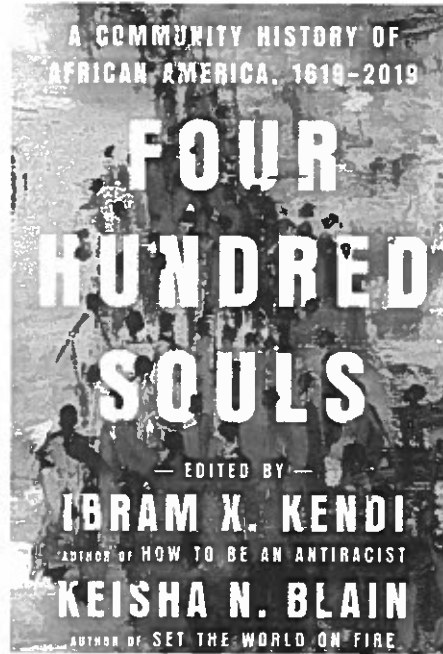


1619 Project Discussion Article Packet



Topic: Slavery and America Part 3: 1779 - 1859

January 13, 2022

6:30 – 8:00 pm

Zoom ID: 823 648 5349

Password: 691353

Upcoming 1619 programs

All programs hosted on Zoom from 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm.

Topics subject to change.

February 10, 2022

Slavery In America Part 4: 1859 - 1939

Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America 1619-2019

March 10, 2022

Slavery in America Part 5: 1939 – 1979

Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America 1619-2019

Please check our 1619 Discussion homepage at:
<https://heightslibrary.org/services/1619-project/>

The Library's 1619 topic interviews are on Youtube
<https://www.youtube.com/hashtag/1619projectdiscussion>

And our Facebook Group:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/3125417084169554>

For more information
Contact: John Piche' at jpiche@heightslibrary.org

1779-1784

SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

DAINA RAMEY BERRY

NESTLED ALONG THE ATLANTIC COASTLINE, PARALLELED by the Savannah River, the city of Savannah is the oldest urban center in the Peach State. Established in 1733 by King George II's 1732 charter, the colony was an experiment to provide British debtors and war criminals a second chance at life in the New World. Thus 114 colonists set sail across the Atlantic on the *Anne*, arriving in February 1733. They "were expected to become farmers and citizen-soldiers on a hostile and desolate frontier," and they worked hard to create amicable relations with the Yamacraw Indians.

Between 1779 and 1784, Savannah residents experienced changes in the economy, in the population, and in social and religious institutions. They witnessed the importation of enslaved people from various regions of West Africa, the growth of religious public worship through the Second Great Awakening, and severe losses during the American Revolution's Siege of Savannah.

Savannah had been planned by William Bull of South Carolina and James Oglethorpe, the British leader sent to establish the colony, and it included a series of squares, wards, and trust lots. Planners intended to create a city that would resemble London. Each ward was "built around central squares with trust lots on the east and west sides of the squares for public buildings and churches, and tything lots for the settlers' homes on the north and south sides of the squares."

With so many enslaved people residing in those wards, in many ways Savannah was nothing like London. There is not a singular way

to think about the lives of people of African descent in Savannah, especially between 1779 and 1784. Many and varied factors and circumstances were in play, including the tremendous restrictions of slavery, the freedom some experienced as a result of war, and the spiritual expression realized through religious conversions.

Even though Georgia was the only colonial region that issued a ban on slavery from its inception in 1733, colonists from South Carolina and other regions brought enslaved people to the city before the ban was lifted by a royal decree in 1751. At that time there were about four hundred enslaved people in Savannah. This means that for them, life in the budding urban center may have been difficult because many worked in the homes of their enslavers and had little contact with other people of African descent.

Some of the early descriptions of experiences in the city from an African perspective come from Olaudah Equiano, an Igbo captive, in the 1760s. Equiano shared his nearly fatal public beating by a well-known physician, his time in jail after the beating, as well as his recovery aided by another prominent physician, in his memoir, *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano* (1789). The shipping and slave-trading industry brought Equiano and thousands of other African captives to the city.

African people forced into the belly of slave ships crossed the Atlantic and came to Savannah through several different routes, but beginning in the late 1760s, Africans came directly from West Africa. While the trade continued and the colony grew, enslaved Africans and their descendants contributed to a growing religious community. During Equiano's time in Savannah, he witnessed a moving sermon by George Whitefield. The spirit-filled preaching, such as was common within the African and African American community, impressed him greatly.

Savannah was home to the First African Baptist Church (established in 1777), hailed as the oldest Black church in North America. Reverend Andrew Bryan, an enslaved preacher who became the second leader of this congregation in 1782, used a rice barn on his enslaver's property for services. Bryan later bought property in Oglethorpe Ward to build a church.

In January 1788, a white minister named Abraham Marshall visited Savannah with one of his Black colleagues, Jesse Peters, and the two baptized more than forty members. Marshall also ordained Bryan. Church membership continued to grow, from 575 members in 1788 to 2,795 in 1831.

In the fall of 1779, while people of African descent worked and worshiped, some had the opportunity to fight for their liberty during the American Revolution. Savannah was home to the second-deadliest battle of the Revolutionary War: the Siege of Savannah. American allies along with the French failed to ward off the British navy when it increased its occupation of the Savannah River by adding "two row galleys." British Captain Hyde Parker ordered "twelve negroes" to serve as part of the crew.

This military strategy to enlist troops of African descent represented a significant moment in African American history. Guides of African descent "were instrumental in the defense of Savannah" because these men knew the waterways better than anyone in uniform. Fighting against the Franco-American forces, the British enlisted some "two hundred negroes" to help with "skirmishes on the outskirts of the city." At the same time, Savannah residents feared armed Blacks and petitioned to disarm them because they walked around with "great insolence."

By October 1779, the American colonists had suffered 752 casualties. When the French tried to lend some naval support, the prepared British sank six French ships in the Savannah River—a humiliating and costly loss for French general Count d'Estaing. D'Estaing's army of 3,600 contained 545 people of African descent, many from Saint Domingue (later Haiti). An estimated 1,094 of these soldiers, including 650 French troops, lost their lives.

One of the reasons for the British success is that they also used African American guides and laborers. Quimano Dolly was one African American who helped the British capture Savannah by bringing troops through a swamp area behind the city. At the end of the war, nearly four thousand people of African descent left Savannah and headed to Florida, the Caribbean, and Canada.

But many Black people remained. Today African Americans rep-

resent 54 percent of the population, the First African Baptist Church still stands, and the battle sites of the American Revolution are recognized in city parks, on historical landmarks, and through the oral traditions of Africans and their descendants. The freedom dreams of the Revolutionary War remain the freedom dreams of today.

1784-1789

THE U.S. CONSTITUTION

DONNA BRAZILE

MY NAME IS RICHARD ALLEN. I WAS BORN ENSLAVED AND died a Methodist bishop.

I am an African, and an American. In my lifetime, 1760-1831, I had two enslavers. Both were relatively good men by my own standards and those of my fellow citizens. Still, slavery was a bitter pill to swallow.

My emotions never accepted that my mind, my learning, my labor, my character, my hands, were someone's personal property. Beginning with the first awareness of my condition, I thought without rest of freedom. I often felt that one day I would be free.

Benjamin Chew of Philadelphia was my first owner. When I was eight, he sold my parents, my siblings, and me to a Delaware planter of modest means. Stokley Sturgis and his wife were aging, kind people. They didn't work me very hard. In fact, I didn't know hard work until I left them to earn back my body.

When I was ten, the Boston Massacre took place. All people, both enslaved and free, were living and moving and breathing in an ether of expectation. It hit me hard that Crispus Attucks, a man like me, was the first to give his life. In 1776 we learned the news that the Declaration of Independence was signed and issued. Its message had a deep impact.

The following year, at age seventeen, I became severely aware of my personal deficiencies, my moral shortcomings. They weighed

heavily. I struggled daily with these feelings. Then Freeborn Garretson, a white preacher, came. I listened and converted to Methodism.

I was hungry for spiritual discipline and guidance. I took Scripture to heart, especially the teachings of Christ. They were words to live by, and I lived by them.

My life changed.

Then Sturgis's life changed. He had been attending our meetings when, at one of them, Reverend Garretson said that slave owners had been "weighed in the balance and found wanting." That struck Sturgis squarely in the heart. He saw he could no longer own slaves.

Sturgis told me I should leave, find work, and pay him what he had paid for me. By age twenty-six in 1786, I had bought my body, literally earned my freedom.

It was in some ways harder to be a free man. Now—no mistake—the ideals of the American Revolution, the words of the Declaration, had triggered the fall of slavery in the northern states.

Although unable to endure the hypocrisy of slavery, most northern white citizens could not bring themselves to be social equals. Accordingly, they did all they could to squelch opportunity for free American Africans.

I felt for those newly freed. Few whites would make loans to buy homes. Those who did, mostly abolitionist Quakers, were tight in reviewing and granting them. It was hard to get jobs. It was hard just to live. We even found it hard to be dead—we were not allowed to own cemeteries in which to bury our deceased.

This conflict, dealing with the hypocrisy of slavery while building a foundation of "All men are created equal," was an ongoing contest throughout the country. It became the primary discord at the Constitutional Convention.

"A nation, without a national government, is, in my view, an awful spectacle," wrote Alexander Hamilton. If the United States were to survive as a nation, it would need a central government. That reality, that overriding necessity, drove the convention's compromises with slavery.

Because of my faith, I was less judgmental and more forgiving than were many about this hypocrisy. We were instructed to "do good"

to those who hated and despitefully misused us. Those weren't just words; they were a command. I obeyed.

With other American Africans, I had been attending services at St. George's in Philadelphia. One Sunday an elder was standing at the door and told us to go to the gallery. We took seats in the same location as where we used to sit downstairs. No sooner had we touched our seats than a prayer was announced, so we got on our knees.

I was focused on the prayer when I heard a commotion of tussling and angry low voices. I looked up to see a trustee pulling my friend and colleague, Absalom Jones, off his knees, saying, "You must not kneel here!"

Jones said he would get up when prayer was finished. The trustee would not have that. Jones was told to rise immediately or he would be forced to rise. The prayer ended just then.

We rose as one and left as one, never to return to St. George's. The abuse and affront were the harder to bear since we had contributed largely of our monies and given our labor generously to laying the church floor and building the gallery.

We were shut out of St. George's by 1787. The Constitutional Convention was in town. There, too, we were shut out. The most vigorous debates were over allowing slavery without building it into our new institutions.

I read the U.S. Constitution. Nowhere are the words *slave* or *slavery* to be found. Abraham Lincoln later told a Cooper Union audience that "this mode of alluding to slaves and slavery, instead of speaking of them, was employed on purpose to exclude from the Constitution the idea that there could be property in man."

It is an honest and realistic argument that slavery became incorporated into the Constitution without naming it because slavery was considered on its way to extinction. To many, the Constitutional Convention compromises were but a temporary accommodation.

Some see only the hypocrisy. They admit of no decent impulses at all in the convention's compromises—and refuse to tolerate slavery's existence for a while longer as a necessity, with the intent that it should in time be no more.

But named or not, slavery was there in writing, a presence allowed

by the Constitution. As for myself, I had been owned by good men who wouldn't be able to see their own sin for years. But I knew of my own sins. And I have a Lord who commands me to forgive. So I forgave and did not sit in judgment.

While I did not judge souls, I did judge behavior. It was my decision, and that of my fellow worshipers, never to return to St. George's Methodist Church. Jones and I, therefore, sought to establish a Free African Society (FAS) based on faith but not affiliated with any church. Today it would be called nondenominational. Following the example of the Constitution, we drew up a preamble, then outlined its purpose and functions.

The FAS would be a self-help group for those recently freed African Americans who were adrift in a hostile society that actively sought to deny them opportunities to advance. The society cultivated and mentored new leaders. It formed a warm community, provided a social life, constructed a network of people who cared.

It was needed. In 1780 there were but 240 freed Americans of African descent in Philadelphia. But by the next census ten years later, the city had 1,849 freed men and women.

I am greatly satisfied that FAS served as a model for many leaders and prophets who would come after me, including W.E.B. Du Bois and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

When we withdrew from St. George's, we rented a storeroom to continue worshipping. This was much opposed by a church leader who visited us twice on the subject, using persuasion ranging from belittling to beseeching.

There are several twists to this story, but the ending is that we settled on a lot on Fifth Street, where I later turned the first shovel for construction. This led, eventually, to the first Independent African church in April 1816, an institution that continues to this day, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, consisting of 2.5 million members.

It saddens me that with all the blood spilled—drawn first by the lash, then by the sword, later drained by dogs, clubs, bombs, and guns during the civil rights era—today the federal courts are reversing the

human rights gains so long in coming, so dearly won. And doing it with the facade that racism is no longer with us.

I was a poor vessel whom God used to give gifts to his oppressed—the tools to free them. American Africans have served a vital function in this democracy. We have been the flint against which the Almighty has sparked this country's struggle to live out the proposition that "all men are created equal."

Whether we are entering a period of regression, or are on the verge of reaching the mountaintop, the tools He gave me are still available: self-help groups, faith and self-discipline, community, and moral leadership as constants from the home to the nation.

1789-1794

SALLY HEMINGS

ANNETTE GORDON-REED



IN AUGUST 1789, SALLY HEMINGS WAS LIVING AT THE HÔTEL de Langeac on the rue de Berri, just off the Champs-Élysées in Paris. She had arrived about two years earlier after living in London for two weeks at the home of John and Abigail Adams.

Hemings had accompanied Mary (Polly) Jefferson, the nine-year-old daughter of Thomas Jefferson, on an Atlantic voyage from Virginia that lasted five weeks. Jefferson was in Paris serving as the American minister to France. John Adams was the American minister in London. He and his wife had agreed to receive Jefferson's daughter and her traveling companion, and to keep Polly until her father could arrive and bring her to Paris.

Jefferson had asked for a "careful Negro woman" to accompany Polly. Then the woman was to return to Virginia. He had suggested Isabel Hern, who was about twenty-eight years old. Hern was unable to make the trip, having recently given birth. So Jefferson's in-laws, Francis and Elizabeth Eppes, with whom Polly and Sally were staying, sent fourteen-year-old Sally Hemings instead.

In the convoluted world of Virginia slavery and family, Sally Hemings's father was John Wayles, the father of Jefferson's deceased wife, Martha, and also of Elizabeth Eppes. So the little girl whom Hemings helped bring across the ocean was her half-niece. When she arrived in Paris, Hemings joined her brother James, who had been in the city since 1784, having come over with Jefferson and Jefferson's eldest daughter, Martha (Patsy).

A great deal had taken place during Hemings's stay in Paris, both within the Hôtel de Langeac and outside it. France had witnessed the fall of the Bastille in July 1789, which is often seen as the beginning of the French Revolution. In truth, much had been happening on that front since Hemings's arrival. The signs of discord in the society were everywhere. Demonstrators amassed in the neighborhood where Hemings lived, outside her residence, actually, shouting about the new world that was to come. Paris was on fire with talk of politics among men and women of all classes.

Hemings's neighborhood was a relatively new one, and though the overall number of Black people in Paris was small, the section of Paris where the Hôtel de Langeac was located had the city's largest concentration of people of color. It was an active community whose members kept tabs on one another's fortunes, alerting each other to developments that were taking place in their community.

Perhaps people kept tabs on the fate of Sally Hemings. As her son Madison Hemings explained, during her time in Paris she had become "Mr. Jefferson's concubine." It is not known when this occurred, but the evidence indicates that it was near the end of her time in the city. In fact, it is very likely that by August 1789, sixteen-year-old Hemings was either newly pregnant or about to become pregnant.

Jefferson had been planning a leave of absence to return his daughters and, most likely, Hemings to Virginia. He was set to come back to Paris and finish his time as minister. When Hemings learned of Jefferson's plans, she balked. She was not alone; none of the young people who were living at the hotel—Jefferson's daughters and his protégé William Short, who had come from Virginia to be Jefferson's secretary—wanted to leave. James Hemings could expect to return with Jefferson.

The Hemings siblings knew that the law in France gave them an easy shot at freedom. Jefferson knew this, too, and was defensive about it, which is probably why he paid both Hemings siblings wages, and paid them well. James was the *chef de cuisine* at the Hôtel de Langeac, and Sally was lady's maid to Jefferson's daughters and likely Jefferson's chambermaid.

It was a heady time for both brother and sister. They were nomi-

nally free, receiving wages near the top of the scale for French servants, and living in the midst of a revolution that promised a new world for people on the bottom of the social scale. Hemings had her own money, but Jefferson had started buying her clothing, and there is reason to think she was attending balls with Patsy Jefferson as an attendant.

Both Hemings siblings would have had every reason to think they had a chance to make it in the new society being born. James hired a tutor to teach him proper French. It is not known whether Sally was included, though her son mentioned her facility with the language. Most important, Sally Hemings did not want to be enslaved again. Jefferson wanted to bring her back to Virginia, and when he met with her resistance, he promised her that if she came home with him, she would live a life of privilege, and that any children they had would be free upon reaching the age of twenty-one. Madison Hemings said that his mother "implicitly relied" on Jefferson's promises and decided to return to Virginia.

Hemings, her brother James, and the Jeffersons set sail for the United States in October 1789. They landed in Norfolk, Virginia, in November. After visiting relatives, the group arrived at Monticello just before Christmas. The next reference to Sally Hemings in Jefferson's records is a letter written around September 1790, saying that at some point in the spring, she had been too ill to make a trip. Other letters from that time make clear that Hemings's status had changed: she ceased to be a lady's maid for Jefferson's daughters once they returned to the United States. It is not known when Hemings gave birth, but the child she had upon her return to Virginia apparently did not survive infancy.

As things turned out, Jefferson did not return to Paris. He accepted President Washington's invitation to serve as U.S. secretary of state and left for New York, then the nation's capital, in March 1790. James Hemings, who continued to be paid regular wages, accompanied him. They were soon joined by Robert Hemings, the eldest of the Hemings-Wayles children. Sally Hemings remained at Monticello and disappears from Jefferson family records. When the capital moved to Philadelphia temporarily, starting in 1791, the Hemings

brothers continued to work for Jefferson. Jefferson referred to Sally Hemings in a letter instructing that she was to be sent the bedding she used while in France.

Jefferson's position as secretary of state kept him away from Monticello a great deal from 1790 until his retirement in 1794. In fact, during that four-year period, he was at Monticello a total of only about five nonconsecutive months. Hemings conceived no children during this time. She likely spent this period with her mother and the rest of her family. She did not become pregnant again until Jefferson retired from Washington's cabinet and returned home at the end of 1794. Hemings conceived her second child in January 1795. She would, in the word of a visitor to Monticello, "cohabit" with Jefferson for thirty-seven years, bearing seven children, four of whom lived to adulthood, all of whom were freed when they became adults.

1794-1799

THE FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT

DEIRDRE COOPER OWENS

IN 1788 A NEW WESTERN NATION ESTABLISHED ITSELF AS A fledgling republic that privileged the democratic process for its most respected citizens: white male property owners over twenty-one years old. At the cornerstone of its democratic process was the vote. Overwhelmingly, white male voters created clauses in the U.S. Constitution that attended to slavery, one of the new nation's most pressing political issues. Article IV, Section 2, Clause 3 of the Constitution not only protected slavery as an American institution but also protected slave owners whose human property liberated themselves into either free states or territories.

In 1789 voters elected their first president, the former general and Revolutionary War hero George Washington. He was one of the wealthiest and most politically connected slave owners in the United States, whose presence eventually established the presidency as a position that was amenable to men who made up what would later be known as the slaveocracy—the slave-owning ruling class that ran the country. It comes as no surprise that from 1789, when Washington was elected, until 1877, when General Ulysses Grant ended his presidency under Reconstruction, more American presidents (twelve) owned slaves than those who did not (six). As a result of the seemingly enduring and lucrative industry based on human bondage, the United States gave birth to a small but politically mighty abolitionist movement.

During the early 1790s, powerful slave owners put more teeth into

Article IV of the Constitution to protect their assets, enslaved people. In 1793 Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, which deemed it a federal crime to aid any fugitive from slavery:

And be it further enacted, That any person who shall knowingly and willingly obstruct or hinder such claimant, his agent, or attorney, in so seizing or arresting such fugitive from labor, or shall rescue such fugitive from such claimant, his agent or attorney, when so arrested pursuant to the authority herein given and declared; or shall harbor or conceal such person after notice that he or she was a fugitive from labor, as aforesaid, shall, for either of the said offences, forfeit and pay the sum of five hundred dollars. Which penalty may be recovered by and for the benefit of such claimant, by action of debt, in any Court proper to try the same, saving moreover to the person claiming such labor or service his right of action for or on account of the said injuries, or either of them.

Anyone who provided assistance to a fugitive risked a hefty fine and whatever other punishment local officials decided to mete out. Fugitives would then be re-enslaved. The nation's leaders were responding to the proliferation of abolitionist societies in northern states. They were also responding to the Black men, women, and children who decided to live in freedom rather than in slavery.

For George Washington, the very act he signed into being haunted him until death. Ona Judge, a twenty-two-year-old enslaved woman, owned by Washington, ran away from his household in the summer of 1793, when Washington signed the nation's most powerful Fugitive Slave Act. Washington immediately placed an ad for her recapture, and insinuated in the ad that he did not know what provocation caused Judge to run away. He seemed to not imagine that a human being held in lifelong bondage might desire freedom, especially from his plantation. Ona Judge remained in the free state of New Hampshire as a fugitive from slavery until her death in 1848.

Washington would have been in the middle of a political maelstrom, had he re-enslaved a poor bondswoman who simply wanted

freedom in a nation that had prioritized that value in its own fight for freedom from Britain. Although the existence of slavery and powerful laws to protect those invested in maintaining the system were in place, the Fugitive Slave Act amplified the role of the fugitive slave catcher.

In the aftermath of the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act, slave catchers proliferated. The men who patrolled slave states, free states, and territories created even more fear in the hearts of enslaved people thinking of running away. If a fugitive slave was caught and re-enslaved, the emotional and physical costs would be dire. Slave catchers were motivated by money and also performed a civic duty to a slaveholding nation that protected slavery at any cost. This constitutional protection of slavery helped to create a cottage industry where white duplicity, anti-Black violence, and the privileging of property rights over human rights reigned.

African Americans, especially those who were free, immediately responded to the Fugitive Slave Act. They created political abolitionist organizations that addressed the need for discretion in their liberation work, raised funds for runaways, and advocated the use of armed tactical violence in the name of self-defense. Black abolitionists recognized violence as an inherently American language that white supporters of slavery understood quite well. Although white abolitionists advanced moral suasion as the central tenet in dismantling slavery, Black abolitionists understood that white America would need more than fiery speeches to dissuade them from supporting slavery.

These leaders were also emboldened by leaders of the Haitian Revolution that began in August 1791. Black people in Haiti, who were engaged in a bloody fight for freedom from their French slave masters, used tactical violence as a means for liberation. Enslaved people in the United States were inspired by the Haitian example. In 1795 in Louisiana, still a Spanish colony, African-born slaves, mainly men, developed a plan to revolt. In Pointe Coupée, Louisiana, fifty-seven slaves and three white men dedicated themselves to destroying slave owners' property, seizing arms, and killing white slave masters. As happened with most slave rebellions, they were betrayed by infor-

ants, in this case by Indian people of the Tunica tribe, and almost half of the enslaved conspirators were beheaded. Although the revolt did not happen, the Pointe Coupée Conspiracy served as a potent reminder for white people that enslaved people would fight back. Despite reigning ideologies that espoused so-called truths about Black people's docility and intellectual inferiority, slave conspiracies not only confirmed white people's fear of an impending "race war" between angry Blacks and defensive whites but also showed the nation that people of African descent would fight for their right to live and die as free people.

The 1793 Fugitive Slave Act was one of the first federal laws to provide universal protection for slave owners against loss of property in enslaved people. It codified anti-Blackness and white supremacy because it signaled that a white person's claim to stolen property was inherently more important than a Black person's right to freedom and liberty. It reified that the United States was a nation divided, one that established freedom with whiteness and servitude with Blackness. Most critically for Black people, whether enslaved or free, the United States proved to be hostile to their freedom and hypocritical in its claims for justice and liberty.

In 1850 Congress passed an even more restrictive Fugitive Slave Act, and in the 1860s a violent and bloody civil war exposed the nation's deep history of anti-Blackness and its commitment to honoring the propertied rather than all its people, especially those of African descent. For African Americans, the Fugitive Slave Acts meant that their fight for freedom and civil rights would be a long and dangerous one. Yet they forged a political consciousness in Black America that extended beyond the borders of the United States and had ties in a developing Black diaspora.

1799-1804

HIGHER EDUCATION

CRAIG STEVEN WILDER

AT THE END OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, FRANCISCO de Miranda—a mercenary and future dictator of Venezuela—visited the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) during a journey through the United States. He found it to be a “well regulated” college despite the absence of President John Witherspoon, who was off fundraising. He approvingly examined the model solar system, which was not working, and then toured the town. However, when he reached nearby New Brunswick, de Miranda wrote nothing about Queen’s College (now Rutgers University).

One might dismiss that as an oversight if it had not happened repeatedly. In 1794 Moreau de Saint-Méry—a Martiniquais lawyer who had practiced in Cap François (Cap-Haïtien) before the Haitian Revolution—visited Princeton. He was disappointed with Nassau Hall, the main campus building that was once the architectural jewel of the British American colonies. He offered modest compliments to the library and still-broken orrery, recorded the tuition and fees, and even took an informal census of students from the South and the West Indies. In New Brunswick, Saint-Méry noticed that a bridge had collapsed across the Raritan River, but he too made no mention of Queen’s College.

A couple of years later, Isaac Weld, a topographer from Ireland, surveyed the region. He ridiculed the College of New Jersey: the main building was a plain stone structure, the museum but a couple of display cases, the vaunted orrery useless, and the library just a col-

lection of old theology texts in no graceful order. All colleges in the United States were really grammar schools, he judged. His stage ride into New Brunswick seemed to confirm that verdict. “There is nothing deserving attention in it,” Weld concluded of the village, “excepting it be the very neat and commodious wooden bridge that has been thrown across the Raritan River.”

There was a reason Rutgers wasn’t even on the radar for visitors. The Revolutionary War had left the campus “wasted & destroyed” and scattered the students, as a Rutgers president appealed to the New Jersey legislature, and the whole college was but “a naked charter and little else.”

The Revolution had strained and fractured the new country’s educational infrastructure. British and American forces had used college campuses for headquarters, barracks, and hospitals. The governors of Harvard in Cambridge, Yale in New Haven, King’s College (now Columbia University) in New York City, the College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania), and the College of Rhode Island (now Brown University) in Providence had had to close their schools or relocate to interior towns as British forces attacked vulnerable port cities. The officers of Rutgers and Princeton dispersed their students and faculties as the fighting approached their gates. British troops targeted the College of William and Mary in Virginia and burned a portion of the campus while French soldiers camped there. Because of its remote location, Dartmouth College in New Hampshire was spared physical damage but emerged from the Revolution in fiscal crisis.

But a renaissance was near. The revival of the slave trade in New England and the mid-Atlantic and the expansion of plantation slavery in the South allowed white Americans to rescue the old colonial colleges from the wreckage of war and raise eighteen new colleges before the turn of the century. In less than two decades, the slave economy underwrote an academic revolution that tripled the number of colleges and transformed the nation’s intellectual geography.

The expansion of higher education tracked the southward and westward movements of plantation slavery. The Presbyterians founded seven new schools, five of them in the South. The Episcopalians built

three Southern colleges. North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee established public universities. Governor Thomas Jefferson and the Virginia legislature chartered Transylvania College in Kentucky, the first college west of the Alleghenies.

Early American colleges preyed upon the bodies, labor, and lives of enslaved Black people. In 1789 Bishop John Carroll and the Roman Catholic clergy founded Georgetown College (now Georgetown University) in what would soon become the new federal district. Carroll's small community of Catholic priests began planning a church with national reach, administered from Georgetown and funded by slavery.

Catholic clerics and families, emboldened by the promise of religious freedom, had ventured into Kentucky after the Revolution, where they established a base for the church's southern and western expansion. A few years later Father Patrick Smyth, a visitor from Ireland, published a scathing account of his tenure in the United States that revealed the brutal realities of "institutional slavery." The Maryland slave plantations were sources and sites of clerical immorality and improvidence, he warned. The Irish priest detailed multiple abuses. A contemporary offered some additional insight into Father Smyth's urgent protests. During his tour of Maryland, the French republican Brissot de Warville exposed the public secret of systemic rape on the church's plantations. The priests were "keeping harems of Negro women, from whom was born a mixed race," Warville charged, while pleading for the abolition of slavery and the cultivation of some "more moral and profitable crop" than tobacco.

In the decades after the Revolution, human slavery allowed the United States to establish a system of public and private colleges and universities, and the inhumanities of that relationship would echo through the history of American higher education.

1804-1809

COTTON

KIESE LAYMON



BLAME COTTON.

Grandmama is massaging the tummies of teacakes in her kitchen. The smell, and only the smell, will make it to tomorrow. I'm watching Walter Payton run to and from yesterday on CBS.

Everyone on Grandmama's TV, in Grandmama's kitchen, is wearing cotton.

I hear a Black man stomp his butter brown boots onto her porch.

I am eight years old, wearing a cotton V-neck, and I feel good.

There are four bangs outside Grandmama's screen door. No one who knocks on Grandmama's screen in the summer knocks more than three times. Most folks don't knock at all. They simply press their faces as close to the screen as possible and say, "Hey, Ms. Cat. Y'all good?"

On this summer day, Grandmama is asking who in the world is up in there banging on her door like the police.

No one in the world is banging on Grandmama's door like the police.

Outside the screen door stands an old Black man with frown lines even deeper than Grandmama's. The depth of those frown lines, the heavy hang of both lips, the creases beneath his graying eyes, give this old Black man's familiar face a symmetry I find sexy. In addition to his butter brown boots, his lean ashen body is held up in these sky-blue overalls. Tucked under his right armpit is a huge wrinkled paper sack.

And as with most of the old Black men of Forest, Mississippi, I can see the imprint of what I assume is a small .22 in his front bib pocket.

Over a supper of collard greens, black-eyed peas, and squirrel dumplings that I just refuse to eat because the squirrel in the dumpling looks just like the squirrels on her pecan trees, Grandmama tells me not to dare call this man my great-granddaddy. "Call him Albert Payton," Grandmama says right in front of his face. "That's who he always been to me. Albert. Payton."

I usually sleep in Grandmama's bed, but that night she asks me to sleep in one of the two beds in what she calls her back bedroom.

"Why I gotta sleep in the same room with that man?" I whisper to her. "I don't even know that joker. And he smell funny."

"Because I said so." Grandmama laughs. "He liable to steal everything that ain't nailed down if he don't . . ." She trails off.

"If he don't what?"

"If he don't have as many good folks watching him as he can find, if you know what I mean." Whenever Grandmama says "if you know what I mean," I always feel grown. And like most grown folks, I never ask her to clarify what she actually means. I just smirk and nod up and down super slowly.

That night, while Grandmama sleeps in the bedroom next to ours, I watch Albert Payton, lying on his back, go in the bib pocket of his overalls, and take out his gun and a bulb of cotton. I watch him place this gun and bulb of cotton on the ironing board next to his bed.

I'd never felt on cotton. I'd felt cotton on my body. I'd seen cotton a few times driving from Jackson to the Delta. But I'd never felt on cotton.

So while my grandmama's father sleeps, I get up and I grab the bulb of cotton. I gently feel the seeds. The nearly crumbling brown flower holding the actual cloud is twisted in more ways than one. I smell it. I can't smell anything. I smell it again. I smell Grandmama. But it's her house.

Over the next few days, I learn that my great-grandfather, who was a shitty father to every child he fathered, was a wizard at picking cotton. He doesn't talk, so when I ask questions, Grandmama answers them.

Why are your hands so rough?

"All that cotton."

Why do the joints in your fingers look swole?

"All that cotton."

Why don't he talk to us?

"All that cotton."

When Grandmama and her father go to bed, I look through these old encyclopedias Grandmama bought for my mama and them when they were children. I'm confused about how or when my great-grandfather could have picked cotton. I don't find much in the encyclopedias, but my mama has a book called *Slavery in the United States* by Charles Ball. She's using the book published in the 1800s to finish her dissertation on *Poverty, Politics, and Public Policy in the South*.

This is usually the kind of book Mama won't let me read because she thinks it will give me nightmares.

Ball writes,

Surely if anything can justify a man in taking his life into his own hands, and terminating his existence, no one can attach blame to the slaves on many of the cotton plantations of the south, when they cut short their breath, and the agonies of the present being, by a single stroke. What is life worth, amidst hunger, nakedness and excessive toil, under the continually up-lifted lash?

I'm not sure what he means by "cut short their breath." But I understand the question "What is life worth?"

My grandmama hates her father because of his inability to be there with her. That night I blame cotton. Even though Grandmama hates her father, she lets him in, offers him food, gives him a bed.

I blame cotton.

There is a gun and a bulb of cotton in my great-grandfather's overall bib. I don't really even notice the gun.

I blame cotton.

I ask Grandmama the next day if her father really picked cotton.

"That's the only reason he here," she says.

I don't know what she means. But I know we are in a seven-hundred-square-foot pink shotgun house surrounded by a garden we eat out of every day. I know there are a father and child in my house who were never paid fairly for work they did in houses, in chicken plants, and in cotton fields.

I blame cotton.

Thirty years later, when I drive to the University of Mississippi to accept a fellowship, I will see acres and acres of cotton on Highway 6, right down the road from where I'm supposed to stay that year.

I will accept the fellowship because of cotton.

When the land is freed, so will be all the cotton and all the money made off the suffering that white folks made cotton bring to Black folks in Mississippi and the entire South.

I go to sleep every night with a bulb of cotton on the dresser next to my bed, not because I want to remember. I will always remember. But the cotton helps me imagine. It helps me wake up. It helps me fight. It helps me realize that there are millions of ways to win. But in this country, they're all rooted in Black bodies, Black deaths, Black imaginations, Black families.

And cotton.

1809-1814

THE LOUISIANA REBELLION

CLINT SMITH

IN WALLACE, LOUISIANA, AT THE FAR EDGE OF THE WHITNEY Plantation, between the wooden white fence demarcating ownership of the land and the red brick path leading you through it, is a plot of earth where the dark heads of fifty-five Black men sit on metal stakes, robust silver beams that push their necks toward the sky.

The heads are not real. They are ceramic renderings of a violent past, but from a distance the human likeness is so unsettling that you need to get closer just to be sure. In the warmer months, gnats and flies swarm around them, while wasps begin nesting on the underside of their open necks. The bugs hum together around the decapitated figurines like an army of small drones. The area beneath the rows of heads is an interspersing of brown and red mulch, creating the illusion that the land beneath these skulls is, similar to the faces, covered in dry blood. Each of the faces is nameless, with the exception of the ten that rest at the front. Mathurin. Cook. Gilbert. Amar. Lindor. Joseph. Dagobert. Komina. Hippolite. Charles. These were the leaders of the largest slave rebellion in American history. These were the people who decided that enough was enough.

On a rainy southern Louisiana evening in January 1811, Charles Deslondes, a mixed-race slave driver, led the rebellion.

Composed of hundreds of people, Deslondes's army advanced along the serpentine path of southern Louisiana's River Road to New Orleans with a military discipline that surprised many of its adversaries. It is remarkable to consider that hundreds of enslaved people—

people who came from different countries, with different native languages, who had different tribal affiliations—were able to organize themselves as effectively as they did. The layered cacophony of their languages merged together into a single organized voice.

On the German Coast of Louisiana—named for the German immigrants who settled there—where the rebellion was taking place, roughly 60 percent of the total population was enslaved. The fear of armed insurrection had long been in the air.

That fear escalated over the course of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), in which Haitian slaves rose up against the French to create the first Black-led republic in the world. The successful uprising had both political and social import. The French army was defeated so badly—80 percent of the soldiers sent to the island died—that Napoleon, looking to cut his losses and refocus his attention on his military battles in Europe, sold the entire Louisiana territory to Thomas Jefferson's negotiators for a paltry \$15 million, about four cents an acre. Without the success of the Haitian Revolution, Napoleon would not likely have sold a landmass that doubled the size of the then-United States. Jefferson was simply looking to purchase New Orleans in order to gain access to the heart of the Mississippi River. For enslaved people throughout the rest of the New World, the victory in Haiti served as inspiration for what was possible.

Even William C. C. Claiborne, the governor of the territory that would become the state of Louisiana in 1812, wanted the territory to stop importing enslaved people from Haiti, fearing that some of them might have taken part in the Haitian Revolution. He didn't want to run the risk of bringing that revolutionary ideology to his state. In 1804 he wrote to then-Secretary of State James Madison to share his concern. "At present I am well assured, there is nothing to fear either from the Mulatto or Negro population," he began, attempting to assuage any immediate fears the president may have had, "but at some future period, this quarter of Union must (I fear) experience in some degree the Misfortunes of St. Domingue [Haiti], and that period will be hastened if the people should be indulged by Congress with a continuance of the African trade." Claiborne said that he would attempt

"to prevent the bringing in, of slaves that have been concerned in the insurrections of St. Domingo."

As the men marched along the bends of the river—drums rumbling, flags held high above their heads—they attacked several plantations with an assortment of knives, machetes, muskets, and other scavenged weapons, killing white men and destroying property in their wake. The groundwork for the uprising had been laid for several months through careful and secretive planning, the planners even using code language so as not to tip off anyone unsympathetic to their cause. At first, the surprise held. The farther along the river they marched, the more men joined and the more weapons they were able to accrue. They wielded clubs and farm tools and the knives that they used to slice sugarcane in the fields. Still, not all the enslaved fighters had guns, and because of that, it would take only a small number of armed troops to put them down. And ultimately that was what happened.

Within forty-eight hours, local militia and federal troops suppressed the rebellion. Many of the rebels were slaughtered on site, decapitated and their heads posted on stakes that lined the levee as a warning to other enslaved people that this was the price of rebellion. Naval officer Samuel Hambleton wrote: "They were brung here for the sake of their Heads, which decorate our Levee, all the way up the coast. I am told they look like crows sitting on long poles."

Deslondes briefly escaped the initial wave of slaughter by hiding in the swamp, but he was quickly captured and executed—his hands were chopped off, the femur bone in his leg was shattered by bullets, and he was burned atop a bale of straw.

Compared to other rebellions, like those of Nat Turner and John Brown, the 1811 slave revolt has received little historical attention. There are no notes of what was said between the co-conspirators, little that gives us insight into what Charles may have been thinking. But what is undoubtedly true is that each of the people assembled that evening knew the risk of their involvement.

In the immediate aftermath of the uprising, now that slave owners' worst fears had come to fruition, the backlash was brutal. Alarmed

slaveholders in Louisiana invested resources in training local militia, and slave patrols began surveying slave quarters with increasing frequency and violence. Commodore John Shaw captured the planters' sense of fear that pushed them to respond with such violence against those who participated in the insurrection, and make them an example to the larger enslaved population: "Had not the most prompt and energetic measures been thus taken, the whole coast would have exhibited a general sense of devastation; every description of property would have been consumed; and the country laid waste by Rioters."

Meanwhile, the federal government committed to defending the institution of slavery by officially granting Louisiana statehood, as a slave state, in 1812. Louisiana remained a state until 1861, when it seceded from the Union. In a speech at the time, Louisiana's commissioner made the state's priorities clear: "Louisiana looks to the formation of a Southern confederacy to preserve the blessings of African slavery."

My mind wanders back to the exhibit in front of me. I look at Charles's floating head and imagine the smell of his charred flesh lacing the air, the cackle of dissolving skin melting into the earth. The wind blows, and I can almost taste the mingling of burned flesh and scorched soil, the mix of sweat and swamp water that lathered his body before he was captured by the bloodhounds who chased him down. I look at the rest of the bodiless figurines, observing the ridges in their tortured faces and adjusting my feet along the uneven brick path to find comfort where none would be found.

1814-1819

QUEER SEXUALITY

RAQUEL WILLIS

TO BE BLACK AND TO BE A GENDER OR SEXUAL MINORITY IS to carry a mixture of identities that have been chronicled historically in a piecemeal manner. This makes it difficult to acquire records that clearly reveal the existence of queer identities and experiences in the United States during the nineteenth century. After all, terms like *gay*, *lesbian*, *bisexual*, *transgender*, and *queer* did not exist then or weren't being used in the manner they are used today.

But by examining the history of queerness in West and Central Africa, uncovering the dominant cisgender and heterosexual mores of the time (and why that social order needed to be maintained), and exploring the concepts of fugitivity and surveillance, we can surmise a great deal about queer Blackness during this era.

First, in attempting to uncover the lives of Black queer folks in the 1810s, we must look to the origin cultures of their groups. Between 1720 and 1770, while the North American colonies received shipments of enslaved Africans from at least eight coastal regions of the continent, at least 60 percent came from West and Central Africa. Another snapshot figure of shipments of enslaved Africans from the first decade of the nineteenth century reveals that at least 35 percent were still coming from West and Central Africa. In examining the existence of queer behaviors and identities in these African regions, we may find that early examples of Black queerness were also imported into the United States.

As Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe assert, "African homo-

sexuality is neither random nor incidental—it is a consistent and logical feature of African societies and belief systems.” Going further, they share documentation, from as early as the 1600s to the early twentieth century, of what by today’s standards Western cultures would refer to as queerness. In West Africa, there was the traditionally feminine dress and sexual behavior of young men of Sudan’s Mossi tribe’s royal court, and homosexual behavior among enslaved millet farmers in present-day Mali. The Dagara society of southern Burkina Faso had a role for gender-nonconforming mediation. Homosexual behaviors are documented within both Hausa and Yoruba communities, and interviews and local lore describe multigendered societal roles and sexually fluid behaviors in Central Africa, especially in present-day Congo and Sudan.

Even with limited documentation of their potential origin cultures and the cultural aspects that later evolved in the same regions, enslaved Africans could have brought hidden alternative gender and sexual behaviors and identities with them to the United States. In the absence of first-person accounts from the antebellum period, it may be useful to employ the approach of historians like Daina Ramey Berry and Leslie M. Harris: examining runaway advertisements for evidence of how enslaved people’s intimate relationships thrived and survived. They also offer a definition of sexuality to ground their understanding of it: “the range of emotional and physical practices that have grown up around human reproduction and non-reproductive intimate expression, practices rooted in cultural beliefs and reflective and expressive of love but also of oppressive power.”

Berry and Harris’s volume emphasizes the importance of the documentation of enslaved people running away from their enslaved circumstances, as a viable means to preserve relationships and “evade capture and to subvert capitalistic control over their bodies.” Those who ran away employed other methods, such as masquerading as a different class or even as another person, to evade capture. In the *Raleigh Register*’s September 9, 1814, issue, an enslaver, Laurence Battle, shared that an enslaved man he owned named Spencer had the “intention to pass for a free man, and may perhaps change his clothes

and alter his name; and may have procured from some villain a free pass.” Historian Sharon Block deduces that this method could be used by runaways to “transcend their laboring status” and more freely navigate society undetected.

Runaway advertisements are not the only sources that offer a glimpse into the lives of enslaved fugitives, and by proxy, gender and sexual minorities whose status would have been criminalized in American society. However, most documentation of these individuals deemed society’s undesirables would have been connected to attempts to reprimand them punitively. “One of the unfortunate things is that a lot of the ways queer and trans bodies appear in the archives is through surveillance and moments of institutional crisis due to their identities,” said Jessica Marie Johnson, a Johns Hopkins University historian. Run-ins with the law offer some of the few markers of their lives.

There are other instances of gender-nonconforming figures during the nineteenth century. On June 11, 1836, Mary Jones (also known as Peter Sewally) testified in court after being arrested for stealing one of her sex work clients’ wallet and money. She testified:

I have been in the practice of waiting upon Girls of ill fame and made up their Beds and received the Company at the door and received the money for rooms and they induced me to dress in Women’s Clothes, saying I looked so much better in them and I have always attended parties among the people of my own Colour dressed in this way—and in New Orleans I always dressed in this way.

“Folks like Mary Waters, Mary Jones, and Thomasina Hall come up in court records in explosions of conversations that fixate on their gender and race,” Johnson says. “It’s probably one of the biggest similarities we have in how women of color are treated now, especially being policed, scrutinized, surveilled, and possibly not given justice in court. That’s a legacy of an earlier preoccupation.”

The existence of queer behaviors and modes of expression, and the

larger white society's need to police these expressions by Black gender and sexual minorities, have long existed on this soil. As Johnson explains, "Policing gender, race, and the boundaries of these things has always been the work of creating laborers, separating communities and people from their humanity. A lot of categories we're dealing with in present-day are legacies of that period."

1819-1824

DENMARK VESEY

ROBERT JONES, JR.

RAPPER KANYE WEST, WHO EMERGED AN ADMIRER OF DONALD Trump, once suggested that slavery was a choice. From his limited understanding of history, he attempted to convey the idea that Black people never resisted their enslavers. As such, the subjugation of enslaved people was the fault of the subjugated who failed to resist.

Clearly, West was unfamiliar with the story of Denmark Vesey, who planned a powerful insurrection in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1822.

Enslaved until he purchased his freedom from lottery winnings (which did not, however, permit him to purchase the freedom of his wife and children), Vesey initially lived quietly as a carpenter around whom white people felt safe. So safe, in fact, that he rented or owned a house in the heart of Charleston only a few blocks away from the mayor and the governor. He gathered with other Blacks at his residence to plot the overthrow of slavery.

In 1800 Vesey, at about thirty-three, must have noticed that Black people made up over 77 percent of the population of Charleston. It was the Blackest city in the country—and one of the most heavily policed. It seems that wherever the Black body is present, whether in solitary or in a multitude, whites feel threatened, perhaps by the ghosts of their own sins for which they have never atoned.

Given the size of their majority, it is not difficult to determine why Vesey imagined that he, along with the rest of the Black population, could overthrow the city. He planned to raid the banks and artillery

17

storages and leave almost every one of its white citizens, young and old, massacred in the streets, then escape to Haiti. The Haitian Revolution must have inspired Vesey's plans since he had once been enslaved on the island to work the sugarcane fields. Smartly, he had faked an epileptic seizure to get out of doing such drudgery and had been brought to Charleston.

For Vesey, Blackness was a unifier that superseded geography. Seeking a community of radical Black spirit, he joined the new African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, founded in 1817 in Charleston. But in 1818, the city shut it down because the whites feared Black people congregating and discovering that their lot was in fact neither ordained nor written in the sky. However, by then it was too late. Vesey had already found among its clergy and believers kindred spirits. For this was a moment when the Black church could be relied upon as a site of revolutionary, liberatory action rather than for what it has more recently been known: respectability, docility, anti-queerness, and greed—a shadow version of whiteness.

A brutally anti-Black city, despite its Black majority, Charleston was home to the Work House, a former sugar factory that had been converted into a torture chamber for Black people. Charleston must have shown Vesey the same untold cruelties that all Black America would witness in 2015 when one Dylann Storm Roof, after being welcomed into the open arms of the congregation of Charleston's Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, opened fire and murdered nine of them in the middle of prayer.

Vesey made it clear to all his lieutenants that they were to recruit to his army only Black people who loved Black people, not those striving to be white. He was distrustful of Charleston's biracial population, particularly the bourgeois class, whom he saw as having, at best, split loyalties. (However, he did recruit at least three biracial men into his army.) What he achieved in terms of organization is remarkable: he recruited as many as nine thousand Black people under the single banner of their own liberation, willing to risk life and limb to attain the dignity afforded to horseflies but denied to them.

What must have stung no less acutely than a lash from the whip, however, was that Vesey's meticulous strategies were undone by other

Black people. As much as by the superior military strength and numbers of the white opposing force, the possibility of Black liberation is often undermined by Black people who have been so successfully indoctrinated by white supremacist principles that the idea of mass Black freedom is threatening or, worse, unimaginable. What motivated these men (alarming, there is no record of any women being recruited either to aid in the rebellion or to undermine it, though they must have certainly played a significant role) to act on behalf of white masters to determine the specifics of the uprising can only be guessed at, but chief among the likely causes are cowardice and pragmatism. That they were scared was obvious; of what, however, deserves more consideration.

From these men, long dead, we will never have definitive answers. But perhaps answers can be found in questioning contemporary figures like Kanye West, U.S. Supreme Court justice Clarence Thomas, former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice, attorney Larry Elder, political commentator Candace Owens, or any other Black person whose actions are direct descendants of the same fealty to racist systems that undid Vesey and company's chances at achieving humanity.

Vesey's strategy was gruesome by necessity, yet it paled in comparison to the infinite horrors enacted by all who participated in the capture, transport, enslavement, abuse, rape, disfigurement, and murder of Black people during the enterprise known as antebellum slavery. Upon being betrayed, in the summer of 1822 Vesey and thirty-nine of his followers were executed by hanging. All transcripts of the trials were ordered destroyed by the judges (though at least one copy, discovered accidentally, survived the purge) for fear that it might inspire Black people to engage heartily in their human right to self-defense.

The Black people who attended the public executions to witness and give their respects were threatened with arrest and flogging if they dared to show any public sign of mourning. Their docility and acquiescence, however phony, were made mandatory so as to assure the white populace of Charleston, and the entire United States, that all the power still rested in white hands, and that despite the cruelties enacted upon them, Black people had nothing but boundless love in their hearts for white people. This myth of Black docility, alongside a

gut-level fear of a Black uprising, is the American empire's motivation for enforcing supplication through unjust laws, sealing a social contract that punishes the wretched for daring to recognize their own dignity, and rewarding them for conceding to the pretense of the empire's innocence. The only peace to be had is through thorough capitulation and assimilation. These are the principles upon which bigotry is built.

However, as Vesey surely understood, the enslaver's morality should not be the morality of the enslaved. If it is wrong to enslave, then it is right to free oneself from enslavement. The means by which that freedom is achieved is above moral speculation, with one exception: once attained, one must remember: Wash the blood from the hands. Never turn the (t)error inward. Discontinue the abject failures of humanity that lead one to regard other people as property, lest the cycle begin again, this time with the blade pointed at one's own throat.

1824-1829

FREEDOM'S JOURNAL

PAMELA NEWKIRK



FOR A QUARTER OF A CENTURY, I HAVE TAUGHT A COURSE that surveys media portrayals of marginalized groups, including racial, ethnic, and religious minorities and the LGBTQI population, in film, on television, and in the popular press. Each year the course begins with an examination of *Freedom's Journal* (1827-1829). It was America's first African American-owned and -operated newspaper and, from its New York City office, it unflinchingly challenged demeaning depictions of Black people in the press. "We wish to plead our own cause," the editors proclaimed in their first editorial on March 16, 1827. "Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the publick been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us dearly. Our vices and our degradation are ever arrayed against us, but our Virtues are passed by unnoticed. From the press and the pulpit we have suffered much by being incorrectly represented."

This editorial was penned by founding editors John B. Russwurm, who a year earlier had become the first African American graduate of Bowdoin College, and Samuel E. Cornish, an abolitionist and freedman who organized New York City's first Black Presbyterian congregation. Their critique came just fifteen weeks before New York State, on July 4, effectively emancipated enslaved Blacks, and nearly four decades before the Emancipation Proclamation, followed by the Thirteenth Amendment, commenced the journey to an uncertain freedom for others.

In cataloging the derisive and destructive portrayals of Africans

and their descendants, the editors extended their critique to progressive whites. "Men whom we equally love and admire have not hesitated to represent us disadvantageously, without becoming personally acquainted with the true state of things, nor discerning between virtue and vice among us.

"And what is still more lamentable," they added, "our friends, to whom we concede all the principles of humanity and religion, from these very causes seem to have fallen into the current of popular feeling and are imperceptibly floating on the stream—actually living in the practice of prejudice, while they abjure it in theory and feel it not in their hearts." From their Lower Manhattan office at 236 Church Street, the editors hoped to "arrest the progress of prejudice" while shielding Africans and their descendants from its wrath.

For two years the newspaper reached African Americans in eleven northern states and the District of Columbia, and it circulated as far away as Haiti, Europe, and Canada. It inspired the publication of two dozen other Black newspapers before the Civil War. Every year I hope my twenty-first-century New York University students will see the nearly two-hundred-year-old paper as little more than a significant relic of a dystopian past. However, the critique leveled in that first editorial still resonates for them. In their case studies of contemporary media portrayals, they continue to find glaring patterns of bias in the pervasive depictions of African Americans, which reserve extra scorn for Black men.

Whether analyzing news coverage in some of the nation's most respected newspapers and magazines, or depictions of Blacks in film and on television, my students find that African Americans are too often relegated to narratives related to crime, sports, and pathology. For far too many Americans, these depictions are more authentic renderings of African American life than are the daily strivings of the actual people who evade detection: the ordinary and extraordinary fathers, brothers, mothers, and sisters who languish on the margins. It's unlikely that the average African American is cognizant of the extent to which these portrayals shape and misshape the contours of their own lives: how the preponderance of stereotypes in film, crime shows, news stories, and music videos reduces them to specters whose

walking, driving, or standing can result in a store clerk's surveillance or a fatal encounter with police. And these images have gone far to sustain a rigid racial caste system resulting in the overpolicing and the mass incarceration of Black and Brown men, as well as a culture of exclusion in many of the most influential fields.

Despite the major strides African Americans have made since Russwurm and Cornish's day, they remain disproportionately underrepresented in practically every influential field, including journalism: between 2002 and 2015, the number of Black journalists in mainstream newspapers actually declined from 2,951 to 1,560.

In radio, people of color, while comprising roughly 39 percent of the population, held just 14.5 percent of newsroom jobs and were only 7.2 percent of general managers and 8.2 percent of news directors, according to the 2019 annual survey conducted by the Radio Television Digital News Association. In television, people of color held about 22.8 percent of newsroom jobs at network affiliates, and were just 7.4 percent of general managers and 13.4 percent of news directors. African Americans, at 12 percent of the news staff, had achieved near proportional representation but were only 5.4 percent of news directors, down from 6.7 percent in 2018.

Meanwhile the Black press, once a staple of African American life, has become as marginalized as those it had sought to represent. As mainstream media prominently covered the civil rights movement, the reliance on Black newspapers waned. The circulation of leading newspapers including *The Chicago Defender*, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, and *The Baltimore Afro-American* peaked in 1945 at 257,000, 202,000, and 137,000, respectively, but by 1970 it stood at just 33,000, 20,000, and 33,000. While unfiltered Black voices can still be found offline and online in *Essence*, *The Root*, and the sprinkling of African American newspapers around the country, the centuries-long struggle to sustain a free Black press continues.

In 2019 the iconic *Ebony* magazine was compelled to sell its historically significant archives in a bankruptcy auction. Black Entertainment Television, founded by Robert L. Johnson, once featured news and politically oriented programming along with music videos and entertainment. However, in 2002 it shifted its focus to entertain-

ment, and in 2005, the year it was sold to Viacom, it canceled its nightly news show. Like a number of other Black-interest outlets, it is no longer Black-owned and has drawn criticism for its programming.

Despite the fanfare over the occasional triumphs, Black voices—like those of other people of color—remain muted in film. *Hollywood Diversity Report: Five Years of Progress and Missed Opportunities*, a 2018 study conducted by UCLA, found that in the top two hundred theatrical releases in 2016, people of color comprised just 8 percent of screenwriters and 12.6 percent of directors.

Moreover, the kind of stereotypes condemned in *Freedom's Journal* persist. A study by the University of Southern California's Viterbi School of Engineering used artificial intelligence to analyze one thousand recent films and found that many continued to reinforce stereotypes of racial minorities, with African American characters more likely to curse.

Given the critical issues facing African Americans—including a starkly unjust criminal justice system and persistent racial disparities detected on practically every social indicator—it is clear that Black people still need to plead our own cause. While in recent decades the luster of the Black press has faded, the legacy of *Freedom's Journal* can be glimpsed in the unbridled voices found on social media; in some Black-owned or -operated outlets; and in the cracks and crevices of mass media. The continuing quest by Black journalists to depict the breadth of the African American experience and to combat injustice recalls the audaciousness and valor of the trailblazing founders of *Freedom's Journal*.

1829-1834

MARIA STEWART

KATHRYN SOPHIA BELLE

I WAS FIRST INTRODUCED TO MARIA W. STEWART (1803-79) as a student at Spelman College in a feminist theory course brilliantly taught by Beverly Guy-Sheftall. The primary text for the course—Sheftall's classic edited collection, *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought* (1995)—begins with Stewart. Perhaps for this reason, she has always stood out to me as a foundational Black feminist and philosophical figure. Stewart offers what I have termed proto-intersectionality—an early Black feminist articulation of intersecting identities and oppressions along the lines of race, gender, and class.

Stewart was born free in Connecticut, orphaned at five years old, and worked as a servant for a minister in her youth. She later worked as a teacher in New York, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C., where she also served as a matron of the Freeman's Hospital. She became a prominent speaker and writer—though that was short-lived due to racism and sexism. Nevertheless, several of her essays and speeches were published in *The Liberator*, and she self-published two edited collections of her written works. She created her own legacy through her speeches, writings, and activism against race and gender oppression. But in the historical record, she is often presented through the lens of her relationships with prominent men: as the widow of James W. Stewart, a friend of David Walker, a correspondent of Alexander Crummell, and a friend and professional affiliate of William Lloyd Garrison.

Stewart has been identified as the first woman in the United States to speak publicly to an audience composed of men and women, and also as America's first Black woman political writer. Her speech in September 1832 was organized by the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of Boston. It was a time when "women did not speak in public," as Paula Giddings explains, "especially on serious issues like civil rights, and most especially, feminism." And they especially did not speak publicly before a "promiscuous" audience of both men and women.

Beyond the significance of this historic first, Marilyn Richardson argues, "Her original synthesis of religious, abolitionist, and feminist concerns places her squarely in the forefront of black female activist and literary tradition only now beginning to be acknowledged as of integral significance to the understanding of the history of black thought and culture in America." Richardson also describes Stewart as offering a "triple consciousness, as she demonstrates the creative struggle of a woman attempting to establish both a literary voice and an historical mirror for her experience as 'an American, a Negro,' and a woman."

Stewart made her public appearances, speeches, and writings during the time of the Second Great Awakening, the Nat Turner Revolt, and intense debates about slavery—from more militant abolitionism (as expressed in William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*, for example) to concerted efforts for the colonization or repatriation of free Black people to Africa by the American Colonization Society. *The Liberator* published several of Stewart's writings, including "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, The Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build" (October 8, 1831); "An Address Delivered Before the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society of America" (April 28, 1832); "Cause for Encouragement: Composed upon Hearing the Editors' Account of the Late Convention in Philadelphia" (letter to the editor, July 14, 1832); "Lecture Delivered at the Franklin Hall" (speech delivered September 21, 1832); "An Address Delivered at the African Masonic Hall" (March 2, 1833; speech delivered February 27); and "Mrs. Stewart's Farewell Address to Her Friends in the City of Boston" (September 21, 1833).

These writings shed light on her proto-intersectional ideas. In her 1831 pamphlet "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, The Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build," Stewart critiqued both the prevailing racist assumption that Blacks were an inferior race and the sexist paternalism of men, all while calling on Black women to have more agency. She named race, gender, and class oppression in the form of economic exploitation of the labor of the "fair daughters of Africa." She admonished Black women to wake up, rise up, and support one another through cooperative economies to gain economic independence. She considered a range of possibilities for Black women, from mothers and educators to intellectually and economically empowered contributors to the community. She called on Black women to "possess the spirit of men, bold and enterprising, fearless and undaunted. Sue for your rights and privileges. Know the reason you cannot attain them."

In 1832 Stewart delivered a lecture at Franklin Hall in Boston. She called out racial prejudice and its specific impact on Black women and girls, limiting them to servile labor and ignoring their qualities beyond that service. In her 1833 "Farewell Address to Her Friends in the City of Boston," she outlined diverse roles and expectations for women, especially Black women. Offering examples of women in the Bible as well as women from various cultures (Greek, Roman, Jewish, Ethiopian, and even "barbarous nations"), Stewart again made the case for Black women in particular to publicly demand their rights. And in her 1833 "Address Delivered at the African Masonic Hall," Stewart critiqued Black men for their "talk, without effort." The "gross neglect, on your part, causes my blood to boil within me."

Beginning with Maria W. Stewart, Black women have been offering intersectional analyses of identity and oppression since at least the early nineteenth century. In addition to her foundational insights about intersecting identities and oppressions, Stewart has also been analyzed from the perspective of her religious and theological insights and interventions, her rhetorical strategies, and her appeals to sympathetic violence.

1834-1839

THE NATIONAL NEGRO CONVENTIONS

EUGENE SCOTT

MORE THAN 150 YEARS AFTER BLACK AMERICANS EXPERIENCED the first tastes of freedom, a question still dominates the minds of those deeply invested in the fate of the descendants of the enslaved: what does it mean to be Black and free in the United States? Throughout the history of Black America, the media have played a significant role in finding answers to the most pressing race questions. And in many ways they continue to do so. However, in an era when many media outlets show little interest in grappling with these questions while others are simply struggling to remain viable, the ability—or willingness—of the press to replicate what it was once so effective at doing is concerning.

Since Black people first arrived in what would become the United States, freedom was without question their greatest desire. And that continued to be the case in those decades leading up to the abolition of slavery, even as attempts at emancipation became more frequent. But exactly what emancipation would look like for Black Americans was still unclear and debatable. While some Black thinkers and abolitionists entertained ideas of citizenship, others believed that formerly enslaved people could never be treated equally and with respect, so they advocated for racial separatism or emigration to the Caribbean or western Africa. Activists grappled with these ideas publicly and privately, but there was a need for a robust gathering where the leaders of the time could discuss the future of Black people. In 1834

those of great influence who were concerned with the state—and fate—of Black people in America congregated to find answers at National Negro Conventions, gatherings aimed at moving America toward abolition at the very least, in the hope that the formerly enslaved would command a more respected standing in the country and across the globe.

In the decades leading up to the Civil War, the question of what it meant to be Black in the United States was largely obvious but still diverse in its answer. In 1830, of the nearly 13 million people in the United States, 2 million were enslaved. This large ratio, combined with an increase in slave rebellions, like those led by Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey, had white enslavers on edge, as they realized that aggressive fights for freedom by the enslaved would become more frequent—and more violent—until freedom was granted. Although these rebellions often ended tragically, they gave many Black people hope. The desire for freedom spread across slave states, as some former slaves successfully reached the temporary promised land: free states. During this time the population of free Black Americans, particularly in the northern and western United States, was growing. However, most Black Americans remained enslaved, leading those who were experiencing freedom—and the white people who supported them—to increase their attention to arriving to the place where all were free. Freedom from slavery was certainly the initial goal for Black people. But as the movement to eradicate slavery grew, a new question arose: what would it mean to be Black in a postslavery America?

During the late 1830s, Black thought leaders, businesspeople, clergy, and many of their white counterparts gathered to answer this burgeoning question at the National Negro Conventions, events whose popularity was made known mainly through the efforts of the press. Two specific publications—*Freedom's Journal*, the country's first Black newspaper, and *The Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper founded by William Lloyd Garrison—played major roles in gathering Black leaders from across the nation to answer this fundamental question while also seeking solutions for more complex ones. These publications, by elevating the National Negro Conventions, allowed

Black people and abolitionists to form networks to move America toward freeing—and advancing the lives of—enslaved people, with a level of urgency and efficiency that was previously unseen. Without them, influential minds could hardly have gathered to develop the strategies required for Black people to receive the justice they had long been denied. This model would be replicated decades later, when the Black press played an influential role in pointing leaders in the Black community (and those who supported them) toward the NAACP's national conventions; the National Urban League's State of Black America; and other events aimed at zeroing in on the most pressing issues facing Black Americans.

One of the most significant contributions of the National Negro Conventions was their vision to encourage the continued gathering of those who cared about the future of Black people in the United States and beyond. Those in attendance gave much attention to the freeing of Black people, but they also recognized that there were issues plaguing the Black community beyond the need for emancipation. They gave significant attention to topics related to the global fate of Black people and internal conflicts within the Black community related to gender and even diversity of political thought. For them, freedom for Black people went beyond freedom from slavery. It also meant having their humanity acknowledged and having the ability to live their lives to the fullest.

The meaning of freedom pertaining to Black people is a question much older than the United States. Quests to determine and experience a free life for Black Americans reach back to the earliest colonial settlements. Yet centuries later, de facto segregation continues, mass incarceration remains prevalent, and significant gaps between the lived experiences of Black and white people in health, education, and wealth persist. The question remains prevalent today and in many ways has taken on deeper significance. Although slavery has been legally abolished, freedom for many Black Americans seems like a far cry from the vision of freedom described by the founders in the Constitution.

1839-1844

RACIAL PASSING

ALLYSON HOBBS

OCTOBER 4, 1842

GEORGE LATIMER AND HIS PREGNANT WIFE, REBECCA, MADE a desperate leap for liberty. They escaped from Norfolk, Virginia, hiding in the hold of a ship for nine hours. They stole away to Baltimore, then to Philadelphia, before arriving in Boston.

Four days after Latimer's escape, Latimer's owner, James Gray, described Latimer's complexion as "a bright yellow" in an advertisement. Latimer was able to pass as white, so he "travelled as a gentleman" while his wife traveled as his servant. While boarding the ship in Norfolk, Latimer walked by a man he knew. He quickly pulled his Quaker hat over his eyes, entered the first-class cabin, and was not recognized.

In antebellum America, runaway slaves wore white skin like a cloak. Racial ambiguity, appropriate dress—Latimer's Quaker hat, for instance—and proper comportment could mask one's enslaved status and provide a strategy for escape. Once Latimer was seated in the first-class cabin, it would have been impolite for a passenger or a conductor to question his racial identity.

Tactical or strategic passing—passing temporarily with a particular purpose in mind—was born out of a dogged desire for freedom. In later historical periods, this type of passing would allow racially ambiguous men and women to access employment opportunities, to travel without humiliation, and to attend elite colleges. In the ante-

bellum period, passing was connected to a larger struggle and to strivings for freedom.

The countless men and women who passed successfully demonstrate that even in the most totalizing systems, there is always some slack. Passing was an expedient means of securing one's freedom, and in its broadest formulation, it became a crucial channel through which African Americans called for the recognition of their humanity. The desperate acts of enslaved men and women were not freighted with the internal conflicts, tensions, or moral angst of other historical periods. Surrounded by loss, enslaved people were motivated by a desire to be reunited with their families, not to leave them behind. Many runaway slaves neither imagined nor desired to begin new lives as white. They simply wanted to be free.

Latimer had been beaten severely while he was enslaved, sometimes in front of his wife. When he was returning from the market with Rebecca, his owner struck him with a stick across his jaw, bruising his skin. His owner followed Latimer to a store, where he hit him with a stick nearly twenty times. Latimer said that if he were captured, he expected to be "beaten and whipped 39 lashes, and perhaps to be washed in pickle afterwards."

"We all know on a certain, almost intuitive level that violence is inseparable from slavery," historian Nell Painter has written. "We readily acknowledge the existence of certain conventions associated with slavery: the use of physical violence to make slaves obedient and submissive, the unquestioned right of owners to use people they owned in whatever ways they wished."

Shortly after Latimer and his wife reached Boston, James Gray arrived in the city and had Latimer arrested on a charge of larceny. Nearly three hundred Black men gathered around the courthouse to prevent Latimer from being returned to Gray, who planned to send Latimer back to Virginia. A chaotic meeting in Faneuil Hall roused public sympathy for Latimer and sharpened abolitionists' demands for legislation to protect fugitive slaves.

Latimer's escape took place in 1842, the same year as *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*. This decision allowed states to forbid officials from cooperating with federal legislation like the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, which

guaranteed slave owners the right to recover runaway slaves. The *Prigg* decision was later overturned by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which required free states to support the capture and delivery of fugitive slaves, even if it meant deputizing local law enforcement.

In November 1842, Latimer's supporters in Boston founded a newspaper, the *Latimer Journal and North Star*. With a circulation of twenty thousand, the *Journal* sought to raise public support for fugitive slaves among antislavery Bostonians. In an interview, an editor asked Latimer if he had ever led Gray or anyone else to believe that he wanted to return to Norfolk. "No, never," Latimer declared. "I would rather die than go back." James Gray tried to get Latimer to return willingly, to avoid all the trouble and the chaos created by the meeting in Faneuil Hall. Gray promised to "serve [Latimer] well." Latimer turned his back on Gray and stated bluntly: "Mr. Gray, when you get me back to Norfolk you may kill me."

What about Rebecca? We know very little about her besides what was published in an advertisement after she escaped:

RANAWAY from the subscriber last evening, negro Woman REBECCA, in company (as is supposed) with her husband, George Latimer, belonging to Mr. James B. Gray, of this place. She is about 20 years of age, dark mulatto or copper colored, good countenance, bland voice and self-possessed and easy in her manners when addressed.—She was married in February last [1842] and at this time obviously enceinte [pregnant]. She will in all probability endeavor to reach some one of the free States. All persons are hereby cautioned against harboring said slave, and masters of vessels from carrying her from this port. The above reward [\$50] will be paid upon delivery to Mary D. Sayer.

Rebecca must have ached for freedom just as desperately as her husband did, not only for herself but also for the unborn child that she carried on their perilous journey.

Who was Mary D. Sayer? Did she own Rebecca? Perhaps her husband did. Her status as a white woman may have depended on

25

Rebecca's labor. Perhaps Sayer stood high on the social ladder (but never at the top, a space occupied exclusively by white men). She lived with the discomfort of knowing that, as Painter explains, white men had unfettered sexual access to all women and saw "women—whether slave or free, wealthy or impoverished, cultured or untutored, black or white—as interchangeable." There was nothing that Mary Sayer could do to prevent her husband from sleeping with enslaved women, who in turn were forced to be readily available sexual partners.

On November 18, 1842, Latimer was finally manumitted for \$400 and could not be returned to Virginia. In 1843 approximately sixty-five thousand residents signed a petition, which led to passage of the "Latimer Law," a liberty law that (1) prevented state officials from assisting in the arrest of fugitive slaves, (2) forbade the use of jails to detain fugitive slaves, and (3) formally separated Massachusetts residents from any connection with slavery. Judges, justices of the peace, and other state officers could not legally assist in the arrest of any fugitive slave.

In an autobiographical sketch published in the same year as the Latimer Law, Latimer wrote that he had always imagined running away, even as a child. He would roll up his sleeve and wonder, "Can this flesh belong to any man as horses do?"

We can only imagine the conversation that George and Rebecca Latimer shared as they lay in the hold of the ship for nine hours during their flight from Norfolk. Maybe they pictured their lives as free people. Maybe they talked about their dreams for their child and touched Rebecca's growing stomach. Maybe they worried that George's disguise as a white man might fail. Maybe they did not speak a word to each other. What we do know is that these two souls believed deeply in their humanity, and that they risked everything for it to be recognized.

26

1844-1849

JAMES MCCUNE SMITH, M.D.

HARRIET A. WASHINGTON

The Negro "with us" is not an actual physical being of flesh and bones and blood, but a hideous monster of the mind, ugly beyond all physical portraying . . . that haunts with grim presence the precincts of this republic, shaking his gory locks over legislative halls and family prayers.

—JAMES MCCUNE SMITH, M.D.

THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW BEGAN ITS 2020-21 ACADEMIC year with the unveiling of the £90.6 million James McCune Smith Learning Hub. This steel-and-glass shrine to modernity also celebrates the past, because it is named for one of the institution's most revered alumni—James McCune Smith, M.D. (1813-65), who graduated as valedictorian of the medical school in 1837.

Today thirty annual university scholarships and the annual James McCune Smith Memorial Lecture bear his name, as do signs in Glasgow's historic "slave walk." The McCune Smith Café offers Scottish delicacies, an "anticolonialist menu," and African coffees on the site of his former Duke Street home.

But in New York City, this Renaissance man—erudite classicist, writer, abolitionist, apothecary, and statistician who was also the first African American to be awarded a formal medical degree—is all but forgotten.

He was born to a white father and an enslaved mother who later earned her freedom, as did James. He grew up in Lower Manhattan's Fourth Ward, where at the African Free School number two on Mulberry Street he earned excellent grades, achieved fluency in Greek and Latin, and displayed a rare facility for writing. He wished to attend university and study medicine, but every U.S. university to which he applied rejected him—evidence of the race-based exclusion that was widely practiced in both Northern and Southern schools, sometimes into the 1960s.

McCune Smith was, however, accepted by the elite University of Glasgow, and local abolitionist groups raised funds that enabled him to sail in 1832 to Scotland. There he earned academic laurels, assumed leadership in the Glasgow Emancipation Society, and inspired the university to eschew its significant profits from enslavement.

Yet McCune Smith was determined to return home after graduation and wield his education against American enslavement. He sailed back to New York City in May 1837.

Once ensconced in New York, McCune Smith proved far more than an incisive abolitionist who wrote for Frederick Douglass's *The North Star*. He opened a medical practice in Manhattan, established the nation's first African American apothecary, and served as the physician of the New York Colored Orphans Asylum. He married Malvina Barnet, and they started a family.

A few years into the 1840s, McCune Smith undertook a key refutation of racial pseudoscience—the U.S. Census of 1840. The “monster of the mind” to which this essay's epigraph refers was promulgated by our nation's most influential nineteenth-century scientists, including Louis Agassiz, Samuel Cartwright, Josiah Nott, and Samuel Morton. They pronounced African Americans to be acutely inferior, unintelligent, and animalistic but strong and designed for subtropical servitude. Their screeds lent the weight of medical science to proslavery arguments.

The results of the 1840 census, which by the time of McCune Smith's review in 1844 were under the ultimate control of Secretary of State John C. Calhoun, showed data on the health of both white

and Black Americans, the latter of which were divided into categories of “free” and “enslaved.” According to these data, enslaved Black Americans enjoyed much better health than free ones, particularly mental health. Free African Americans were eleven times more likely than enslaved ones to be mentally ill, he found. Enslavement was therefore beneficial, according to the census data, and freedom could prove fatal.

Except for protests by one physician, antislavery activists offered only pallid rebuttals, while McCune Smith analyzed the data and found it rife with fraud and error. He demonstrated that many of the figures were specious or invented and that by every meaningful measure, from life expectancy to disease rates to mental health, free Blacks enjoyed far superior health than the enslaved.

McCune Smith presented his detailed report to the U.S. Senate in 1844. Former president John Quincy Adams, then serving in the House of Representatives, ordered an investigation, but Calhoun, a slavery advocate and former medical student, appointed a proslavery crony who pronounced the census flawless. Thus the 1840 census was never formally corrected, and enslavement was held to be necessary for African American health.

McCune Smith continued his abolition work despite snubs. The New York Academy of Medicine refused to consider his fellowship application, a slight that was mitigated by his posthumous acceptance at my request in 2018. After the orphans' asylum was burned to the ground by rioting whites in the 1863 draft riots, he relocated his family to Williamsburg, Brooklyn, for safety. He had planned to leave New York for an academic position at Wilberforce University in Ohio but was unable to do so because of an illness.

James McCune Smith, who fought enslavement valiantly on two continents, lived to see it banned by the Thirteenth Amendment before his 1865 death.

The distortion of medicine to support nineteenth-century enslavement is more than a shameful bit of history. Contemporary research reveals a widespread belief among physicians that, for example, Blacks are impervious to pain. Bias also persists in the dramatic un-

derrepresentation of African American men among the nation's eighteen thousand medical students: they make up 6 percent of the country's population but less than 2 percent of medical students. And that number is falling: their peak year for medical school graduation was 1978.

1849-1854

OREGON

MITCHELL S. JACKSON

BACK WHEN I WAS A YOUNGIN LIVING IN PORTLAND, OREGON, almost my whole block was Black. There was the old woman across the street, whose blinds were forever cracked, the easier to spy on us juveniles and snitch to our parents or guardians. There was the lil patna Poobear, who lived a couple houses down and whose front porch could've doubled as a junkyard. There was Ms. Mary in the middle of the block, whose cherry tree was the most fertile in the land but who would chase you off her lawn with a switch should you dare to pick a single sweet orb. There were the Mayfields at the end of the block, a family with huge Doberman pinschers stalking behind a fence too short to keep them from bounding it and turning canine-petrified me into doggie grub.

In a shabby duplex across from the Mayfields lived a Native American family (foolish me, I called them Indians in those days), whose yard always featured a dismantled car on cinder blocks. Back then, us neighborhood kids would build go-carts and race them down a hill, or we would stage concerts using upturned coffee cans, or on special summer days, we would chase down the ice cream truck and cop frozen treats—ice cream sandwiches were my fave—and lounge in someone's front yard and hold tacit speed-licking contests. As far as I can recall, there was but one white person on the block, an old woman who didn't much engage with the rest of us. This was the 1980s, and my block was situated in Northeast Portland, what us denizens came to call the NEP.

The NEP was one of the few mostly Black neighborhoods in the city. Because of that fact, because I didn't venture much outside my neighborhood as a kid, and because I was ignorant of my state and city's racial history, I knew not that I was living in a white man's land, that it had been intended as one from its founding, and that Black folks had long been an unwanted presence.

The lone person, on record, to be expelled from Oregon was a fair-skinned Black man named Jacob Vanderpool, purportedly a sailor from the West Indies. Vanderpool had arrived by ship in what was then the Oregon Territory (Oregon didn't achieve statehood until 1859) and settled in Oregon City, where he opened a boardinghouse/saloon. Vanderpool must've been one helluva businessman because the following year, August 1851, a man named Theophilus Magruder, himself the owner of a hostelry, complained that Vanderpool's presence in Oregon City was a violation of the territory's exclusion law, passed in 1844.

The case went to trial later that month. Vanderpool's lawyer claimed the law violated several provisions of the U.S. Constitution, that the Oregon legislature hadn't owned the jurisdiction to create it in the first place, and also that the charge itself had not been executed properly. But strong defense be damned, the very next day, August 26, 1851, the judge ruled Vanderpool guilty of violating the exclusion law and ordered him "removed from said territory within thirty days."

Another expulsion order on Oregon's historical ledgers occurred in September 1851 and involved brothers O. B. Francis and Abner Hunt Francis, free Blacks who owned a mercantile store in downtown Portland. Abner was also an abolitionist and friend of Frederick Douglass. Historians theorize that the brothers' business and anti-slavery ties aroused the concerns of racist whites, and therefore while Abner was away, O.B. (and his wife) were ordered to leave the territory within six months. On appeal to the Oregon supreme court in September 1851, that judgment was shortened to four months. Abner, implicating himself in the expulsion, published a letter about his and his brother's plight in Douglass's newspaper, *The North Star*: "even in the so-called free territory of Oregon, the colored American citizen, though he may possess all the qualities and qualifications which make

a man a good citizen, is driven out like a beast in the forest." Fortunately for the Francis brothers, 225 local citizens signed a petition that allowed them to remain in Oregon on an exception. Though lawmakers spent beaucoup time debating said petition, in the end, they tabled it and never revisited it.

A third expulsion order targeted a man named Morris Thomas, who was married to a woman named Jane Snowdon. Like those targeted for ousting before him, he was an entrepreneur, his business a barbershop. As in the case of the Francis brothers, local citizens, 128 of them, filed a petition asking that Thomas and his family be spared expulsion.

About the time I reached the era of double-digit birthdays, folks who never had to worry one bit about being kicked out of the state or the city (most often white men in shabby suits) were roaming our neighborhood. They weren't door-to-door salesmen hawking encyclopedias or water purifiers, but door-to-door home buyers. And they were offering residents, some of them our grand- and great-grandparents, cash for abodes some had owned for decades. Those deals must've seemed sweet or else the best of an inevitable swindle, because people started selling.

By the mid-1990s, many of the neighborhood's residents were white. By the early 2000s, forget about it, almost all the families from the old neighborhood were gone, which is also to say, Northeast Portland had become what most of Portland is, what most of Oregon is, a place that nurtures whiteness. While the tactics for its whitening, for the most part, didn't involve foreclosures or blatant evictions, its transformation featured racialized expulsion nonetheless.

Though it was amended in 1849, the legal means to expel Vanderpool, the Francis brothers, and Thomas, as well as the ethos of Oregon as a white monolith, had been established in 1844 via the Oregon Territory's exclusion law. Of the numerous people responsible for the racist writ, the lion's share of onus belongs to a certain few: a Native surnamed Cockstock, a free Black man named James Saules, and white men named Elijah White and Peter Burnett.

So it goes, Saules had been beefing with Cockstock in a land dispute. In the resulting confrontation, two white men, along with

Cockstock, were killed. A few weeks later Saules was involved in another dispute, and this time he threatened a white settler that he'd incite the Natives to violence against him. For making that threat, Saules was arrested and, in time, handed over to Elijah White, an Indian subagent. White wrote a letter to the secretary of war in D.C., calling Blacks "dangerous subjects" and arguing that Saules and every other negro "ought to be transported" and their "immigration prohibited."

As one might guess, the secretary of war was the wrong contact for White to complain to. However, White's cause was soon taken up by an Oregon politician named Peter Burnett. It was Burnett who had written the 1844 exclusion law and its revision, who had proposed it to Oregon's territorial government, who had convinced the white men who composed that government to pass his racist legislation—the lone law of its kind passed by states admitted into the union.

And now, what do we have all these decades hence? The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2016 statistics (for the year 2015) note that the population of whites in the state of Oregon is 84.89 percent and the percentage of Blacks is 1.90 percent. In Portland, the figures are 77.37 percent for whites and 5.7 percent for Blacks. Compare those numbers to the 2016 national statistics, where whites comprise between 61.3 and 76.9 percent of the population depending on whether Hispanics and Latinos identifying as white are included (which is an essay in itself), and Blacks are 12.7 percent. You needn't be an analyst to glean that in my fair state, in my beloved city, my people are scant, scant by design.

As it turns out, white folks, the ones who made us scarce in the NEP and who compose a majority everywhere in Oregon, love them some ice cream just as much as my old neighborhood crew did. In the new NEP, there's a famous ice cream parlor named Salt & Straw, so famous that people sometimes line up for a block for the chance to taste its artisanal flavors. (Anyone for Mummy's Pumpkin Spice Potion, or Black Cat Licorice and Lavender, or Cinnamon Snickerdoodle?)

Back in 2015, during a street fair just a few blocks from where I grew up that now attracts thousands, a sixteen-year-old Black boy

fired a gun into a crowd, wounding two teenage boys and a twenty-five-year-old woman. Per protocol, the police taped off the crime scene. They also ordered Salt & Straw closed. One would think the would-be customers would've respected the gravity of the incident and set aside their ice cream hopes for the day. But on the contrary, before it was closed, two dozen or so more people approached the crime scene tape not to inquire about victims but to beseech the police to let them past to cop their frozen treats. Others snapped selfies using the crime scene as a backdrop, some cracking jokes about dessert-fueled motives. Others dined at restaurants just a few feet from where police searched for shell casings. It's oh so obvious to me that the people who transmuted that crime scene into a collective case of blatant, damn near parodic insouciance were reflecting the ethos of that long-ago territorial government, one set on nixing eternal the presence of my people for the supposed safety, privilege, and prosperity of a great white monolith.

1854-1859

DRED SCOTT

JOHN A. POWELL

THE MOST ELEMENTAL QUESTIONS OF AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP, democracy, and identity were ill defined and surprisingly undetermined by colonial, revolutionary, common law, and antebellum traditions. The Constitution itself, prior to 1868, failed to specify the precise nature of national citizenship, and how it was to be defined or acquired, despite the fact that in two major provisions (Article IV, Section 2, and Article III, Section 2), it extended to citizens critical protections and privileges that it denied to noncitizens. It was also not entirely clear about on what basis new territories might be admitted to the Union as states, or how the territories should be governed.

The period 1854 to 1859 crystallized disastrous answers to these questions with calamitous consequences, including Bleeding Kansas, the dissolution of the Whig Party and the formation of the Republican Party, the acrimonious debates over slavery in the territories, and the doctrine of popular sovereignty. The idea of popular sovereignty was epitomized by the Lincoln-Douglas debates and, above all, by the infamous *Dred Scott* decision, a combustible mixture that exacerbated a sectional crisis and precipitated the Civil War.

The entire tapestry of American history may contain no more singularly revealing or defining event than the infamous *Dred Scott* decision. In his Pulitzer Prize-winning book on the case, Don Fehrenbacher asserts that *Dred Scott* is "a point of illumination, casting light upon more than a century of American" law and politics that preceded it. This tells only half the story. The light of *Dred Scott* also

extends forward in time, straight through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and well into the twenty-first.

Dred Scott was, among other things, a complex, multifaceted case addressing aspects of territorial sovereignty, the constitutionality of the Missouri Compromise's prohibition of slavery above the 36° 30' latitude line, and the meaning of American citizenship. However, the case is best known for the indelible scar etched by an overreaching chief justice, Roger B. Taney. Writing on behalf of the Court, Taney held that persons of African descent—whether free or slave—were not, and could never become, citizens of the United States. Some today still embrace this claim.

To resolve the issue of whether Dred Scott and his wife and children could file suit against John Sanford for their freedom—on the basis of their sojourn in either a free state or a free territory—the Court did not have to overturn part of the Missouri Compromise or draw a race line into American citizenship. Instead, it could easily have dismissed the case on the grounds of standing. Or it could have said that Dred Scott's return to a slave state meant that the condition of slavery reattached. Or that a formerly enslaved person, who had won their freedom and became a state citizen, was also a federal citizen, as some Southern theories—under which federal citizenship was derivative of state citizenship—would suggest. Or it could have held that a freeborn African American, born a citizen of a state, was also a federal citizen.

But the Supreme Court did none of these things. Instead, it held that no person of African descent, whether born free or slave, whether manumitted or held in chains, or whether a citizen of a state or not, was a federal citizen nor could they ever become one. In so doing, Taney not only inverted the states' rights paradigm and nationalized the denial of citizenship to African descendants, stripping northern Black citizens of their federal citizenship rights, but he also denied states the ability to do anything about it.

In Taney's view, the framers of the Constitution did not intend to include members of the "enslaved African race" because they did not consider them to be members of their political community that framed that instrument. Chief Justice Taney explained his reasoning

in the harshest terms: "They had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit." Thus, persons of African descent were not members of the political community; nor could they benefit from the instruments that were formed for the benefit and protection of the (white) people of the United States; nor were they "members of the political communities in the several states."

The *Dred Scott* decision not only extended the protections of slavery nationally, but it stripped free Black citizens of free states of their federal citizenship status and rights. And it made whiteness, and white identity, the sine qua non of American national citizenship. This legacy lives with us still. Whenever restrictive immigration laws and travel bans are erected primarily against nonwhite peoples, *Dred Scott* casts its long shadow in the continuing predicate of whiteness as a condition of fitness for American citizenship.

Since citizenship is the primary distributive decision we make, and the political community defines the polity, *Dred Scott* posed a simple question: who belongs? And Chief Justice Taney's answer to that question was unequivocal. In that sense, *Dred Scott* is the fulcrum of American identity. It defines, through who is included and who is excluded, the very nature of our national and civic identity.

Since *Dred Scott* has never been formally overturned by the Supreme Court, it was left up to the political branches to do so. Virtually every instrument expanding equality has taken aim at *Dred Scott*. The Thirteenth Amendment was the first volley, limiting slavery. The next step was the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and, more directly, the Fourteenth Amendment, which defined that federal and state citizenship are acquired by birthright citizenship, by being born or naturalized in the United States. It extended critical protections to those citizens (and all persons) with the equal protection clause, the due process clause, and the privileges and immunities clause, among others.

But in truth, the overturning of *Dred Scott* is an ongoing and in-

complete project. The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which ended national quotas on immigration, and the Twenty-fourth Amendment, which banned poll taxes as a condition of voting, are also part of that project. Every effort to extend equality into the heart of American citizenship, to erase the race line drawn by Chief Justice Taney, and to enlarge the "we" who belong to the American project continues the work of overturning *Dred Scott*.

Also implicated is the extent to which these questions can be left to democratic majorities or even empowered pluralities. Indeed, the doctrine of popular sovereignty would have left these questions to a vote. But true equality cannot be left to the whims of an electorate—it is the predicate for democracy and the vote, not their product. This, too, is a lesson from the period of the late 1850s: that a constitution or declaration constitutes the "we," and that this act of constituting structures all other distributive decisions and identity itself. Thus, who we are, and who belongs, is the most fundamental question that we have ever asked or can ever ask. We are still struggling to get the answer to this question right. We are still coming up short.

