, was bankrolling slavery in the United States. To raise capital, state-chartered banks pooled debt generated by slave mortgages and repackaged it as bonds promising investors annual interest. During slavery's boom time, banks did swift business in bonds, finding buyers in Hamburg and Amsterdam, in Boston and Philadelphia.

Some historians have claimed that the British abolition of the slave trade was a turning point in modernity, marked by the development of a new kind of moral consciousness when people began considering the suffering of others thousands of miles away. But perhaps all that changed was a growing need to scrub the blood of enslaved workers off American dollars, British pounds and French francs, a need that Western financial markets fast found a way to satisfy through the global trade in bank bonds. Here was a means to profit from slavery without getting your hands dirty. In fact, many investors may not have realized that their money was being used to buy and exploit people, just as many of us who are vested in multinational textile companies today are unaware that our money subsidizes a business that continues to rely on forced labor in countries like Uzbekistan and China and child workers in countries like India and Brazil. Call it irony, coincidence or maybe cause — historians haven't settled the matter — but avenues to profit indirectly from slavery grew in popularity as the institution of slavery itself grew more unpopular. "I think they go together," the historian Calvin Schermerhorn told me. "We care about fellow members of humanity, but what do we do when we want returns on an investment that depends on their bound labor?" he said. "Yes, there is a higher consciousness. But then it comes down to: Where do you get your cotton from?"

Banks issued tens of millions of dollars in loans on the assumption that rising cotton prices

would go on forever. Speculation reached a fever pitch in the 1830s, as businessmen, planters and lawyers convinced themselves that they could amass real treasure by joining in a risky game that everyone seemed to be playing. If planters thought themselves invincible, able to bend the laws of finance to their will, it was most likely because they had been granted authority to bend the laws of nature to their will, to do with the land and the people who worked it as they pleased. Du Bois wrote: "The mere fact that a man could be, under the law, the actual master of the mind and body of human beings had to have disastrous effects. It tended to inflate the ego of most planters beyond all reason; they became arrogant, strutting, quarrelsome kinglets." What are the laws of economics to those exercising godlike power over an entire people?

We know how these stories end. The American South rashly overproduced cotton thanks to an abundance of cheap land, labor and credit, consumer demand couldn't keep up with supply, and prices fell. The value of cotton started to drop as early as 1834 before plunging like a bird winged in midflight, setting off the Panic of 1837. Investors and creditors called in their debts, but plantation owners were underwater. Mississippi planters owed the banks in New Orleans \$33 million in a year their crops yielded only \$10 million in revenue. They couldn't simply liquidate their assets to raise the money. When the price of cotton tumbled, it pulled down the value of enslaved workers and land along with it. People bought for \$2,000 were now selling for \$60. Today, we would say the planters' debt was "toxic."

WALL ST. SIDE BAR
How Slavery Made Wall Street

By Tiya Miles

While "Main Street" might be anywhere and everywhere, as the historian Joshua Freeman points out, "Wall Street" has only ever been one specific place on the map. New York has been a principal center of American commerce dating back to the colonial period — a centrality founded on the labor extracted from thousands of indigenous American and African slaves.

Desperate for hands to build towns, work wharves, tend farms and keep households, colonists across the American Northeast — Puritans in Massachusetts Bay, Dutch settlers in New Netherland and Quakers in Pennsylvania — availed themselves of slave labor. Native Americans captured in colonial wars in New England were forced to work, and African people were imported in greater and greater numbers. New York City soon surpassed other slaving towns of the Northeast in scale as well as impact.

Founded by the Dutch as New Amsterdam in 1625, what would become the City of New York first imported 11 African men in 1626. The Dutch West India Company owned these men and their families, directing their labors to common enterprises like land clearing and road construction. After the English Duke of York acquired authority over the colony and

changed its name, slavery grew harsher and more comprehensive. As the historian Leslie Harris has written, 40 percent of New York households held enslaved people in the early 1700s.

New Amsterdam's and New York's enslaved put in place much of the local infrastructure, including Broad Way and the Bowery roads, Governors Island, and the first municipal buildings and churches. The unfree population in New York was not small, and their experience of exploitation was not brief. In 1991, construction workers uncovered an extensive 18th-century African burial ground in Lower Manhattan, the final resting place of approximately 20,000 people.

And New York City's investment in slavery expanded in the 19th century. In 1799 the state of New York passed the first of a series of laws that would gradually abolish slavery over the coming decades, but the investors and financiers of the state's primary metropolis doubled down on the business of slavery. New Yorkers invested heavily in the growth of Southern plantations, catching the wave of the first cotton boom. Southern planters who wanted to buy more land and black people borrowed funds from New York bankers and protected the value of bought bodies with policies from New York insurance companies. New York factories produced the agricultural tools forced into Southern slaves' hands and the rough fabric called "Negro Cloth" worn on their backs. Ships originating in New York docked in the port of New Orleans to service the trade in domestic and (by then, illegal) international slaves. As the historian David Quigley has demonstrated, New York City's phenomenal economic consolidation came as a result of its dominance in the Southern cotton trade, facilitated by the construction of the Erie Canal. It was in this moment — the early decades of the 1800s — that New York City gained its status as a financial behemoth through shipping raw cotton to Europe and bankrolling the boom industry that slavery made.

In 1711, New York City officials decreed that "all Negro and Indian slaves that are let out to hire ... be hired at the Market house at the Wall Street Slip." It is uncanny, but perhaps predictable, that the original wall for which Wall Street is named was built by the enslaved at a site that served as the city's first organized slave auction. The capital profits and financial wagers of Manhattan, the United States and the world still flow through this place where black and red people were traded and where the wealth of a region was built on slavery.

— — — — WALL ST. SIDE BAR ENDS — —

Because enslavers couldn't repay their loans, the banks couldn't make interest payments on their bonds. Shouts went up around the Western world, as investors began demanding that states raise taxes to keep their promises. After all, the bonds were backed by taxpayers. But after a swell of populist outrage, states decided not to squeeze the money out of every Southern family, coin by coin. But neither did they foreclose on defaulting plantation owners. If they tried, planters absconded to Texas (an independent republic at the time) with their treasure and enslaved work force. Furious bondholders mounted lawsuits and cashiers committed suicide, but the bankrupt states refused to pay their debts. Cotton slavery was too big to fail. The South chose to cut itself out of the global credit market, the

hand that had fed cotton expansion, rather than hold planters and their banks accountable for their negligence and avarice.

Even academic historians, who from their very first graduate course are taught to shun presentism and accept history on its own terms, haven't been able to resist drawing parallels between the Panic of 1837 and the 2008 financial crisis. All the ingredients are there: mystifying financial instruments that hide risk while connecting bankers, investors and families around the globe; fantastic profits amassed overnight; the normalization of speculation and breathless risk-taking; stacks of paper money printed on the myth that some institution (cotton, housing) is unshakable; considered and intentional exploitation of black people; and impunity for the profiteers when it all falls apart — the borrowers were bailed out after 1837, the banks after 2008.

During slavery, "Americans built a culture of speculation unique in its abandon," writes the historian Joshua Rothman in his 2012 book, "Flush Times and Fever Dreams." That culture would drive cotton production up to the Civil War, and it has been a defining characteristic of American capitalism ever since. It is the culture of acquiring wealth without work, growing at all costs and abusing the powerless. It is the culture that brought us the Panic of 1837, the stock-market crash of 1929 and the recession of 2008. It is the culture that has produced staggering inequality and undignified working conditions. If today America promotes a particular kind of low-road capitalism — a union-busting capitalism of poverty wages, gig jobs and normalized insecurity; a winner-take-all capitalism of stunning disparities not only permitting but awarding financial rule-bending; a racist capitalism that ignores the fact that slavery didn't just deny black freedom but built white fortunes, originating the black-white wealth gap that annually grows wider — one reason is that American capitalism was founded on the lowest road there is.

Matthew Desmond is a professor of sociology at Princeton University and a contributing writer for the magazine. He last wrote a feature about the benefits of a living wage. **Lyle Ashton Harris** is an artist who works in photography, collage and performance. He currently has works in two group exhibitions at the Guggenheim in New York. **Mehrsa Baradaran** is a professor at U.C. Irvine School of Law and author of "The Color of Money" and "How the Other Half Banks." **Tiya Miles** is a professor in the history department at Harvard and the author, most recently, of "The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits."

How False Beliefs in Physical Racial Difference Still Live in Medicine Today

nytimes.com

The excruciatingly painful medical experiments went on until his body was disfigured by a network of scars. John Brown, an enslaved man on a Baldwin County, Ga., plantation in the 1820s and '30s, was lent to a physician, Dr. Thomas Hamilton, who was obsessed with proving that physiological differences between black and white people existed. Hamilton used Brown to try to determine how deep black skin went, believing it was thicker than white skin. Brown, who eventually escaped to England, recorded his experiences in an autobiography, published in 1855 as "Slave Life in Georgia: A Narrative of the Life, Sufferings, and Escape of John Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Now in England." In Brown's words, Hamilton applied "blisters to my hands, legs and feet, which bear the scars to this day. He continued until he drew up the dark skin from between the upper and the under one. He used to blister me at intervals of about two weeks." This went on for nine months, Brown wrote, until "the Doctor's experiments had so reduced me that I was useless in the field."

Hamilton was a courtly Southern gentleman, a respected physician and a trustee of the Medical Academy of Georgia. And like many other doctors of the era in the South, he was also a wealthy plantation owner who tried to use science to prove that differences between black people and white people went beyond culture and were more than skin deep, insisting that black bodies were composed and functioned differently than white bodies. They believed that black people had large sex organs and small skulls — which translated to promiscuity and a lack of intelligence — and higher tolerance for heat, as well as immunity to some illnesses and susceptibility to others. These fallacies, presented as fact and legitimized in medical journals, bolstered society's view that enslaved people were fit for little outside forced labor and provided support for racist ideology and discriminatory public policies.

Over the centuries, the two most persistent physiological myths — that black people were impervious to pain and had weak lungs that could be strengthened through hard work — wormed their way into scientific consensus, and they remain rooted in modern-day medical education and practice. In the 1787 manual "A Treatise on Tropical Diseases; and on The Climate of the West-Indies," a British doctor, Benjamin Moseley, claimed that black people could bear surgical operations much more than white people, noting that "what would be the cause of insupportable pain to a white man, a Negro would almost disregard." To drive home his point, he added, "I have amputated the legs of many Negroes who have held the upper part of the limb themselves."

These misconceptions about pain tolerance, seized upon by pro-slavery advocates, also allowed the physician J. Marion Sims — long celebrated as the father of modern gynecology — to use black women as subjects in experiments that would be unconscionable today, practicing painful operations (at a time before anesthesia was in use) on enslaved women in Montgomery, Ala., between 1845 and 1849. In his autobiography, “The Story of My Life.” Sims described the agony the women suffered as he cut their genitals again and again in an attempt to perfect a surgical technique to repair vesico-vaginal fistula, which can be an extreme complication of childbirth.

Thomas Jefferson, in “Notes on the State of Virginia,” published around the same time as Moseley’s treatise, listed what he proposed were “the real distinctions which nature has made,” including a lack of lung capacity. In the years that followed, physicians and scientists embraced Jefferson’s unproven theories, none more aggressively than Samuel Cartwright, a physician and professor of “diseases of the Negro” at the University of Louisiana, now Tulane University. His widely circulated paper, “Report on the Diseases and Physical Peculiarities of the Negro Race,” published in the May 1851 issue of The New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal, cataloged supposed physical differences between whites and blacks, including the claim that black people had lower lung capacity. Cartwright, conveniently, saw forced labor as a way to “vitalize” the blood and correct the problem. Most outrageous, Cartwright maintained that enslaved people were prone to a “disease of the mind” called drapetomania, which caused them to run away from their enslavers. Willfully ignoring the inhumane conditions that drove desperate men and women to attempt escape, he insisted, without irony, that enslaved people contracted this ailment when their enslavers treated them as equals, and he prescribed “whipping the devil out of them” as a preventive measure.

Today Cartwright’s 1851 paper reads like satire, Hamilton’s supposedly scientific experiments appear simply sadistic and, last year, a statue commemorating Sims in New York’s Central Park was removed after prolonged protest that included women wearing blood-splattered gowns in memory of Anarcha, Betsey, Lucy and the other enslaved women he brutalized. And yet, more than 150 years after the end of slavery, fallacies of black immunity to pain and weakened lung function continue to show up in modern-day medical education and philosophy.

Even Cartwright’s footprint remains embedded in current medical practice. To validate his theory about lung inferiority in African-Americans, he became one of the first doctors in the United States to measure pulmonary function with an instrument called a spirometer. Using a device he designed himself, Cartwright calculated that “the deficiency in the Negro may be safely estimated at 20 percent.” Today most commercially available spirometers, used around the world to diagnose and monitor respiratory illness, have a “race correction” built into the software, which controls for the assumption that blacks have less lung capacity than whites. In her 2014 book, “Breathing Race Into the Machine: The Surprising Career of the

Spirometer from Plantation to Genetics,” Lundy Braun, a Brown University professor of medical science and Africana studies, notes that “race correction” is still taught to medical students and described in textbooks as scientific fact and standard practice.

Recent data also shows that present-day doctors fail to sufficiently treat the pain of black adults and children for many medical issues. A 2013 review of studies examining racial disparities in pain management published in The American Medical Association Journal of Ethics found that black and Hispanic people — from children with appendicitis to elders in hospice care — received inadequate pain management compared with white counterparts.

A 2016 survey of 222 white medical students and residents published in The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences showed that half of them endorsed at least one myth about physiological differences between black people and white people, including that black people’s nerve endings are less sensitive than white people’s. When asked to imagine how much pain white or black patients experienced in hypothetical situations, the medical students and residents insisted that black people felt less pain. This made the providers less likely to recommend appropriate treatment. A majority of these doctors to be also still believed the lie that Thomas Hamilton tortured John Brown to prove nearly two centuries ago: that black skin is thicker than white skin.

This disconnect allows scientists, doctors and other medical providers — and those training to fill their positions in the future — to ignore their own complicity in health care inequality and gloss over the internalized racism and both conscious and unconscious bias that drive them to go against their very oath to do no harm.

The centuries-old belief in racial differences in physiology has continued to mask the brutal effects of discrimination and structural inequities, instead placing blame on individuals and their communities for statistically poor health outcomes. Rather than conceptualizing race as a risk factor that predicts disease or disability because of a fixed susceptibility conceived on shaky grounds centuries ago, we would do better to understand race as a proxy for bias, disadvantage and ill treatment. The poor health outcomes of black people, the targets of discrimination over hundreds of years and numerous generations, may be a harbinger for the future health of an increasingly diverse and unequal America.

Linda Villarosa directs the journalism program at the City College of New York and is a contributing writer for the magazine. Her feature on black infant and maternal mortality was a finalist for a National Magazine Award.

Why Is Everyone Always Stealing Black Music?

nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/music-black-culture-appropriation.html

By Wesley Morris

August 14
2019

I've got a friend who's an incurable Pandora guy, and one Saturday while we were making dinner, he found a station called Yacht Rock. "A tongue-in-cheek name for the breezy sounds of late '70s/early '80s soft rock" is Pandora's definition, accompanied by an exhortation to "put on your Dockers, pull up a deck chair and relax." With a single exception, the passengers aboard the yacht were all dudes. With two exceptions, they were all white. But as the hours passed and dozens of songs accrued, the sound gravitated toward a familiar quality that I couldn't give language to but could practically taste: an earnest Christian yearning that would reach, for a moment, into Baptist rawness, into a known warmth. I had to laugh — not because as a category Yacht Rock is absurd, but because what I tasted in that absurdity was black.

I started putting each track under investigation. Which artists would saunter up to the racial border? And which could do their sauntering without violating it? I could hear degrees of blackness in the choir-loft certitude of Doobie Brothers-era Michael McDonald on "What a Fool Believes"; in the rubber-band soul of Steely Dan's "Do It Again"; in the malt-liquor misery of Ace's "How Long" and the toy-boat wistfulness of Little River Band's "Reminiscing."

Then Kenny Loggins's "This Is It" arrived and took things far beyond the line. "This Is It" was a hit in 1979 and has the requisite smoothness to keep the yacht rocking. But Loggins delivers the lyrics in a desperate stage whisper, like someone determined to make the kind of love that doesn't wake the baby. What bowls you over is the intensity of his yearning — teary in the verses, snarling during the chorus. He sounds as if he's baring it all yet begging to wring himself out even more.

Playing black-music detective that day, I laughed out of bafflement and embarrassment and exhilaration. It's the conflation of pride and chagrin I've always felt anytime a white person inhabits blackness with gusto. It's: *You have to hand it to her*. It's: *Go, white boy. Go, white boy. Go*. But it's also: *Here we go again*. The problem is rich. If blackness can draw all of this ornate literariness out of Steely Dan and all this psychotic origami out of Eminem; if it can make Teena Marie sing everything — "Square Biz," "Revolution," "Portuguese Love," "Lovergirl" — like she knows her way around a pack of Newports; if it can turn the chorus of Carly Simon's "You Belong to Me" into a gospel hymn; if it can animate the swagger in the sardonic vulnerabilities of Amy Winehouse; if it can surface as unexpectedly as it does in the angelic angst of a singer as seemingly green as Ben Platt; if it's the reason Nu Shooz's "I Can't Wait" remains the whitest jam at the blackest parties, then it's proof of how deeply it matters to the music of being alive in America, alive to America.

It's proof, too, that American music has been fated to thrive in an elaborate tangle almost from the beginning. Americans have made a political investment in a myth of racial separateness, the idea that art forms can be either "white" or "black" in character when aspects of many are at least both. The purity that separation struggles to maintain? This country's music is an advertisement for 400 years of the opposite: centuries of "amalgamation" and "miscegenation" as they long ago called it, of all manner of interracial collaboration conducted with dismaying ranges of consent.

"White," "Western," "classical" music is the overarching basis for lots of American pop songs. Chromatic-chord harmony, clean timbre of voice and instrument: These are the ingredients for some of the hugely singable harmonies of the Beatles, the Eagles, Simon and Fleetwood Mac, something choral, "pure," largely ungrained. Black music is a completely different story. It brims with call and response, layers of syncopation and this rougher element called "noise," unique sounds that arise from the particular hue and timbre of an instrument — Little Richard's woos and knuckled keyboard zooms. The dusky heat of Miles Davis's trumpeting. Patti LaBelle's emotional police siren. DMX's scorched-earth bark. The visceral stank of Etta James, Aretha Franklin, live-in-concert Whitney Houston and Prince on electric guitar.

But there's something even more fundamental, too. My friend Delvyn Case, a musician who teaches at Wheaton College, explained in an email that improvisation is one of the most crucial elements in what we think of as black music: "The raising of individual creativity/expression to the highest place within the aesthetic world of a song." Without improvisation, a listener is seduced into the composition of the song itself and not the distorting or deviating elements that noise creates. Particular to black American music is the architecture to create a means by which singers and musicians can be completely free, free in the only way that would have been possible on a plantation: through art, through music — music no one "composed" (because enslaved people were denied literacy), music born of feeling, of play, of exhaustion, of hope.

What you're hearing in black music is a miracle of sound, an experience that can really happen only once — not just melisma, glissandi, the rasp of a sax, breakbeats or sampling but the mood or inspiration from which those moments arise. The attempt to rerecord it seems, if you think about it, like a fool's errand. You're not capturing the arrangement of notes, per se. You're catching the spirit.

And the spirit travels from host to host, racially indiscriminate about where it settles, selective only about who can withstand being possessed by it. The rockin' backwoods blues so bewitched Elvis Presley that he believed he'd been called by blackness. Chuck Berry sculpted rock 'n' roll with uproarious guitar riffs and lascivious winks at whiteness. Mick Jagger and Robert Plant and Steve Winwood and Janis Joplin and the Beatles jumped, jived and wailed the black blues. Tina Turner wrested it all back, tripling the octane in some of

their songs. Since the 1830s, the historian Ann Douglas writes in "Terrible Honesty," her history of popular culture in the 1920s, "American entertainment, whatever the state of American society, has always been integrated, if only by theft and parody." What we've been dealing with ever since is more than a catchall word like "appropriation" can approximate. The truth is more bounteous and more spiritual than that, more confused. That confusion is the DNA of the American sound.

It's in the wink-wink costume funk of Beck's "Midnite Vultures" from 1999, an album whose kinky nonsense deprecations circle back to the popular culture of 150 years earlier. It's in the dead-serious, nostalgic dance-floor schmaltz of Bruno Mars. It's in what we once called "blue-eyed soul," a term I've never known what to do with, because its most convincing practitioners — the Bee-Gees, Michael McDonald, Hall & Oates, Simply Red, George Michael, Taylor Dayne, Lisa Stansfield, Adele — never winked at black people, so black people rarely batted an eyelash. Flaws and all, these are homeowners as opposed to renters. No matter what, though, a kind of gentrification tends to set in, underscoring that black people have often been rendered unnecessary to attempt blackness. Take Billboard's Top 10 songs of 2013: It's mostly nonblack artists strongly identified with black music, for real and for kicks: Robin Thicke, Miley Cyrus, Justin Timberlake, Macklemore and Ryan Lewis, the dude who made "The Harlem Shake."

Sometimes all the inexorable mixing leaves me longing for something with roots that no one can rip all the way out. This is to say that when we're talking about black music, we're talking about horns, drums, keyboards and guitars doing the unthinkable together. We're also talking about what the borrowers and collaborators don't want to or can't lift — centuries of weight, of atrocity we've never sufficiently worked through, the blackness you know is beyond theft because it's too real, too rich, too heavy to steal.

Blackness was on the move before my ancestors were legally free to be. It was on the move before my ancestors even knew what they had. It was on the move because white people were moving it. And the white person most frequently identified as its prime mover is Thomas Dartmouth Rice, a New Yorker who performed as T.D. Rice and, in acclaim, was lusted after as "Daddy" Rice, "the negro *par excellence*." Rice was a minstrel, which by the 1830s, when his stardom was at its most refulgent, meant he painted his face with burned cork to approximate those of the enslaved black people he was imitating.

In 1830, Rice was a nobody actor in his early 20s, touring with a theater company in Cincinnati (or Louisville; historians don't know for sure), when, the story goes, he saw a decrepit, possibly disfigured old black man singing while grooming a horse on the property of a white man whose last name was Crow. On went the light bulb. Rice took in the tune and the movements but failed, it seems, to take down the old man's name. So in his song based on the horse groomer, he renamed him: "Weel about and turn about jus so/Ebery time I weel about, I jump Jim Crow." And just like that, Rice had invented the fellow who would become the mascot for two centuries of legalized racism.

That night, Rice made himself up to look like the old black man — or something like him, because Rice's get-up most likely concocted skin blacker than any actual black person's and a gibberish dialect meant to imply black speech. Rice had turned the old man's melody and hobbled movements into a song-and-dance routine that no white audience had ever experienced before. What they saw caused a permanent sensation. He reportedly won 20 encores.

Rice repeated the act again, night after night, for audiences so profoundly rocked that he was frequently mobbed *during* performances. Across the Ohio River, not an arduous distance from all that adulation, was Boone County, Ky., whose population would have been largely enslaved Africans. As they were being worked, sometimes to death, white people, desperate with anticipation, were paying to see them depicted at play.

Other performers came and conquered, particularly the Virginia Minstrels, who exploded in 1843, burned brightly then burned out after only months. In their wake, P.T. Barnum made a habit of booking other troupes for his American Museum; when he was short on performers, he blacked up himself. By the 1840s, minstrel acts were taking over concert halls, doing wildly clamored-for residencies in Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

A blackface minstrel would sing, dance, play music, give speeches and cut up for white audiences, almost exclusively in the North, at least initially. Blackface was used for mock operas and political monologues (they called them stump speeches), skits, gender parodies and dances. Before the minstrel show gave it a reliable home, blackface was the entertainment between acts of conventional plays. Its stars were the Elvis, the Beatles, the 'NSync of the 19th century. The performers were beloved and so, especially, were their songs.

During minstrelsy's heyday, white songwriters like Stephen Foster wrote the tunes that minstrels sang, tunes we continue to sing. Edwin Pearce Christy's group the Christy Minstrels formed a band — banjo, fiddle, bone castanets, tambourine — that would lay the groundwork for American popular music, from bluegrass to Motown. Some of these instruments had come from Africa; on a plantation, the banjo's body would have been a desiccated gourd. In "Doo-Dah!" his book on Foster's work and life, Ken Emerson writes that the fiddle and banjo were paired for the melody, while the bones "chattered" and the tambourine "thumped and jingled a beat that is still heard 'round the world."

But the sounds made with these instruments could be only *imagined* as black, because the first wave of minstrels were Northerners who'd never been meaningfully South. They played Irish melodies and used Western choral harmonies, not the proto-gospel call-and-response music that would make life on a plantation that much more bearable. Black artists *were* on the scene, like the pioneer bandleader Frank Johnson and the borderline-mythical Old Corn Meal, who started as a street vendor and wound up the first black man to perform, as

himself, on a white New Orleans stage. His stuff was copied by George Nichols, who took up blackface after a start in plain-old clowning. Yet as often as not, blackface minstrelsy tethered black people and black life to white musical structures, like the polka, which was having a moment in 1848. The mixing was already well underway: Europe plus slavery plus the circus, times harmony, comedy and drama, equals Americana.

And the muses for so many of the songs were enslaved Americans, people the songwriters had never met, whose enslavement they rarely opposed and instead sentimentalized. Foster's minstrel-show staple "Old Uncle Ned," for instance, warmly if disrespectfully eulogizes the enslaved the way you might a salaried worker or an uncle:

Den lay down de shubble and de hoe,
Hang up de fiddle and de bow:
No more hard work for poor Old Ned —
He's gone whar de good Niggas go,
No more hard work for poor Old Ned —
He's gone whar de good Niggas go.

Such an affectionate showcase for poor old (enslaved, soon-to-be-dead) Uncle Ned was as essential as "air," in the white critic Bayard Taylor's 1850 assessment: songs like this were the "true expressions of the more popular side of the national character," a force that follows "the American in all its emigrations, colonizations and conquests, as certainly as the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving Day." He's not wrong. Minstrelsy's peak stretched from the 1840s to the 1870s, years when the country was as its most violently and legislatively ambivalent about slavery and Negroes; years that included the Civil War and Reconstruction, the ferocious rhetorical ascent of Frederick Douglass, John Brown's botched instigation of a black insurrection at Harpers Ferry and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln.

Minstrelsy's ascent also coincided with the publication, in 1852, of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," a polarizing landmark that minstrels adapted for the stage, arguing for and, in simply remaining faithful to Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, against slavery. These adaptations, known as U.T.C.s, took over the art form until the end of the Civil War. Perhaps minstrelsy's popularity could be (generously) read as the urge to escape a reckoning. But a good time predicated upon the presentation of other humans as stupid, docile, dangerous with lust and enamored of their bondage? It was an escape into slavery's fun house.

What blackface minstrelsy gave the country during this period was an entertainment of skill, ribaldry and polemics. But it also lent racism a stage upon which existential fear could become jubilation, contempt could become fantasy. Paradoxically, its dehumanizing bent let white audiences feel more human. They could experience loathing as desire, contempt as adoration, repulsion as lust. They could weep for overworked Uncle Ned as surely as they could ignore his lashed back or his body as it swung from a tree.

But where did this leave a black performer? If blackface was the country's cultural juggernaut, who would pay Negroes money to perform as themselves? When they were hired, it was only in a pinch. Once, P.T. Barnum needed a replacement for John Diamond, his star white minstrel. In a New York City dance hall, Barnum found a boy, who, it was reported at the time, could outdo Diamond (and Diamond was *good*). The boy, of course, was genuinely black. And his being actually black would have rendered him an outrageous blight on a white consumer's narrow presumptions. As Thomas Low Nichols would write in his 1864 compendium, "Forty Years of American Life," "There was not an audience in America that would not have resented, in a very energetic fashion, the insult of being asked to look at the dancing of a real negro." So Barnum "greased the little 'nigger's' face and rubbed it over with a new blacking of burned cork, painted his thick lips vermilion, put on a woolly wig over his tight curled locks and brought him out as 'the champion nigger-dancer of the world.'" This child might have been William Henry Lane, whose stage name was Juba. And, as Juba, Lane was persuasive enough that Barnum could pass him off as a white person in blackface. He ceased being a real black boy in order to become Barnum's minstrel Pinocchio.

After the Civil War, black performers had taken up minstrelsy, too, corking themselves, for both white and black audiences — with a straight face or a wink, depending on who was looking. Black troupes invented important new dances with blue-ribbon names (the buck-and-wing, the Virginia essence, the stop-time). But these were unhappy innovations. Custom obligated black performers to fulfill an audience's expectations, expectations that white performers had established. A black minstrel was impersonating the impersonation of himself. Think, for a moment, about the talent required to pull *that* off. According to Henry T. Sampson's book, "Blacks in Blackface," there were no sets or effects, so the black blackface minstrel show was "a developer of ability because the artist was placed on his own." How's that for being twice as good? Yet that no-frills excellence could curdle into an entirely other, utterly degrading double consciousness, one that predates, predicts and probably informs W.E.B. DuBois's more self-consciously dignified rendering.

American popular culture was doomed to cycles not only of questioned ownership, challenged authenticity, dubious propriety and legitimate cultural self-preservation but also to the prison of black respectability, which, with brutal irony, could itself entail a kind of appropriation. It meant comportment in a manner that seemed less black and more white. It meant the appearance of refinement and polish. It meant the cognitive dissonance of, say,

Nat King Cole's being very black and sounding — to white America, anyway, with his frictionless baritone and diction as crisp as a hospital corner — suitably white. He was perfect for radio, yet when he got a TV show of his own, it was abruptly canceled, his brown skin being too much for even the black and white of a 1955 television set. There was, perhaps, not a white audience in America, particularly in the South, that would not have resented, in a very energetic fashion, the insult of being asked to look at the majestic *singing* of a real Negro.

The modern conundrum of the black performer's seeming respectable, among black people, began, in part, as a problem of white blackface minstrels' disrespectful blackness. Frederick Douglass wrote that they were "the filthy scum of white society." It's that scum that's given us pause over everybody from Bert Williams and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson to Flavor Flav and Kanye West. *Is their blackness an act? Is the act under white control?* Just this year, Harold E. Doley Jr., an affluent black Republican in his 70s, was quoted in The Times lamenting West and his alignment with Donald Trump as a "bad and embarrassing minstrel show" that "served to only drive black people away from the G.O.P."

But it's from that scum that a robust, post-minstrel black American theater sprung as a new, black audience hungered for actual, uncorked black people. Without that scum, I'm not sure we get an event as shatteringly epochal as the reign of Motown Records. Motown was a full-scale integration of Western, classical orchestral ideas (strings, horns, woodwinds) with the instincts of both the black church (rhythm sections, gospel harmonies, hand claps) and juke joint Saturday nights (rhythm sections, guitars, vigor). Pure yet "noisy." Black men in Armani. Black women in ball gowns. Stables of black writers, producers and musicians. Backup singers solving social equations with geometric choreography. And just in time for the hegemony of the American teenager.

Even now it feels like an assault on the music made a hundred years before it. Motown specialized in love songs. But its stars, those songs and their performance of them were declarations of war on the insults of the past and present. The scratchy piccolo at the start of a Four Tops hit was, in its way, a raised fist. Respectability wasn't a problem with Motown; respectability was its point. How radically optimistic a feat of antiminstrelsy, for it's as glamorous a blackness as this country has ever mass-produced and devoured.

The proliferation of black music across the planet — the proliferation, in so many senses, of being black — constitutes a magnificent joke on American racism. It also confirms the attraction that someone like Rice had to that black man grooming the horse. But something about that desire warps and perverts its source, lampoons and cheapens it even in adoration. Loving black culture has never meant loving black people, too. Loving black culture risks loving the life out of it.

And yet doesn't that attraction make sense? This is the music of a people who have survived, who not only won't stop but also can't be stopped. Music by a people whose major innovations — jazz, funk, hip-hop — have been about progress, about the future, about getting as far away from nostalgia as time will allow, music that's thought deeply about the allure of outer space and robotics, music whose promise and possibility, whose rawness, humor and carnality call out to everybody — to other black people, to kids in working class England and middle-class Indonesia. If freedom's ringing, who on Earth wouldn't also want to rock the bell?

In 1845, J.K. Kennard, a critic for the newspaper *The Knickerbocker*, hyperventilated about the blackening of America. Except he was talking about blackface minstrels doing the blackening. Nonetheless, Kennard could see things for what they were:

“Who are our true rulers? The negro poets, to be sure! Do they not set the fashion, and give laws to the public taste? Let one of them, in the swamps of Carolina, compose a new song, and it no sooner reaches the ear of a white amateur, than it is written down, amended, (that is. almost spoilt.) printed, and then put upon a course of rapid dissemination, to cease only with the utmost bounds of Anglo-Saxondom, perhaps of the world.”

What a panicked clairvoyant! The fear of black culture — or “black culture” — was more than a fear of black people themselves. It was an anxiety over white obsolescence. Kennard's anxiety over black influence sounds as ambivalent as Lorde's, when, all the way from her native New Zealand, she tsk-ed rap culture's extravagance on “Royals,” her hit from 2013, while recognizing, both in the song's hip-hop production and its appetite for a particular sort of blackness, that maybe she's too far gone:

Every song's like gold teeth, Grey Goose, trippin' in the
bathroom
Bloodstains, ball gowns, trashin' the hotel room
We don't care, we're driving Cadillacs in our dreams
But everybody's like Cristal, Maybach, diamonds on your
timepiece
Jet planes, islands, tigers on a gold leash
We don't care, we aren't caught up in your love affair

Beneath Kennard's warnings must have lurked an awareness that his white brethren had already fallen under this spell of blackness, that nothing would stop its spread to teenage girls in 21st-century Auckland, that the men who "infest our promenades and our concert halls like a colony of beetles" (as a contemporary of Kennard's put it) weren't black people at all but white people just like him — beetles and, eventually, Beatles. Our first most original art form arose from our original sin, and some white people have always been worried that the primacy of black music would be a kind of karmic punishment for that sin. The work has been to free this country from paranoia's bondage, to truly embrace the amplitude of integration. I don't know how we're doing.

Last spring, "Old Town Road," a silly, drowsy ditty by the Atlanta songwriter Lil Nas X, was essentially banished from country radio. Lil Nas sounds black, as does the trap beat he's droning over. But there's definitely a twang to him that goes with the opening bars of faint banjo and Lil Nas's lil' cowboy fantasy. The song snowballed into a phenomenon. All kinds of people — cops, soldiers, dozens of dapper black promgoers — posted dances to it on YouTube and TikTok. Then a crazy thing happened. It charted — not just on Billboard's Hot 100 singles chart, either. In April, it showed up on both its Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart and its Hot Country Songs chart. A first. And, for now at least, a last.

The gatekeepers of country radio refused to play the song; they didn't explain why. Then, Billboard determined that the song failed to "embrace enough elements of today's country music to chart in its current version." This doesn't warrant translation, but let's be thorough, anyway: *The song is too black for certain white people.*

But by that point it had already captured the nation's imagination and tapped into the confused thrill of integrated culture. A black kid hadn't really merged white music with black, he'd just taken up the American birthright of cultural synthesis. The mixing feels historical. Here, for instance, in the song's sample of a Nine Inch Nails track is a banjo, the musical

spine of the minstrel era. Perhaps Lil Nas was *too* American. Other country artists of the genre seemed to sense this. White singers recorded pretty tributes in support, and one, Billy Ray Cyrus, performed his on a remix with Lil Nas X himself.

The newer version lays Cyrus's casual grit alongside Lil Nas's lackadaisical wonder. It's been No.1 on Billboard's all-genre Hot 100 singles chart since April, setting a record. And the bottomless glee over the whole thing makes me laugh, too — not in a surprised, yacht-rock way but as proof of what a fine mess this place is. One person's sign of progress remains another's symbol of encroachment. *Screw the history. Get off my land.*

Four hundred years ago, more than 20 kidnapped Africans arrived in Virginia. They were put to work and put through hell. Twenty became millions, and some of those people found — somehow — deliverance in the power of music. Lil Nas X has descended from those millions and appears to be a believer in deliverance. The verses of his song flirt with Western kitsch, what young black internetters branded, with adorable idiosyncrasy and a deep sense of history, the "yee-haw agenda." But once the song reaches its chorus ("I'm gonna take my horse to the Old Town Road, and ride til I can't no more"), I don't hear a kid in an outfit. I hear a cry of ancestry. He's a westward-bound refugee; he's an Exoduster. And Cyrus is down for the ride. Musically, they both know: This land is their land.

Wesley Morris is a staff writer for the magazine, a critic at large for The New York Times and a co-host of the podcast "Still Processing." He was awarded the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for criticism.

How Segregation Caused Your Traffic Jam

nytimes.com/2018/08/14/megacity-traffic-caused-segregation.html

By FREDERICK B. ROSE

August 14, 2018

3:58 PM

Atlanta has some of the worst traffic in the United States. Drivers there average two hours each week mired in gridlock, hung up at countless spots, from the constantly clogged Georgia 400 to a complicated cluster of overpasses at Tom Moreland Interchange, better known as “Spaghetti Junction.” The Downtown Connector — a 12-to-14-lane megahighway that in theory connects the city’s north to its south — regularly has three-mile-long traffic jams that last four hours or more. Commuters might assume they’re stuck there because some city planner made a mistake, but the heavy congestion actually stems from a great success. In Atlanta, as in dozens of cities across America, daily congestion is a direct consequence of a century-long effort to segregate the races.

For much of the nation’s history, the campaign to keep African-Americans “in their place” socially and politically manifested itself in an effort to keep them quite literally in one place or another. Before the Civil War, white masters kept enslaved African-Americans close at hand to coerce their labor and guard against revolts. But with the abolition of slavery, the spatial relationship was reversed. Once they had no need to keep constant watch over African-Americans, whites wanted them out of sight. Civic planners pushed them into ghettos, and the segregation we know today became the rule.

At first the rule was overt, as Southern cities like Baltimore and Louisville enacted laws that mandated residential racial segregation. Such laws were eventually invalidated by the Supreme Court, but later measures achieved the same effect by more subtle means. During the New Deal, federal agencies like the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation and the Federal Housing Administration encouraged redlining practices that explicitly marked minority neighborhoods as risky investments and therefore discouraged bank loans, mortgages and insurance there. Other policies simply targeted black communities for isolation and demolition. The postwar programs for urban renewal, for instance, destroyed black neighborhoods and displaced their residents with such regularity that African-Americans came to believe, in James Baldwin’s memorable phrase, that “urban renewal means Negro removal.”

This intertwined history of infrastructure and racial inequality extended into the 1950s and 1960s with the creation of the Interstate highway system. The federal government shouldered nine-tenths of the cost of the new Interstate highways, but local officials often had a say in selecting the path. As in most American cities in the decades after the Second World War, the new highways in Atlanta — local expressways at first, then Interstates —

were steered along routes that bulldozed “blighted” neighborhoods that housed its poorest residents, almost always racial minorities. This was a common practice not just in Southern cities like Jacksonville, Miami, Nashville, New Orleans, Richmond and Tampa, but in countless metropolises across the country, including Chicago, Cincinnati, Denver, Detroit, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Syracuse and Washington.

While Interstates were regularly used to destroy black neighborhoods, they were also used to keep black and white neighborhoods apart. Today, major roads and highways serve as stark dividing lines between black and white sections in cities like Buffalo, Hartford, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh and St. Louis. In Atlanta, the intent to segregate was crystal clear. Interstate 20, the east-west corridor that connects with I-75 and I-85 in Atlanta’s center, was deliberately plotted along a winding route in the late 1950s to serve, in the words of Mayor Bill Hartsfield, as “the boundary between the white and Negro communities” on the west side of town. Black neighborhoods, he hoped, would be hemmed in on one side of the new expressway, while white neighborhoods on the other side of it would be protected. Racial residential patterns have long since changed, of course, but the awkward path of I-20 remains in place.

By razing impoverished areas downtown and segregating the races in the western section, Atlanta’s leaders hoped to keep downtown and its surroundings a desirable locale for middle-class whites. Articulating a civic vision of racial peace and economic progress, Hartsfield bragged that Atlanta was the “City Too Busy to Hate.” But the so-called urban renewal and the new Interstates only helped speed white flight from Atlanta. Over the 1960s, roughly 60,000 whites left the city, with many of them relocating in the suburbs along the northern rim. When another 100,000 whites left the city in the 1970s, it became a local joke that Atlanta had become “The City Too Busy Moving to Hate.”

As the new suburbs ballooned in size, traffic along the poorly placed highways became worse and worse. The obvious solution was mass transit — buses, light rail and trains that would more efficiently link the suburbs and the city — but that, too, faced opposition, largely for racial reasons. The white suburbanites had purposefully left the problems of the central city behind and worried that mass transit would bring them back.

Accordingly, suburbanites waged a sustained campaign against the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) from its inception. Residents of the nearly all-white Cobb County resoundingly rejected the system in a 1965 vote. In 1971, Gwinnett and Clayton Counties, which were then also overwhelmingly white, followed suit, voting down a proposal to join MARTA by nearly 4-1 margins, and keeping MARTA out became the default position of many local politicians. (Emmett Burton, a Cobb County commissioner, won praise for promising to “stock the Chattahoochee with piranha” if that were needed to keep MARTA away.) David Chesnut, the white chairman of MARTA, insisted in 1987 that suburban opposition to mass transit had been “90 percent a racial issue.” Because of that resistance, MARTA became a city-only service that did little to relieve commuter traffic. By the mid-

1980s, white racists were joking that MARTA, with its heavily black ridership, stood for "Moving Africans Rapidly Through Atlanta."

Even as the suburbs became more racially diverse, they remained opposed to MARTA. After Gwinnett voted the system down again in 1990, a former Republican legislator later marveled at the arguments given by opponents. "They will come up with 12 different ways of saying they are not racist in public," he told a reporter. "But you get them alone, behind a closed door, and you see this old blatant racism that we have had here for quite some time."

Earlier this year, Gwinnett County voted MARTA down for a third time. Proponents had hoped that changes in the county's racial composition, which was becoming less white, might make a difference. But the March initiative still failed by an eight-point margin. Officials discovered that some nonwhite suburbanites shared the isolationist instincts of earlier white suburbanites. One white property manager in her late 50s told a reporter that she voted against mass transit because it was used by poorer residents and immigrants, whom she called "illegals." "Why should we pay for it?" she asked. "Why subsidize people who can't manage their money and save up a dime to buy a car?"

In the end, Atlanta's traffic is at a standstill because its attitude about transit is at a standstill, too. Fifty years after its Interstates were set down with an eye to segregation and its rapid-transit system was stunted by white flight, the city is still stalled in the past.

Kevin M. Kruse is a professor of history at Princeton University and the author of "White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism."

Why Doesn't America Have Universal Health Care? One Word: Race

nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/universal-health-care-racism.html

By JENEEN INTERLANDI

August 14,
2019

The smallpox virus hopped across the post-Civil War South, invading the makeshift camps where many thousands of newly freed African-Americans had taken refuge but leaving surrounding white communities comparatively unscathed. This pattern of affliction was no mystery: In the late 1860s, doctors had yet to discover viruses, but they knew that poor nutrition made people more susceptible to illness and that poor sanitation contributed to the spread of disease. They also knew that quarantine and vaccination could stop an outbreak in its tracks; they had used those very tools to prevent a smallpox outbreak from ravaging the Union Army.

Smallpox was not the only health disparity facing the newly emancipated, who at the close of the Civil War faced a considerably higher mortality rate than that of whites. Despite their urgent pleas for assistance, white leaders were deeply ambivalent about intervening. They worried about black epidemics spilling into their own communities and wanted the formerly enslaved to be healthy enough to return to plantation work. But they also feared that free and healthy African-Americans would upend the racial hierarchy, the historian Jim Downs writes in his 2012 book, "Sick From Freedom."

Federal policy, he notes, reflected white ambivalence at every turn. Congress established the medical division of the Freedmen's Bureau — the nation's first federal health care program — to address the health crisis, but officials deployed just 120 or so doctors across the war-torn South, then ignored those doctors' pleas for personnel and equipment. They erected more than 40 hospitals but prematurely shuttered most of them.

White legislators argued that free assistance of any kind would breed dependence and that when it came to black infirmity, hard labor was a better salve than white medicine. As the death toll rose, they developed a new theory: Blacks were so ill suited to freedom that the entire race was going extinct. "No charitable black scheme can wash out the color of the Negro, change his inferior nature or save him from his inevitable fate," an Ohio congressman said.

One of the most eloquent rejoinders to the theory of black extinction came from Rebecca Lee Crumpler, the nation's first black female doctor. Crumpler was born free and trained and practiced in Boston. At the close of the war, she joined the Freedmen's Bureau and

worked in the freed people's communities of Virginia. In 1883, she published one of the first treatises on the burden of disease in black communities. "They seem to forget there is a *cause* for every ailment," she wrote. "And that it may be in their power to remove it."

In the decades following Reconstruction, the former slave states came to wield enormous congressional power through a voting bloc that was uniformly segregationist and overwhelmingly Democratic. That bloc preserved the nation's racial stratification by securing local control of federal programs under a mantra of "states' rights" and, in some cases, by adding qualifications directly to federal laws with discriminatory intent.

The African-American ward of the Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami in 1944. Jerry Cooke/The Life Images Collection, via Getty Images

As the Columbia University historian Ira Katznelson and others have documented, it was largely at the behest of Southern Democrats that farm and domestic workers — more than half the nation's black work force at the time — were excluded from New Deal policies, including the Social Security and Wagner Acts of 1935 (the Wagner Act ensured the right of workers to collective bargaining), and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which set a minimum wage and established the eight-hour workday. The same voting bloc ensured states controlled crucial programs like Aid to Dependent Children and the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act, better known as the G.I. Bill, allowing state leaders to effectively exclude black people.

[Myths about physical racial differences were used to justify slavery — and are still believed by doctors today.]

In 1945, when President Truman called on Congress to expand the nation's hospital system as part of a larger health care plan, Southern Democrats obtained key concessions that shaped the American medical landscape for decades to come. The Hill-Burton Act provided federal grants for hospital construction to communities in need, giving funding priority to rural areas (many of them in the South). But it also ensured that states controlled the disbursement of funds and could segregate resulting facilities.

Professional societies like the American Medical Association barred black doctors; medical schools excluded black students, and most hospitals and health clinics segregated black patients. Federal health care policy was designed, both implicitly and explicitly, to exclude black Americans. As a result, they faced an array of inequities — including statistically shorter, sicker lives than their white counterparts. What's more, access to good medical care was predicated on a system of employer-based insurance that was inherently difficult for black Americans to get. "They were denied most of the jobs that offered coverage," says David Barton Smith, an emeritus historian of health care policy at Temple University. "And even when some of them got health insurance, as the Pullman porters did, they couldn't make use of white facilities."

In the shadows of this exclusion, black communities created their own health systems. Lay black women began a national community health care movement that included fund-raising for black health facilities; campaigns to educate black communities about nutrition, sanitation and disease prevention; and programs like National Negro Health Week that drew national attention to racial health disparities. Black doctors and nurses — most of them trained at one of two black medical colleges, Meharry and Howard — established their own professional organizations and began a concerted war against medical apartheid. By the 1950s, they were pushing for a federal health care system for all citizens.

That fight put the National Medical Association (the leading black medical society) into direct conflict with the A.M.A., which was opposed to any nationalized health plan. In the late 1930s and the 1940s, the group helped defeat two such proposals with a vitriolic campaign that informs present-day debates: They called the idea socialist and un-American and warned of government intervention in the doctor-patient relationship. The group used the same arguments in the mid-'60s, when proponents of national health insurance introduced Medicare. This time, the N.M.A. developed a countermessage: Health care was a basic human right.

Medicare and Medicaid were part of a broader plan that finally brought the legal segregation of hospitals to an end: The 1964 Civil Rights Act outlawed segregation for any entity receiving federal funds, and the new health care programs soon placed every hospital in the country in that category. But they still excluded millions of Americans. Those who did not fit into specific age, employment or income groups had little to no access to health care.

In 2010, the Affordable Care Act brought health insurance to nearly 20 million previously uninsured adults. The biggest beneficiaries of this boon were people of color, many of whom obtained coverage through the law's Medicaid expansion. That coverage contributed to a measurable decrease in some racial health disparities, but the success was neither as enduring nor as widespread as it might have been. Several states, most of them in the former Confederacy, refused to participate in Medicaid expansion. And several are still trying to make access to the program contingent on onerous new work requirements. The results of both policies have been unequivocal. States that expanded Medicaid saw a drop in disease-related deaths, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research. But in Arkansas, the first state to implement work requirements, nearly 20,000 people were forced off the insurance plan.

One hundred and fifty years after the freed people of the South first petitioned the government for basic medical care, the United States remains the only high-income country in the world where such care is not guaranteed to every citizen. In the United States, racial health disparities have proved as foundational as democracy itself. "There has never been any period in American history where the health of blacks was equal to that of whites,"

Evelynn Hammonds, a historian of science at Harvard University, says. "Disparity is built into the system." Medicare, Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act have helped shrink those disparities. But no federal health policy yet has eradicated them.

Jeneen Interlandi is a member of The Times's editorial board and a staff writer for the magazine. Her last article for the magazine was about teaching in the age of school shootings.

Why American Prisons Owe Their Cruelty to Slavery

nytimes.com

Several years ago, my law office was fighting for the release of a black man who had been condemned, at the age of 16, to die in prison. Matthew was one of 62 Louisiana children sentenced to life imprisonment without parole for nonhomicide offenses. But a case I'd argued at the Supreme Court was part of a 2010 ruling that banned such sentences for juveniles, making our clients eligible for release.

Some had been in prison for nearly 50 years. Almost all had been sent to Angola, a penitentiary considered one of America's most violent and abusive. Angola is immense, larger than Manhattan, covering land once occupied by slave plantations. Our clients there worked in fields under the supervision of horse-riding, shotgun-toting guards who forced them to pick crops, including cotton. Their disciplinary records show that if they refused to pick cotton — or failed to pick it fast enough — they could be punished with time in "the hole," where food was restricted and inmates were sometimes tear-gassed. Still, some black prisoners, including Matthew, considered the despair of the hole preferable to the unbearable degradation of being forced to pick cotton on a plantation at the end of the 20th century. I was fearful that such clients would be denied parole based on their disciplinary records. Some were.

The United States has the highest rate of incarceration of any nation on Earth: We represent 4 percent of the planet's population but 22 percent of its imprisoned. In the early 1970s, our prisons held fewer than 300,000 people; since then, that number has grown to more than 2.2 million, with 4.5 million more on probation or parole. Because of mandatory sentencing and "three strikes" laws, I've found myself representing clients sentenced to life without parole for stealing a bicycle or for simple possession of marijuana. And central to understanding this practice of mass incarceration and excessive punishment is the legacy of slavery.

It took only a few decades after the arrival of enslaved Africans in Virginia before white settlers demanded a new world defined by racial caste. The 1664 General Assembly of Maryland decreed that all Negroes within the province "shall serve *durante vita*," hard labor for life. This enslavement would be sustained by the threat of brutal punishment. By 1729, Maryland law authorized punishments of enslaved people including "to have the right hand cut off ... the head severed from the body, the body divided into four quarters, and head and quarters set up in the most public places of the county."

Soon American slavery matured into a perverse regime that denied the humanity of black people while still criminalizing their actions. As the Supreme Court of Alabama explained in 1861, enslaved black people were “capable of committing crimes,” and in that capacity were “regarded as persons” — but in most every other sense they were “incapable of performing civil acts” and considered “things, not persons.”

~~[To get updates on The 1619 Project, and for more on race from The New York Times, sign up for our weekly Race/Related newsletter.]~~

The 13th Amendment is credited with ending slavery, but it stopped short of that: It made an exception for those convicted of crimes. After emancipation, black people, once seen as less than fully human “slaves,” were seen as less than fully human “criminals.” The provisional governor of South Carolina declared in 1865 that they had to be “restrained from theft, idleness, vagrancy and crime.” Laws governing slavery were replaced with Black Codes governing free black people — making the criminal-justice system central to new strategies of racial control.

These strategies intensified whenever black people asserted their independence or achieved any measure of success. During Reconstruction, the emergence of black elected officials and entrepreneurs was countered by convict leasing, a scheme in which white policymakers invented offenses used to target black people: vagrancy, loitering, being a group of black people out after dark, seeking employment without a note from a former enslaver. The imprisoned were then “leased” to businesses and farms, where they labored under brutal conditions. An 1887 report in Mississippi found that six months after 204 prisoners were leased to a white man named McDonald, dozens were dead or dying, the prison hospital filled with men whose bodies bore “marks of the most inhuman and brutal treatment ... so poor and emaciated that their bones almost come through the skin.”

Anything that challenged the racial hierarchy could be seen as a crime, punished either by the law or by the lynchings that stretched from Mississippi to Minnesota. In 1916, Anthony Crawford was lynched in South Carolina for being successful enough to refuse a low price for his cotton. In 1933, Elizabeth Lawrence was lynched near Birmingham for daring to chastise white children who were throwing rocks at her.

It's not just that this history fostered a view of black people as presumptively criminal. It also cultivated a tolerance for employing any level of brutality in response. In 1904, in Mississippi, a black man was accused of shooting a white landowner who had attacked him. A white mob captured him and the woman with him, cut off their ears and fingers, drilled corkscrews into their flesh and then burned them alive — while hundreds of white spectators enjoyed deviled eggs and lemonade. The landowner's brother, Woods Eastland, presided over the violence; he was later elected district attorney of Scott County, Miss., a position that allowed his son James Eastland, an avowed white supremacist, to serve six terms as a United States senator, becoming president pro tempore from 1972 to 1978.

This appetite for harsh punishment has echoed across the decades. Late in the 20th century, amid protests over civil rights and inequality, a new politics of fear and anger would emerge. Nixon's war on drugs, mandatory minimum sentences, three-strikes laws, children tried as adults, "broken windows" policing — these policies were not as expressly racialized as the Black Codes, but their implementation has been essentially the same. It is black and brown people who are disproportionately targeted, stopped, suspected, incarcerated and shot by the police.

Hundreds of years after the arrival of enslaved Africans, a presumption of danger and criminality still follows black people everywhere. New language has emerged for the noncrimes that have replaced the Black Codes: driving while black, sleeping while black, sitting in a coffee shop while black. All reflect incidents in which African-Americans were mistreated, assaulted or arrested for conduct that would be ignored if they were white. In schools, black kids are suspended and expelled at rates that vastly exceed the punishment of white children for the same behavior.

Inside courtrooms, the problem gets worse. Racial disparities in sentencing are found in almost every crime category. Children as young as 13, almost all black, are sentenced to life imprisonment for nonhomicide offenses. Black defendants are 22 times more likely to receive the death penalty for crimes whose victims are white, rather than black — a type of bias the Supreme Court has declared "inevitable."

The smog created by our history of racial injustice is suffocating and toxic. We are too practiced in ignoring the victimization of any black people tagged as criminal; like Woods Eastland's crowd, too many Americans are willing spectators to horrifying acts, as long as we're assured they're in the interest of maintaining order.

This cannot be the end of the story. In 2018, the Equal Justice Initiative, a nonprofit I direct, opened a museum in Montgomery, Ala., dedicated to the legacy of slavery and a memorial honoring thousands of black lynching victims. We must acknowledge the 400 years of injustice that haunt us. I'm encouraged: Half a million people have visited. But I'm also worried, because we are at one of those critical moments in American history when we will either double down on romanticizing our past or accept that there is something better waiting for us.

I recently went to New Orleans to celebrate the release of several of our Angola clients, including Matthew — men who survived the fields and the hole. I realized how important it is to stay hopeful: Hopelessness is the enemy of justice. There were moments of joy that night. But there was also heaviness; we all seemed keenly aware that we were not truly free from the burden of living in a nation that continues to deny and doubt this legacy, and how much work remains to be done.

Bryan Stevenson is the executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative and the author of "Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption."

The Barbaric History of Sugar in America

 [nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/sugar-slave-trade-slavery.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/sugar-slave-trade-slavery.html)

By KHALIL GIBRAN MUHAMMAD

August 14,
2019

Domino Sugar's Chalmette Refinery in Arabi, La., sits on the edge of the mighty Mississippi River, about five miles east by way of the river's bend from the French Quarter, and less than a mile down from the Lower Ninth Ward, where Hurricane Katrina and the failed levees destroyed so many black lives. It is North America's largest sugar refinery, making nearly two billion pounds of sugar and sugar products annually. Those ubiquitous four-pound yellow paper bags emblazoned with the company logo are produced here at a rate of 120 bags a minute, 24 hours a day, seven days a week during operating season.

The United States makes about nine million tons of sugar annually, ranking it sixth in global production. The United States sugar industry receives as much as \$4 billion in annual subsidies in the form of price supports, guaranteed crop loans, tariffs and regulated imports of foreign sugar, which by some estimates is about half the price per pound of domestic sugar. Louisiana's sugar-cane industry is by itself worth \$3 billion, generating an estimated 16,400 jobs.

A vast majority of that domestic sugar stays in this country, with an additional two to three million tons imported each year. Americans consume as much as 77.1 pounds of sugar and related sweeteners per person per year, according to United States Department of Agriculture data. That's nearly twice the limit the department recommends, based on a 2,000-calorie diet.

Sugar has been linked in the United States to diabetes, obesity and cancer. If it is killing all of us, it is killing black people faster. Over the last 30 years, the rate of Americans who are obese or overweight grew 27 percent among all adults, to 71 percent from 56 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control, with African-Americans overrepresented in the national figures. During the same period, diabetes rates overall nearly tripled. Among black non-Hispanic women, they are nearly double those of white non-Hispanic women, and one and a half times higher for black men than white men.

None of this — the extraordinary mass commodification of sugar, its economic might and outsize impact on the American diet and health — was in any way foreordained, or even predictable, when Christopher Columbus made his second voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in 1493, bringing sugar-cane stalks with him from the Spanish Canary Islands. In Europe at that time, refined sugar was a luxury product, the backbreaking toil and dangerous labor required in its manufacture an insuperable barrier to production in anything approaching

bulk. It seems reasonable to imagine that it might have remained so if it weren't for the establishment of an enormous market in enslaved laborers who had no way to opt out of the treacherous work.

Children on a Louisiana sugar-cane plantation around 1885. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library

For thousands of years, cane was a heavy and unwieldy crop that had to be cut by hand and immediately ground to release the juice inside, lest it spoil within a day or two. Even before harvest time, rows had to be dug, stalks planted and plentiful wood chopped as fuel for boiling the liquid and reducing it to crystals and molasses. From the earliest traces of cane domestication on the Pacific island of New Guinea 10,000 years ago to its island-hopping advance to ancient India in 350 B.C., sugar was locally consumed and very labor-intensive. It remained little more than an exotic spice, medicinal glaze or sweetener for elite palates.

It was the introduction of sugar slavery in the New World that changed everything. "The true Age of Sugar had begun — and it was doing more to reshape the world than any ruler, empire or war had ever done," Marc Aronson and Marina Budhos write in their 2010 book, "Sugar Changed the World." Over the four centuries that followed Columbus's arrival, on the mainlands of Central and South America in Mexico, Guyana and Brazil as well as on the sugar islands of the West Indies — Cuba, Barbados and Jamaica, among others — countless indigenous lives were destroyed and nearly 11 million Africans were enslaved, just counting those who survived the Middle Passage.

"White gold" drove trade in goods and people, fueled the wealth of European nations and, for the British in particular, shored up the financing of their North American colonies. "There was direct trade among the colonies and between the colonies and Europe, but much of the Atlantic trade was triangular: enslaved people from Africa; sugar from the West Indies and Brazil; money and manufactures from Europe," writes the Harvard historian Walter Johnson in his 1999 book, "Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market." "People were traded along the bottom of the triangle; profits would stick at the top."

Before French Jesuit priests planted the first cane stalk near Baronne Street in New Orleans in 1751, sugar was already a huge moneymaker in British New York. By the 1720s, one of every two ships in the city's port was either arriving from or heading to the Caribbean, importing sugar and enslaved people and exporting flour, meat and shipbuilding supplies. The trade was so lucrative that Wall Street's most impressive buildings were Trinity Church at one end, facing the Hudson River, and the five-story sugar warehouses on the other, close to the East River and near the busy slave market. New York's enslaved population reached 20 percent, prompting the New York General Assembly in 1730 to issue a consolidated slave code, making it "unlawful for above three slaves" to meet on their own, and authorizing "each town" to employ "a common whipper for their slaves."

In 1795, Étienne de Boré, a New Orleans sugar planter, granulated the first sugar crystals in the Louisiana Territory. With the advent of sugar processing locally, sugar plantations exploded up and down both banks of the Mississippi River. All of this was possible because of the abundantly rich alluvial soil, combined with the technical mastery of seasoned French and Spanish planters from around the cane-growing basin of the Gulf and the Caribbean — and because of the toil of thousands of enslaved people. More French planters and their enslaved expert sugar workers poured into Louisiana as Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines led a successful revolution to secure Haiti's independence from France.

Within five decades, Louisiana planters were producing a quarter of the world's cane-sugar supply. During her antebellum reign, Queen Sugar bested King Cotton locally, making Louisiana the second-richest state in per capita wealth. According to the historian Richard Follett, the state ranked third in banking capital behind New York and Massachusetts in 1840. The value of enslaved people alone represented tens of millions of dollars in capital that financed investments, loans and businesses. Much of that investment funneled back into the sugar mills, the "most industrialized sector of Southern agriculture," Follett writes in his 2005 book, "Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World 1820-1860." No other agricultural region came close to the amount of capital investment in farming by the eve of the Civil War. In 1853, Representative Miles Taylor of Louisiana bragged that his state's success was "without parallel in the United States, or indeed in the world in any branch of industry."

The enslaved population soared, quadrupling over a 20-year period to 125,000 souls in the mid-19th century. New Orleans became the Walmart of people-selling. The number of enslaved labor crews doubled on sugar plantations. And in every sugar parish, black people outnumbered whites. These were some of the most skilled laborers, doing some of the most dangerous agricultural and industrial work in the United States.

In the mill, alongside adults, children toiled like factory workers with assembly-line precision and discipline under the constant threat of boiling hot kettles, open furnaces and grinding rollers. "All along the endless carrier are ranged slave children, whose business it is to place the cane upon it, when it is conveyed through the shed into the main building," wrote Solomon Northup in "Twelve Years a Slave," his 1853 memoir of being kidnapped and forced into slavery on Louisiana plantations.

~~Men working among thousands of barrels of sugar in New Orleans in 1902. Underwood & Underwood, via the Library of Congress~~

To achieve the highest efficiency, as in the round-the-clock Domino refinery today, sugar houses operated night and day. "On cane plantations in sugar time, there is no distinction as to the days of the week," Northup wrote. Fatigue might mean losing an arm to the grinding rollers or being flayed for failing to keep up. Resistance was often met with sadistic cruelty.

A formerly enslaved black woman named Mrs. Webb described a torture chamber used by her owner, Valsin Marmillion. "One of his cruelties was to place a disobedient slave, standing in a box, in which there were nails placed in such a manner that the poor creature was unable to move," she told a W.P.A. interviewer in 1940. "He was powerless even to chase the flies, or sometimes ants crawling on some parts of his body."

Louisiana led the nation in destroying the lives of black people in the name of economic efficiency. The historian Michael Tadman found that Louisiana sugar parishes had a pattern of "deaths exceeding births." Backbreaking labor and "inadequate net nutrition meant that slaves working on sugar plantations were, compared with other working-age slaves in the United States, far less able to resist the common and life-threatening diseases of dirt and poverty," wrote Tadman in a 2000 study published in the American Historical Review. Life expectancy was less like that on a cotton plantation and closer to that of a Jamaican cane field, where the most overworked and abused could drop dead after seven years.

SIDE BAR ARTICLE

"The Enslaved Pecan Pioneer"

By Tiya Miles

Pecans are the nut of choice when it comes to satisfying America's sweet tooth, with the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday season being the pecan's most popular time, when the nut graces the rich pie named for it. Southerners claim the pecan along with the cornbread and collard greens that distinguish the regional table, and the South looms large in our imaginations as this nut's mother country.

The presence of pecan pralines in every Southern gift shop from South Carolina to Texas, and our view of the nut as regional fare, masks a crucial chapter in the story of the pecan: It was an enslaved man who made the wide cultivation of this nut possible.

Pecan trees are native to the middle southwestern region of the Mississippi River Valley and the Gulf Coast of Texas and Mexico. While the trees can live for a hundred years or more, they do not produce nuts in the first years of life, and the kinds of nuts they produce are wildly variable in size, shape, flavor and ease of shell removal. Indigenous people worked around this variability, harvesting the nuts for hundreds and probably thousands of years, camping near the groves in season, trading the nuts in a network that stretched across the continent, and lending the food the name we have come to know it by: paccan.

Once white Southerners became fans of the nut, they set about trying to standardize its fruit by engineering the perfect pecan tree. Planters tried to cultivate pecan trees for a commercial market beginning at least as early as the 1820s, when a well-known planter from South Carolina named Abner Landrum published detailed descriptions of his attempt in the American Farmer periodical. In the mid-1840s, a planter in Louisiana sent cuttings of a much-prized pecan tree over to his neighbor J.T. Roman, the owner of Oak Alley Plantation. Roman did what many enslavers were accustomed to in that period: He turned the impossible work over to an enslaved person with vast capabilities, a man whose name we

know only as Antoine. Antoine undertook the delicate task of grafting the pecan cuttings onto the limbs of different tree species on the plantation grounds. Many specimens thrived, and Antoine fashioned still more trees, selecting for nuts with favorable qualities. It was Antoine who successfully created what would become the country's first commercially viable pecan varietal.

Decades later, a new owner of Oak Alley, Hubert Bonzano, exhibited nuts from Antoine's trees at the Centennial Exposition of 1876, the World's Fair held in Philadelphia and a major showcase for American innovation. As the horticulturalist Lenny Wells has recorded, the exhibited nuts received a commendation from the Yale botanist William H. Brewer, who praised them for their "remarkably large size, tenderness of shell and very special excellence." Coined "the Centennial," Antoine's pecan varietal was then seized upon for commercial production (other varieties have since become the standard).

Was Antoine aware of his creation's triumph? No one knows. As the historian James McWilliams writes in "The Pecan: A History of America's Native Nut" (2013): "History leaves no record as to the former slave gardener's location — or whether he was even alive — when the nuts from the tree he grafted were praised by the nation's leading agricultural experts." The tree never bore the name of the man who had handcrafted it and developed a full-scale orchard on the Oak Alley Plantation before he slipped into the shadow of history.

Read More

PECAN SIDEBAR ENDS"

Most of these stories of brutality, torture and premature death have never been told in classroom textbooks or historical museums. They have been refined and whitewashed in the mills and factories of Southern folklore: the romantic South, the Lost Cause, the popular "moonlight and magnolias" plantation tours so important to Louisiana's agritourism today.

When I arrived at the Whitney Plantation Museum on a hot day in June, I mentioned to Ashley Rogers, 36, the museum's executive director, that I had passed the Nelson Coleman Correctional Center about 15 miles back along the way. "You passed a dump and a prison on your way to a plantation," she said. "These are not coincidences."

The Whitney, which opened five years ago as the only sugar-slavery museum in the nation, rests squarely in a geography of human detritus. The museum tells of the everyday struggles and resistance of black people who didn't lose their dignity even when they lost everything else. It sits on the west bank of the Mississippi at the northern edge of the St. John the Baptist Parish, home to dozens of once-thriving sugar plantations; Marmillion's plantation and torture box were just a few miles down from Whitney.

The museum also sits across the river from the site of the German Coast uprising in 1811, one of the largest revolts of enslaved people in United States history. As many as 500 sugar rebels joined a liberation army heading toward New Orleans, only to be cut down by federal troops and local militia; no record of their actual plans survives. About a hundred were

killed in battle or executed later, many with their heads severed and placed on pikes throughout the region. Based on historians' estimates, the execution tally was nearly twice as high as the number in Nat Turner's more famous 1831 rebellion. The revolt has been virtually redacted from the historical record. But not at Whitney. And yet tourists, Rogers said, sometimes admit to her, a white woman, that they are warned by hotel concierges and tour operators that Whitney is the one misrepresenting the past. "You are meant to empathize with the owners as their guests," Rogers told me in her office. In Louisiana's plantation tourism, she said, "the currency has been the distortion of the past."

The landscape bears witness and corroborates Whitney's version of history. Although the Coleman jail opened in 2001 and is named for an African-American sheriff's deputy who died in the line of duty, Rogers connects it to a longer history of coerced labor, land theft and racial control after slavery. Sugar cane grows on farms all around the jail, but at the nearby Louisiana State Penitentiary, or Angola, prisoners grow it. Angola is the largest maximum-security prison by land mass in the nation. It opened in its current location in 1901 and took the name of one of the plantations that had occupied the land. Even today, incarcerated men harvest Angola's cane, which is turned into syrup and sold on-site.

From slavery to freedom, many black Louisianans found that the crushing work of sugar cane remained mostly the same. Even with Reconstruction delivering civil rights for the first time, white planters continued to dominate landownership. Freedmen and freedwomen had little choice but to live in somebody's old slave quarters. As new wage earners, they negotiated the best terms they could, signed labor contracts for up to a year and moved frequently from one plantation to another in search of a life whose daily rhythms beat differently than before. And yet, even compared with sharecropping on cotton plantations, Rogers said, "sugar plantations did a better job preserving racial hierarchy." As a rule, the historian John C. Rodrigue writes, "plantation labor overshadowed black people's lives in the sugar region until well into the 20th century."

Sheet music to an 1875 song romanticizing the painful, exhausted death of an enslaved sugar-plantation worker. From Sheridan Libraries/Levy/Gado/Getty Images

Sometimes black cane workers resisted collectively by striking during planting and harvesting time — threatening to ruin the crop. Wages and working conditions occasionally improved. But other times workers met swift and violent reprisals. After a major labor insurgency in 1887, led by the Knights of Labor, a national union, at least 30 black people — some estimated hundreds — were killed in their homes and on the streets of Thibodaux, La. "I think this will settle the question of who is to rule, the nigger or the white man, for the next 50 years," a local white planter's widow, Mary Pugh, wrote, rejoicing, to her son.

Many African-Americans aspired to own or rent their own sugar-cane farms in the late 19th century, but faced deliberate efforts to limit black farm and land owning. The historian Rebecca Scott found that although "black farmers were occasionally able to buy plots of

cane land from bankrupt estates, or otherwise establish themselves as suppliers, the trend was for planters to seek to establish relations with white tenants or sharecroppers who could provide cane for the mill."

By World War II, many black people began to move not simply from one plantation to another, but from a cane field to a car factory in the North. By then, harvesting machines had begun to take over some, but not all, of the work. With fewer and fewer black workers in the industry, and after efforts in the late 1800s to recruit Chinese, Italian, Irish and German immigrant workers had already failed, labor recruiters in Louisiana and Florida sought workers in other states.

In 1942, the Department of Justice began a major investigation into the recruiting practices of one of the largest sugar producers in the nation, the United States Sugar Corporation, a South Florida company. Black men unfamiliar with the brutal nature of the work were promised seasonal sugar jobs at high wages, only to be forced into debt peonage, immediately accruing the cost of their transportation, lodging and equipment — all for \$1.80 a day. One man testified that the conditions were so bad, "It wasn't no freedom; it was worse than the pen." Federal investigators agreed. When workers tried to escape, the F.B.I. found, they were captured on the highway or "shot at while trying to hitch rides on the sugar trains." The company was indicted by a federal grand jury in Tampa for "carrying out a conspiracy to commit slavery," wrote Alec Wilkinson, in his 1989 book, "Big Sugar: Seasons in the Cane Fields of Florida." (The indictment was ultimately quashed on procedural grounds.) A congressional investigation in the 1980s found that sugar companies had systematically tried to exploit seasonal West Indian workers to maintain absolute control over them with the constant threat of immediately sending them back to where they came from.

At the Whitney plantation, which operated continuously from 1752 to 1975, its museum staff of 12 is nearly all African-American women. A third of them have immediate relatives who either worked there or were born there in the 1960s and '70s. These black women show tourists the same slave cabins and the same cane fields their own relatives knew all too well.

Farm laborers, mill workers and refinery employees make up the 16,400 jobs of Louisiana's sugar-cane industry. But it is the owners of the 11 mills and 391 commercial farms who have the most influence and greatest share of the wealth. And the number of black sugar-cane farmers in Louisiana is most likely in the single digits, based on estimates from people who work in the industry. They are the exceedingly rare exceptions to a system designed to codify black loss.

And yet two of these black farmers, Charles Guidry and Eddie Lewis III, have been featured in a number of prominent news items and marketing materials out of proportion to their representation and economic footprint in the industry. Lewis and Guidry have appeared in

separate online videos. The American Sugar Cane League has highlighted the same pair separately in its online newsletter, Sugar News.

Lewis has no illusions about why the marketing focuses on him, he told me; sugar cane is a lucrative business, and to keep it that way, the industry has to work with the government. "You need a few minorities in there, because these mills survive off having minorities involved with the mill to get these huge government loans," he said. A former financial adviser at Morgan Stanley, Lewis, 36, chose to leave a successful career in finance to take his rightful place as a fifth-generation farmer. "My family was farming in the late 1800s" near the same land, he says, that his enslaved ancestors once worked. Much of the 3,000 acres he now farms comes from relationships with white landowners his father, Eddie Lewis Jr., and his grandfather before him, built and maintained.

Lewis is the minority adviser for the federal Farm Service Agency (F.S.A.) in St. Martin and Lafayette Parish, and also participates in lobbying federal legislators. He says he does it because the stakes are so high. If things don't change, Lewis told me, "I'm probably one of two or three that's going to be farming in the next 10 to 15 years. They're trying to basically extinct us." As control of the industry consolidates in fewer and fewer hands, Lewis believes black sugar-cane farmers will no longer exist, part of a long-term trend nationally, where the total proportion of all African-American farmers has plummeted since the early 1900s, to less than 2 percent from more than 14 percent, with 90 percent of black farmers' land lost amid decades of racist actions by government agencies, banks and real estate developers.

The Rhinelander Sugar House, a sugar refinery and warehouse on the site of what is now the headquarters of the New York Police Department, in the late 1800s. When it was built in 1763, the building was one of the largest in the colony. Photograph by Hugo V. Sass, via the Museum of The City of New York

"There's still a few good white men around here," Lewis told me. "It's not to say it's all bad. But this is definitely a community where you still have to say, 'Yes sir,' 'Yes, ma'am,' and accept 'boy' and different things like that."

One of the biggest players in that community is M.A. Patout and Son, the largest sugar-cane mill company in Louisiana. Founded in 1825, Patout has been known to boast that it is "the oldest complete family-owned and operated manufacturer of raw sugar in the United States." It owns three of the 11 remaining sugar-cane mills in Louisiana, processing roughly a third of the cane in the state.

The company is being sued by a former fourth-generation black farmer. As first reported in The Guardian, Wenceslaus Provost Jr. claims the company breached a harvesting contract in an effort to deliberately sabotage his business. Provost, who goes by the first name June, and his wife, Angie, who is also a farmer, lost their home to foreclosure in 2018, after defaulting on F.S.A.-guaranteed crop loans. June Provost has also filed a federal lawsuit

against First Guaranty Bank and a bank senior vice president for claims related to lending discrimination, as well as for mail and wire fraud in reporting false information to federal loan officials. The suit names a whistle-blower, a federal loan officer, who, in April 2015, "informed Mr. Provost that he had been systematically discriminated against by First Guaranty Bank," the lawsuit reads.

(In court filings, M.A. Patout and Son denied that it breached the contract. Representatives for the company did not respond to requests for comment. In court filings, First Guaranty Bank and the senior vice president also denied Provost's claims. Their representatives did not respond to requests for comment.)

Lewis is himself a litigant in a separate petition against white landowners. He claims they "unilaterally, arbitrarily and without just cause terminated" a seven-year-old agreement to operate his sugar-cane farm on their land, causing him to lose the value of the crop still growing there. Lewis is seeking damages of more than \$200,000, based on an independent appraisal he obtained, court records show. The landowners did not respond to requests for comment.

But the new lessee, Ryan Doré, a white farmer, did confirm with me that he is now leasing the land and has offered to pay Lewis what a county agent assessed as the crop's worth, about \$50,000. Doré does not dispute the amount of Lewis's sugar cane on the 86.16 acres. What he disputes is Lewis's ability to make the same crop as profitable as he would. Doré, who credits M.A. Patout and Son for getting him started in sugar-cane farming, also told me he is farming some of the land June Provost had farmed.

Lewis and the Provosts say they believe Doré is using his position as an elected F.S.A. committee member to gain an unfair advantage over black farmers with white landowners. "He's privileged with a lot of information," Lewis said.

Doré denied he is abusing his F.S.A. position and countered that "the Lewis boy" is trying to "make this a black-white deal." Doré insisted that "both those guys simply lost their acreage for one reason and one reason only: They are horrible farmers."

It's impossible to listen to the stories that Lewis and the Provosts tell and not hear echoes of the policies and practices that have been used since Reconstruction to maintain the racial caste system that sugar slavery helped create. The crop, land and farm theft that they claim harks back to the New Deal era, when Southern F.S.A. committees denied black farmers government funding.

"June and I hope to create a dent in these oppressive tactics for future generations," Angie Provost told me on the same day this spring that a congressional subcommittee held hearings on reparations. "To this day we are harassed, retaliated against and denied the true DNA of our past."

- 65 -

Khalil Gibran Muhammad is a Suzanne Young Murray professor at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University and author of "The Condemnation of Blackness."
Tiya Miles is a professor in the history department at Harvard and the author, most recently, of "The Dawn of Detroit: A Chronicle of Slavery and Freedom in the City of the Straits."

[read more](#)

66

What the Reactionary Politics of 2019 Owe to the Politics of Slavery



nytimes.com

NYTimes.com

NYTimes.com

NYTimes.com

NYTimes.com

If you want to understand American politics in 2019 and the strain of reactionary extremism that has taken over the Republican Party, a good place to start is 2011: the year after a backlash to Barack Obama's presidency swept Tea Party insurgents into Congress, flipping control of the House.

It was clear, at the start of that year, that Congress would have to lift the debt ceiling — the limit on bonds and other debt instruments the government issues when it doesn't have the revenues to fulfill spending obligations. These votes were often opportunities for grandstanding and occasionally brinkmanship by politicians from both parties. But it was understood that, when push came to shove, Congress would lift the limit and the government would pay its obligations.

2011 was different. Congressional Republicans, led by the new Tea Party conservatives, wanted to repeal the Affordable Care Act and make other sharp cuts to the social safety net. But Democrats controlled the Senate and the White House. So House Republicans decided to take a hostage. "I'm asking you to look at a potential increase in the debt limit as a leverage moment when the White House and President Obama will have to deal with us," said the incoming majority leader, Eric Cantor, at a closed-door retreat days before the session began, according to The Washington Post. Either the White House would agree to harsh austerity measures or Republicans would force the United States to default on its debt obligations, precipitating an economic crisis just as the country, and the world, was beginning to recover from the Great Recession.

The debt-limit standoff was a case study of a fundamental change within the Republican Party after Obama took office in 2009. Republicans would either win total victory or they would wreck the system itself. The Senate Republican leader, Mitch McConnell, used a variety of procedural tactics to effectively nullify the president's ability to nominate federal judges and fill vacancies in the executive branch. In the minority, he used the filibuster to an unprecedented degree. In the majority, after Republicans won the Senate in the 2014 midterm elections, he led an extraordinary blockade of the Supreme Court, stopping the Senate from even considering the president's nominee for the bench.

-67-

Where did this destructive, sectarian style of partisan politics come from? Conventional wisdom traces its roots to the “Gingrich Revolution” of the 1990s, whose architect pioneered a hardball, insurgent style of political combat, undermining norms and dismantling congressional institutions for the sake of power. This is true enough, but the Republican Party of the Obama years didn’t just recycle its Gingrich-era excesses; it also pursued a policy of total opposition, not just blocking Obama but also casting him as fundamentally illegitimate and un-American. He may have been elected by a majority of the voting public, but that majority didn’t count. It didn’t represent the “real” America.

Obama’s election reignited a fight about democratic legitimacy — about who can claim the country as their own, and who has the right to act as a citizen — that is as old as American democracy itself. And the reactionary position in this conflict, which seeks to narrow the scope of participation and arrest the power of majorities beyond the limits of the Constitution, has its own peculiar history: not just in the ideological battles of the founding but also in the institution that defined the early American republic as much as any other.

The plantations that dotted the landscape of the antebellum South produced the commodities that fueled the nation’s early growth. Enslaved people working in glorified labor camps picked cotton, grew indigo, harvested resin from trees for turpentine and generated additional capital in the form of their children, bought, sold and securitized on the open market. But plantations didn’t just produce goods; they produced ideas too. Enslaved laborers developed an understanding of the society in which they lived. The people who enslaved them, likewise, constructed elaborate sets of beliefs, customs and ideologies meant to justify their positions in this economic and social hierarchy. Those ideas permeated the entire South, taking deepest root in places where slavery was most entrenched.

South Carolina was a paradigmatic slave state. Although the majority of enslavers resided in the “low country,” with its large rice and cotton plantations, nearly the entire state participated in plantation agriculture and the slave economy. By 1820 most South Carolinians were enslaved Africans. By midcentury, the historian Manisha Sinha notes in “The Counterrevolution of Slavery,” it was the first Southern state where a majority of the white population held slaves.

Not surprisingly, enslavers dominated the state’s political class. “Carolinian rice aristocrats and the cotton planters from the hinterland,” Sinha writes, “formed an intersectional ruling class, bound together by kinship, economic, political and cultural ties.” The government they built was the most undemocratic in the Union. The slave-rich districts of the coasts enjoyed nearly as much representation in the Legislature as more populous regions in the interior of the state. Statewide office was restricted to wealthy property owners. To even qualify for the governorship, you needed a large, debt-free estate. Rich enslavers were essentially the only

people who could participate in the highest levels of government. To the extent that there were popular elections, they were for the lowest levels of government, because the State Legislature tended to decide most high-level offices.

But immense power at home could not compensate for declining power in national politics. The growth of the free Northwest threatened Southern dominance in Congress. And the slaveholding planter class would witness the rise of an organized movement to stop the expansion of slavery and curb the power enslavers held over key institutions like the Senate and the Supreme Court.

Out of this atmosphere of fear and insecurity came a number of thinkers and politicians who set their minds to protecting South Carolina and the rest of the slaveholding South from a hostile North. Arguably the most prominent and accomplished of these planter-politicians was John C. Calhoun. Vice president under John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson, secretary of state under John Tyler and eventually a United States senator representing the state, Calhoun was a deep believer in the system of slavery — which he called a “positive good” that “forms the most solid and durable foundation on which to rear free and stable institutions”— and a committed advocate for the slave-owning planter class. He was an astute politician, but he made his most important mark as a theoretician of reaction: a man who, realizing that democracy could not protect slavery in perpetuity, set out to limit democracy.

Calhoun popularized the concept of “nullification”: the theory that any state subject to federal law was entitled to invalidate it. He first advanced the idea in an anonymous letter, written when he was vice president, protesting the Tariff of 1828, which sought to protect Northern industry and agriculture from foreign competitors. Calhoun condemned it as an unconstitutional piece of regional favoritism.

— — — — SLAVERY MOVES WEST SIDEBAR — — —

| How Slavery Made Its Way West

| By Tiya Miles

| Slavery leapt out of the East and into the interior lands of the Old Southwest in the 1820s and 1830s. Cotton began to soar as the most lucrative product in the global marketplace just as the slaveholding societies of the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic were reaching limits in soil fertility. To land speculators, planters, ambitious settlers and Northern investors, the fertile lands to the west now looked irresistible. |

The Native American nations that possessed the bulk of those lands stood in the way of this imagined progress. President Andrew Jackson, an enslaver from Tennessee famous for brutal “Indian” fighting in Georgia and Florida, swooped in on the side of fellow enslavers, championing the Indian Removal Act of 1830. When Congress passed the bill by a breathtakingly slim margin, Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws and Seminoles in the South as well as Potawatomis, Wyandots, Odawas, Delawares, Shawnees and Senecas in the Midwest were relocated to an uncharted space designated as Indian Territory (including

present-day Oklahoma and Kansas). "Removal," as the historian Claudio Saunt argues in a forthcoming book on the topic, was far too quiet a word to capture the violation of this mass "expulsion" of 80,000 people.

As new lands in the Old Southwest were pried open, white enslavers back east realized that their most profitable export was no longer tobacco or rice. A complex interstate slave trade became an industry of its own. This extractive system, together with enslavers moving west with human property, resulted in the relocation of approximately one million enslaved black people to a new region. The entrenched practice of buying, selling, owning, renting and mortgaging humans stretched into the American West along with the white settler-colonial population that now occupied former indigenous lands.

Slaveholding settlers who had pushed into Texas from the American South wanted to extend cotton agriculture and increase the numbers of white arrivals. "It was slavery that seemed to represent the soft underbelly of the Texas unrest," the historian Steven Hahn asserts in "A Nation Without Borders." Armed conflict between American-identified enslavers and a Mexican state that outlawed slavery in 1829 was among the causes of the Mexican-American War, which won for the United States much of the Southwest and California.

Texas became the West's cotton slavery stronghold, with enslaved black people making up 30 percent of the state's population in 1860. "Indian Territory" also held a large population of enslaved black people. Mormons, too, kept scores of enslaved laborers in Utah. The small number of black people who arrived in California, New Mexico and Oregon before midcentury usually came as property. Even as most Western states banned slavery in their new constitutions, individual enslavers held onto their property-in-people until the Civil War.

Enslaved men who had served in the Union Army were among the first wave of African-Americans to move west of their own free will. They served as soldiers, and together with wives and children they formed pocket communities in Montana, Colorado, New Mexico and Texas. It is a painful paradox that the work of black soldiers centered on what the historian Quintard Taylor has called "settler protection" in his classic 1998 study of African-Americans in the West, "In Search of the Racial Frontier." Even while bearing slavery's scars, black men found themselves carrying out orders to secure white residents of Western towns, track down "outlaws" (many of whom were people of color), police the federally imposed boundaries of Indian reservations and quell labor strikes. "This small group of black men," Taylor observes, "paid a dear price in their bid to earn the respect of the nation."

— — — — SLAVERY MOVES WEST END — — — —

The South may have been part of the pro-Andrew Jackson majorities in Congress, but that wasn't enough for Calhoun, who wanted absolute security for the region and its economic interests. Demographic and political change doomed it to be a "permanent minority": "Our

geographical position, our industry, pursuits and institutions are all peculiar." Against a domineering North, he argued, "representation affords not the slightest protection."

"It is, indeed, high time for the people of the South to be roused to a sense of impending calamities — on an early and full knowledge of which their safety depends," Calhoun wrote in an 1831 report to the South Carolina Legislature. "It is time that they should see and feel that ... they are in a permanent and hopeless minority on the great and vital connected questions."

His solution lay in the states. To Calhoun, there was no "union" per se. Instead, the United States was simply a compact among sovereigns with distinct, and often competing, sectional interests. This compact could only survive if all sides had equal say on the meaning of the Constitution and the shape and structure of the law. Individual states, Calhoun thought, should be able to veto federal laws if they thought the federal government was favoring one state or section over another. The union could only act with the assent of the entire whole — what Calhoun called "the concurrent majority" — as opposed to the Madisonian idea of rule by numerical majority, albeit mediated by compromise and consensus.

Calhoun initially lost the tariff fight, which pitted him against an obstinate Andrew Jackson, but he did not give up on nullification. He expanded on the theory at the end of his life, proposing an alternative system of government that gave political minorities a final say over majority action. In this "concurrent government," each "interest or portion of the community" has an equal say in approving the actions of the state. Full agreement would be necessary to "put the government in motion." Only through this, Calhoun argued, would the "different interests, orders, classes, or portions, into which the community may be divided, can be protected."

The government Calhoun envisioned would protect "liberty": not the liberty of the citizen but the liberty of the master, the liberty of those who claimed a right to property and a position at the top of a racial and economic hierarchy. This liberty, Calhoun stated, was "a reward to be earned, not a blessing to be gratuitously lavished on all alike — a reward reserved for the intelligent, the patriotic, the virtuous and deserving — and not a boon to be bestowed on a people too ignorant, degraded and vicious, to be capable either of appreciating or of enjoying it." It is striking how much this echoes contemporary arguments against the expansion of democracy. In 2012, for example, a Tea Party congressional candidate from Florida said that voting is a "privilege" and seemed to endorse property requirements for participation.

Calhoun died in 1850. Ten years later, following the idea of nullification to its conclusion, the South seceded from the Union after Abraham Lincoln won the White House without a single Southern state. War came a few months later, and four years of fighting destroyed the system of slavery Calhoun fought to protect. But parts of his legacy survived. His deep suspicion of majoritarian democracy — his view that government must protect interests,

defined by their unique geographic and economic characteristics, more than people — would inform the sectional politics of the South in the 20th century, where solid blocs of Southern lawmakers worked collectively to stifle any attempt to regulate the region.

Despite insurgencies at home — the Populist Party, for example, swept through Georgia and North Carolina in the 1890s — reactionary white leaders were able to maintain an iron grip on federal offices until the Voting Rights Act of 1965. And even then, the last generation of segregationist senators held on through the 1960s into the early 2000s. United, like their predecessors, by geography and their stake in Jim Crow segregation, they were a powerful force in national politics, a bloc that vetoed anything that touched their regional prerogatives.

Anti-lynching laws and some pro-labor legislation died at the hands of lawmakers from the “Solid South” who took advantage of Senate rules like the filibuster to effectively enact Calhoun’s idea of a concurrent majority against legislation that threatened the Southern racial status quo; the spirit of nullification lived on. When Northern liberal Democrats added a civil rights plank to the party platform at the 1948 presidential convention, in an effort to break the Southern conservatives’ hold on the party, 35 delegates from Mississippi and Alabama walked out in protest: the prologue to the “Dixiecrat Revolt” that began the conservative migration into the eventual embrace of the Republican Party.

Calhoun’s idea that states could veto the federal government would return as well following the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, as segregationists announced “massive resistance” to federal desegregation mandates and sympathizers defended white Southern actions with ideas and arguments that cribbed from Calhoun and recapitulated enslaver ideology for modern American politics. “The central question that emerges,” the *National Review* founding editor William F. Buckley Jr. wrote in 1957, amid congressional debate over the first Civil Rights Act, “is whether the white community in the South is entitled to take such measures as are necessary to prevail, politically and culturally, in areas which it does not predominate numerically? The sobering answer is *yes* — the white community is so entitled because, for the time being, it is the advanced race.” He continued: “It is more important for any community, anywhere in the world, to affirm and live by civilized standards, than to bow to the demands of the numerical majority.”

It is a strikingly blunt defense of Jim Crow and affirmation of white supremacy from the father of the conservative movement. Conservatives drove the groundswell that made Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, an opponent of the Civil Rights Act, the 1964 Republican Party nominee for president. He lost in a landslide but won the Deep South (except for Florida), where the white people of the region — among the most conservative in the country, a direct legacy of slavery and the society it built — flocked to the candidate who stood against the constitutional demands of the black-freedom movement. Goldwater may have insisted that there are “some rights that are clearly protected by valid laws and are therefore ‘civil rights,’” but he also declared that “states’ rights” were “disappearing

under the piling sands of absolutism" and called *Brown v. Board* an "unconstitutional trespass into the legislative sphere of government." "I therefore support all efforts by the States, excluding violence, of course," Goldwater wrote in "The Conscience of a Conservative," "to preserve their rightful powers over education."

Later, when key civil rights questions had been settled by law, Buckley would essentially renounce these views, praising the movement and criticizing race-baiting demagogues like George C. Wallace. Still, his initial impulse — to give political minorities a veto not just over policy but over democracy itself — reflected a tendency that would express itself again and again in the conservative politics he ushered into the mainstream, emerging when political, cultural and demographic change threatened a narrow, exclusionary vision of American democracy. Writing in the 1980s and '90s, Samuel Francis — a polemicist who would eventually migrate to the very far right of American conservatism — identified this dynamic in the context of David Duke's campaign for governor of Louisiana:

"Reagan conservatism, in its innermost meaning, had little to do with supply-side economics and spreading democracy. It had to do with the awakening of a people who face political, cultural and economic dispossession, who are slowly beginning to glimpse the fact of dispossession and what dispossession will mean for them and their descendants, and who also are starting to think about reversing the processes and powers responsible for their dispossession."

There is a homegrown ideology of reaction in the United States, inextricably tied to our system of slavery. And while the racial content of that ideology has attenuated over time, the basic framework remains: fear of rival political majorities; of demographic "replacement"; of a government that threatens privilege and hierarchy.

The past 10 years of Republican extremism is emblematic. The Tea Party billed itself as a reaction to debt and spending, but a close look shows it was actually a reaction to an ascendant majority of black people, Latinos, Asian-Americans and liberal white people. In their survey-based study of the movement, the political scientists Christopher S. Parker and Matt A. Barreto show that Tea Party Republicans were motivated "by the fear and anxiety associated with the perception that 'real' Americans are losing their country."

The scholars Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson came to a similar conclusion in their contemporaneous study of the movement, based on an ethnographic study of Tea Party activists across the country. "Tea Party resistance to giving more to categories of people deemed undeserving is more than just an argument about taxes and spending," they note in "The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism"; "it is a heartfelt cry about where they fear 'their country' may be headed." And Tea Party adherents' "worries about racial and ethnic minorities and overly entitled young people," they write, "signal a larger fear about generational social change in America."

To stop this change and its political consequences, right-wing conservatives have embarked on a project to nullify opponents and restrict the scope of democracy. Mitch McConnell's hyper-obstructionist rule in the Senate is the most high-profile example of this strategy, but it's far from the most egregious.

In 2012, North Carolina Republicans won legislative and executive power for the first time in more than a century. They used it to gerrymander the electoral map and impose new restrictions on voting, specifically aimed at the state's African-American voters. One such restriction, a strict voter-identification law, was designed to target black North Carolinians with "almost surgical precision," according to the federal judges who struck the law down. When, in 2016, Democrats overcame these obstacles to take back the governor's mansion, the Republican-controlled Legislature tried to strip power from the office, to prevent Democrats from reversing their efforts to rig the game.

A similar thing happened in Wisconsin. Under Scott Walker, the governor at the time, Wisconsin Republicans gave themselves a structural advantage in the State Legislature through aggressive gerrymandering. After the Democratic candidate toppled Walker in the 2018 governor's race, the Republican majority in the Legislature rapidly moved to limit the new governor's power and weaken other statewide offices won by Democrats. They restricted the governor's ability to run public-benefit programs and set rules on the implementation of state laws. And they robbed the governor and the attorney general of the power to continue, or end, legal action against the Affordable Care Act.

Michigan Republicans took an almost identical course of action after Democrats in that state managed to win executive office, using their gerrymandered legislative majority to weaken the new Democratic governor and attorney general. One proposed bill, for example, would have shifted oversight of campaign-finance law from the secretary of state to a six-person commission with members nominated by the state Republican and Democratic parties, a move designed to produce deadlock and keep elected Democrats from reversing previous decisions.

The Republican rationale for tilting the field in their permanent favor or, failing that, nullifying the results and limiting Democrats' power as much as possible, has a familiar ring to it. "Citizens from every corner of Wisconsin deserve a strong legislative branch that stands on equal footing with an incoming administration that is based almost solely in Madison," one Wisconsin Republican said following the party's lame-duck power grab. The speaker of the State Assembly, Robin Vos, made his point more explicit. "If you took Madison and Milwaukee out of the state election formula, we would have a clear majority — we would have all five constitutional officers, and we would probably have many more seats in the Legislature." The argument is straightforward: Some voters, *their* voters, count. Others — the liberals, black people and other people of color who live in cities — don't.

Senate Republicans played with similar ideas just before the 2016 election, openly announcing their plans to block Hillary Clinton from nominating anyone to the Supreme Court, should she become president. "I promise you that we will be united against any Supreme Court nominee that Hillary Clinton, if she were president, would put up," declared Senator John McCain of Arizona just weeks before voting. And President Trump, of course, has repeatedly and falsely denounced Clinton's popular-vote victory as illegitimate, the product of fraud and illegal voting. "In addition to winning the Electoral College in a landslide," he declared on Twitter weeks after the election, "I won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally."

The larger implication is clear enough: A majority made up of liberals and people of color isn't a real majority. And the solution is clear, too: to write those people out of the polity, to use every available tool to weaken their influence on American politics. The recent attempt to place a citizenship question on the census was an important part of this effort. By asking for this information, the administration would suppress the number of immigrant respondents, worsening their representation in the House and the Electoral College, reweighting power to the white, rural areas that back the president and the Republican Party.

You could make the case that none of this has anything to do with slavery and slaveholder ideology. You could argue that it has nothing to do with race at all, that it's simply an aggressive effort to secure conservative victories. But the tenor of an argument, the shape and nature of an opposition movement — these things matter. The goals may be colorblind, but the methods of action — the attacks on the legitimacy of nonwhite political actors, the casting of rival political majorities as unrepresentative, the drive to nullify democratically elected governing coalitions — are clearly downstream of a style of extreme political combat that came to fruition in the defense of human bondage.

Correction August 19, 2019

An earlier version of this article misstated a year that Republicans won the Senate in midterm elections. It was 2014, not 2010.

Jamelle Bouie is a Washington-based New York Times opinion columnist and a political analyst for CBS News. He covers campaigns, elections, national affairs and culture.

How America's Vast Racial Wealth Gap Grew: By Plunder

 nytimes.com

By TOM BRADY

Elmore Bolling, whose brothers called him Buddy, was a kind of one-man economy in Lowndesboro, Ala. He leased a plantation, where he had a general store with a gas station out front and a catering business; he grew cotton, corn and sugar cane. He also owned a small fleet of trucks that ran livestock and made deliveries between Lowndesboro and Montgomery. At his peak, Bolling employed as many as 40 people, all of them black like him.

One December day in 1947, a group of white men showed up along a stretch of Highway 80 just yards from Bolling's home and store, where he lived with his wife, Bertha Mae, and their seven young children. The men confronted him on a section of road he had helped lay and shot him seven times — six times with a pistol and once with a shotgun blast to the back. His family rushed from the store to find him lying dead in a ditch.

The shooters didn't even cover their faces; they didn't need to. Everyone knew who had done it and why. "He was too successful to be a Negro," someone who knew Bolling told a newspaper at the time. When Bolling was killed, his family estimates he had as much as \$40,000 in the bank and more than \$5,000 in assets, about \$500,000 in today's dollars. But within months of his murder nearly all of it would be gone. White creditors and people posing as creditors took the money the family got from the sale of their trucks and cattle. They even staked claims on what was left of the family's savings. The jobs that he provided were gone, too. Almost overnight the Bollings went from prosperity to poverty. Bertha Mae found work at a dry cleaner. The older children dropped out of school to help support the family. Within two years, the Bollings fled Lowndes County, fearing for their lives.

The period that followed the Civil War was one of economic terror and wealth-stripping that has left black people at lasting economic disadvantage. White Americans have seven times the wealth of black Americans on average. Though black people make up nearly 13 percent of the United States population, they hold less than 3 percent of the nation's total wealth. The median family wealth for white people is \$171,000, compared with just \$17,600 for black people. It is worse on the margins. According to the Economic Policy Institute, 19 percent of black households have zero or negative net worth. Just 9 percent of white families are that poor.

Today's racial wealth gap is perhaps the most glaring legacy of American slavery and the violent economic dispossession that followed. The fate suffered by Elmore Bolling and his family was not unique to them, or to Jim Crow Alabama. It was part of a much broader social and political campaign. When legal slavery ended in 1865, there was great hope for formerly

TKB

enslaved people. Between 1865 and 1870, the Reconstruction Amendments established birthright citizenship — making all black people citizens and granting them equal protection under the law — and gave black men the right to vote. There was also the promise of compensation. In January 1865, Gen. William Sherman issued an order reallocating hundreds of thousands of acres of white-owned land along the coasts of Florida, Georgia and South Carolina for settlement by black families in 40-acre plots. Congress established the Freedmen's Bureau to oversee the transition from slavery to freedom, and the Freedman's Savings Bank was formed to help four million formerly enslaved people gain financial freedom.

When Lincoln was assassinated, Vice President Andrew Johnson effectively rescinded Sherman's order by pardoning white plantation owners and returning to them the land on which 40,000 or so black families had settled. "This is a country for white men, and by God, as long as I am President, it shall be a government for white men," Johnson declared in 1866. The Freedmen's Bureau, always meant to be temporary, was dismantled in 1872. More than 60,000 black people deposited more than \$1 million into the Freedman's Savings Bank, but its all-white trustees began issuing speculative loans to white investors and corporations, and when it failed in 1874, many black depositors lost much of their savings.

"The origins of the racial wealth gap start with the failure to provide the formerly enslaved with the land grants of 40 acres," says William A. Darity Jr., a professor of public policy and African-American studies at Duke University. Any financial progress that black people made was regarded as an affront to white supremacy. After a decade of black gains under Reconstruction, a much longer period of racial violence would wipe nearly all of it away.

To assuage Southern white people, the federal government pulled out the Union troops who were stationed in the South to keep order. During this period of so-called Redemption, lawmakers throughout the South enacted Black Codes and Jim Crow laws that stripped black people of many of their freedoms and property. Other white people, often aided by law enforcement, waged a campaign of violence against black people that would rob them of an incalculable amount of wealth.

[To get updates on The 1619 Project, and for more on race from The New York Times, [sign up for our weekly Race/Related newsletter.](#)]

Armed white people stormed prosperous majority-black Wilmington, N.C., in 1898 to murder dozens of black people, force 2,000 others off their property and overthrow the city government. In the Red Summer of 1919, at least 240 black people were murdered across the country. And in 1921, in one of the bloodiest racial attacks in United States history, Greenwood, a prosperous black neighborhood in Tulsa, Okla., was burned and looted. It is estimated that as many as 300 black people were murdered and 10,000 were rendered homeless. Thirty-five square blocks were destroyed. No one was ever convicted in any of these acts of racist violence.

"You have limited opportunity to accumulate wealth, and then you have a process where that wealth is destroyed or taken away," Darity says. "And all of that is prior to the effects of restrictive covenants — redlining, the discriminatory application of the G.I. Bill and other federal programs."

The post-Reconstruction plundering of black wealth was not just a product of spontaneous violence, but etched in law and public policy. Through the first half of the 20th century, the federal government actively excluded black people from government wealth-building programs. In the 1930s, President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal helped build a solid middle class through sweeping social programs, including Social Security and the minimum wage. But a majority of black people at the time were agricultural laborers or domestic workers, occupations that were ineligible for these benefits. The establishment of the Home Owners Loan Corporation in 1933 helped save the collapsing housing market, but it largely excluded black neighborhoods from government-insured loans. Those neighborhoods were deemed "hazardous" and colored in with red on maps, a practice that came to be known as "redlining."

The G.I. Bill is often hailed as one of Roosevelt's most enduring legacies. It helped usher millions of working-class veterans through college and into new homes and the middle class. But it discriminatorily benefited white people. While the bill didn't explicitly exclude black veterans, the way it was administered often did. The bill gave veterans access to mortgages with no down payments, but the Veterans Administration adopted the same racially restrictive policies as the Federal Housing Administration, which guaranteed bank loans only to developers who wouldn't sell to black people. "The major way in which people have an opportunity to accumulate wealth is contingent on the wealth positions of their parents and their grandparents," Darity says. "To the extent that blacks have the capacity to accumulate wealth, we have not had the ability to transfer the same kinds of resources across generations."

Seventy years later, the effects of Bolling's murder are still felt by his children and their children. "There was no inheritance, nothing for my father to pass down, because it was all taken away," says Josephine Bolling McCall, the only one of Bolling's children to get a college degree. Of the seven siblings, those with more education fared best; the men struggled most, primarily working as low-paid laborers. Of Elmore and Bertha Mae's 25 grandchildren, only six graduated from college; of those, two are McCall's children. The rest are unemployed or underemployed. They have never known anything like the prosperity of their grandparents.

Trymaine Lee is a Pulitzer Prize- and Emmy Award-winning journalist and a correspondent for MSNBC. He covers social-justice issues and the role of race in politics and law enforcement.

1619 Project

DISCUSSION GROUP

**1ST TUESDAY OF
THE MONTH • 7 PM**

**At the Lee Road
Branch**

March 3 African Identity and loss of Culture

April 7 Slavery Culture

May 5 Rebellion and Resistance

Join our discussion of how the legacy of slavery remains the dominant factor of American political, cultural, and social spheres. Based on the articles in *The New York Times Magazine*, our discussions will expand upon and dive deeper into the issues raised.

Topic Articles are available at the Lee Road Branch.

The 1619 Project is a partnership between *The New York Times Magazine*, The Pulitzer Center, and the Smithsonian Institutes.



**Heights
Libraries**
Opening Doors. Opening Minds
www.heightslibrary.org

