

National

WHY YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

THE YEAR 1619

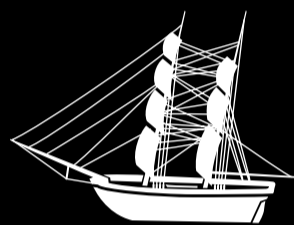
THIS YEAR marks the 400th anniversary of when the first enslaved Africans were brought to what is now the state of Virginia. Most of us are familiar with how slavery worked in this country. We learn that enslaved men, women and children were kidnapped from their homes in Africa, locked into heavy iron chains and crammed onto ships for a dangerous journey. They had no idea where they were going and often died on the way — from heat, starvation, thirst and violence. They were brought to the colonies and were sold and forced to work on the land and in the homes of white people for the rest of their lives, though resistance and rebellion were common. And they eventually fought for and won their freedom — sacrificing their lives to escape bondage. But this is only part of the story.

There is virtually no part of modern life in this country that has not been affected by slavery — from our legal system to the schools we attend. “The story of 1619 is not a black story, and it’s not a white story; it’s truly an American story,” says Nikole Hannah-Jones, a staff writer for The New York Times Magazine. She proposed that the magazine devote an entire issue to tracing how slavery affects different parts of life in America. Last Sunday, Aug. 18, that special issue and a special broadsheet section appeared in the paper. On this page, The New York Times for Kids joins the effort to acknowledge the importance of the year 1619 in United States history, to explain how slavery has shaped our country and to examine how we talk about slavery today. *Lovia Gyarkye*

SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES THROUGH TIME

1619

THE YEAR THE FIRST SLAVE SHIP ARRIVED IN POINT COMFORT, CARRYING MORE THAN 20 ENSLAVED AFRICANS.



5,000

THE ESTIMATED DISTANCE, IN MILES, OF THE MIDDLE PASSAGE, WHICH DESCRIBES THE SLAVE-TRADE ROUTE FROM THE COAST OF AFRICA TO ONE OF THE COLONIES IN THE AMERICAS OR THE CARIBBEAN.

12.5

THE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT, IN MILLIONS, FORCIBLY TRANSPORTED FROM THEIR HOMELANDS TO PLANTATIONS ACROSS THE AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN FROM THE 16TH CENTURY TO THE 19TH CENTURY.

45

THE ROUGH PERCENTAGE OF THE 55 AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARIES WHO MET IN 1781 TO FINALIZE THE CONSTITUTION WHO ALSO OWNED ENSLAVED PEOPLE.

1781

THE YEAR ELIZABETH FREEMAN, AN ENSLAVED WOMAN IN MASSACHUSETTS BETTER KNOWN AS MUM BETT, SUED FOR HER FREEDOM AND WON. IN COURT, SHE ARGUED THAT SLAVERY VIOLATED THE NEW MASSACHUSETTS CONSTITUTION OF 1780, WHICH SAID THAT ALL MEN ARE BORN FREE AND EQUAL.

1793

THE YEAR CONGRESS PASSED THE FIRST FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT, WHICH MADE IT A CRIME TO HELP AN ENSLAVED PERSON WHO HAD ESCAPED.



68

THE NUMBER OF DAYS FOR WHICH NAT TURNER AVOIDED CAPTURE BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES. HE LED ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS REBELLIONS AGAINST SLAVERY, WITH MORE THAN 50 ARMED BLACK MEN, IN 1831 IN VIRGINIA. AFTER HE WAS CAUGHT, HE WAS HANGED.

1836

THE YEAR THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ADOPTED A “GAG RULE” ON SLAVERY, REFUSING TO DISCUSS GETTING RID OF SLAVERY OR THE RIGHTS OF ENSLAVED PEOPLE.



3

THE ESTIMATED VALUE, IN BILLIONS OF DOLLARS, OF THE 4 MILLION ENSLAVED PERSONS LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES IN 1860.

180,000

THE APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF BLACK SOLDIERS WHO SERVED IN THE UNION ARMY DURING THE CIVIL WAR, WHICH STARTED IN 1861 BECAUSE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN STATES COULD NOT AGREE ABOUT ENDING SLAVERY. THE WAR WOULD NOT END UNTIL 1865.



\$2,500

THE PRICE THAT TWO 18-YEAR-OLD GIRLS EACH SOLD FOR IN SAVANNAH, GA., IN 1863.

13

THE AMENDMENT THAT ABOLISHED SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES. IT WAS PASSED BY CONGRESS IN 1865, TWO YEARS AFTER ABRAHAM LINCOLN ISSUED THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION — WHICH DID NOT FREE ALL ENSLAVED PEOPLE.

12

THE AGE OF THE GIRL REDOSHI WHEN SHE WAS BROUGHT TO THE UNITED STATES. SHE IS BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN THE LAST SURVIVOR OF THE SLAVE TRADE. SHE DIED IN 1937.

98

THE PERCENTAGE OF BLACK CHILDREN IN THE SOUTH WHO STILL ATTENDED SEGREGATED SCHOOLS IN 1964.

THIS WAS 10 YEARS AFTER THE SUPREME COURT UNANIMOUSLY RULED IN THE CASE KNOWN AS BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION THAT RACIAL SEGREGATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS VIOLATED THE CONSTITUTION.

2013

THE YEAR MISSISSIPPI OFFICIALLY ABOLISHED SLAVERY BY RATIFYING THE 13TH AMENDMENT.



4 MYTHS ABOUT SLAVERY

BY ERICA L. GREEN

EVEN THOUGH it has been more than 150 years since slavery ended in the United States, we Americans have a difficult time discussing the pain and shame of slavery. In few places is this more true than in the nation’s classrooms. Depending on where you live, what textbooks your school districts buy and what lesson plans your teachers use, you might graduate from school with an understanding of this part of American history that is vastly different from someone else’s — and vastly different from what actually happened. Historians and researchers who study how slavery is taught in school have found that important facts and context are often ignored, downplayed or misrepresented to perpetuate more comforting myths about slavery. “We don’t want to inflict shame upon black children, and we don’t want to shame white children,” says Hasan Kwame Jeffries, a history professor at Ohio State University. “So, what we have been teaching is a very sanitized version of what slavery was.” Here are four common myths and misunderstandings about slavery that are taught in schools throughout the United States.

1 STATES’ RIGHTS LED TO THE CIVIL WAR. Many states in the South have had school curriculums that emphasize “states’ rights” (the right of states to follow their own rules rather than those of the federal government) as the main cause of the Civil War. But the right that the South fought to protect — to declare that black people were legally property — is rarely clearly identified as the chief cause of the conflict. **THE REALITY:** Southern states sought to leave the United States to preserve slavery, which they saw as vital to their economy.

2 ENSLAVED PEOPLE WERE ‘WORKERS.’ One of the largest textbook publishers in the country was criticized in recent years for a passage in one of its old “World Geography” textbooks. It said the African slave trade brought millions of “workers from Africa to the Southern United States to work on agricultural plantations.”

THE REALITY: Enslaved people were not “workers,” which implies paid, voluntary labor. Enslaved people were forced to work without pay, considered property by law.

3 SLAVERY ONLY EXISTED IN THE SOUTH. When schools teach the history of slavery, they often focus on the Civil War, which can lead to the misunderstanding that slavery only existed in Southern states. **THE REALITY:** Slavery existed in every colony, although Northern states abolished slavery by the early 1800s, before the Civil War began. Slavery was not abolished in New York until 1827.

4 SLAVERY WASN’T THAT BAD. Until last year, some students at a school in Texas used a textbook that stated some enslaved people weren’t “terribly unhappy” with their conditions, because some had “kind and generous owners” who didn’t beat or kill them. **THE REALITY:** Slavery was a violent, painful way of life, whose very basis was racism and oppression through mental and physical brutality. Enslaved people suffered a variety of abuses, from savage beatings to the threat of being sold or separated from their families. Leaving the violence and degradation out of school lessons partly shields kids’ innocence, but it also preserves the legacies of our celebrated heroes who were enslavers. For example, some textbooks depict George Washington as a “kind and generous” owner because he eventually freed his enslaved people, but that didn’t happen until after he and his wife died. And even enslaved people who worked on President Washington’s plantation, Mount Vernon — including his personal assistant — tried to escape. ♦

HOW I BECAME A

HISTORIAN



BY ANNETTE GORDON-REED

WHEN I WAS a little girl, there was a court decision in 1954 that mandated that schools be integrated — that there couldn’t be separate white schools and black schools. My school in Conroe, Tex., had been avoiding acting on the decision for more than a decade. My parents sent me to first grade at the white school. I was there for a year by myself, until there was a court ruling, and then everyone was mixed together. Lawyers as heroic figures were in the back of my mind all that time.

When I went to college, I majored in history. I was thinking I would become a lawyer and write on the side. After I went to Harvard Law School, I worked for a big law firm, and then for the Board of Correction in New York, which oversees Rikers Island jails. Then my urge to write seriously came back. So I decided to

become a professor, first at New York Law School, then teaching history at Rutgers-Newark.

Then I wrote a book, and it changed my life. When I was in third grade, I read a child’s biography of President Thomas Jefferson, told through the eyes of a fictionalized enslaved boy. He was depicted as lazy and trifling, while Jefferson was intelligent. I remember wondering why you had to tell the story this way. As an adult, I wrote my first book about how historians had weighed the evidence that Jefferson had had children with Sally Hemings, an enslaved woman on one of his plantations. (Enslaved people had no legal right to refuse relationships with their enslavers.) I read what Hemings’s son Madison Hemings said about being Jefferson’s

son, and another enslaved person’s account that confirmed it. I checked timelines. I read the private diary of a friend of Jefferson’s. I came to the conclusion that the story about them was most likely true. A year after my book was published, DNA evidence corroborated what I found.

Now my day job is as a professor of law and history at Harvard University. In any given semester, I might teach criminal procedure — when police can stop you in a car, or come and search your house — or a history class about law and politics in the 1790s. In my spare time, I write. Right now, I’m doing a second volume of the Hemings family story. I feel like a kid who grew up in Little League and made it to the Yankees. As told to *Elise Craig*