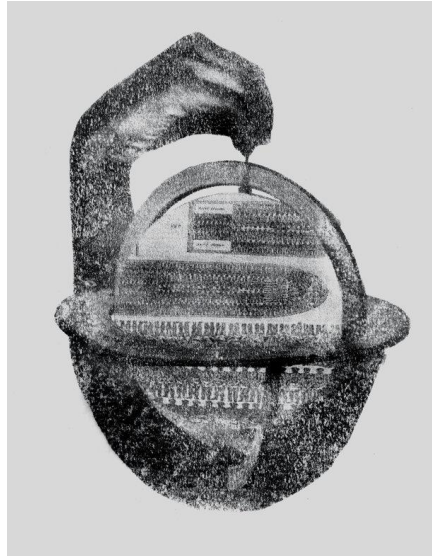


● August 1619

A poem by Clint Smith

In Aug. 1619, a ship arrived in Point Comfort, Va., carrying more than 20 enslaved Africans, the first on record to be brought to the English colony of Virginia. They were among the 12.5 million Africans forced into the trans-Atlantic slave trade, their journey to the New World today known as the Middle Passage

ALT Text: *Black and white photo illustration by Jon Key.*



*Over the course of 350 years,
36,000 slave ships crossed the Atlantic
Ocean. I walk over to the globe & move
my finger back & forth between
the fragile continents. I try to keep
count how many times I drag
my hand across the bristled
hemispheres, but grow weary of chasing
a history that swallowed me.
For every hundred people who were*

*captured & enslaved, forty died before they
ever reached the New World.*

*I pull my index finger from Angola
to Brazil & feel the bodies jumping from
the ship.*

*I drag my thumb from Ghana
to Jamaica & feel the weight of dysentery
make an anvil of my touch.*

*I slide my ring finger from Senegal
to South Carolina & feel the ocean
separate a million families.*

*The soft hum of history spins
on its tilted axis. A cavalcade of ghost ships
wash their hands of all they carried.*

Clint Smith is a doctoral candidate at Harvard University and the author of the poetry collection
“Counting Descent,” as well as a forthcoming nonfiction book, “How the Word Is Passed.”

Photo illustration by Jon Key. Diagram: Getty Images.

● *March 5, 1770*

A poem by Yusef Komunyakaa

In 1770, Crispus Attucks, a fugitive from slavery who worked as dockworker, became the first American to die for the cause of independence after being shot in a clash with British troops.

ALT Text: *Black and white photo illustration by Jon Key.*



African & Natick blood-born

known along paths up & down

Boston Harbor, escaped slave,

harpooner & rope maker,

he never dreamt a pursuit of happiness

or destiny, yet rallied

beside patriots who hurled a fury

of snowballs, craggy dirt-frozen

chunks of ice, & oyster shells

at the stout flank of redcoats,

as the 29th Regiment of Foot

aimed muskets, waiting for fire!

How often had he walked, gazing

down at gray timbers of the wharf,

as if to find a lost copper coin?

Wind deviled cold air as he stood

leaning on his hardwood stick,

& then two lead bullets

tore his chest, blood reddening snow

on King Street, March 5, 1770,

first to fall on captain's command.

Five colonists lay for calling hours

in Faneuil Hall before sharing a grave

at the Granary Burying Ground.

They had laid a foundering stone

for the Minutemen at Lexington

& Concord, first to defy & die,
 & an echo of the future rose over
 the courtroom as John Adams
 defended the Brits, calling the dead
 a “motley rabble of saucy boys,
 negroes & mulattoes, Irish
 teagues & outlandish jacktars,”
 who made soldiers fear for their lives,
 & at day’s end only two would pay
 with the branding of their thumbs.

***Yusef Komunyakaa** is a poet whose books include “The Emperor of Water Clocks” and “Neon Vernacular,” for which he received the Pulitzer Prize. He teaches at N.Y.U. Photo illustration by Jon Key. Boston Massacre: National Archives. Attucks: Getty Images.*

● 1773

A poem by Eve L. Ewing

In 1773, a publishing house in London released “Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral,” by Phillis Wheatley, a 20-year-old enslaved woman in Boston, making her the first African-American to publish a book of poetry.

Pretend I wrote this at your grave.

Pretend the grave is marked. Pretend we know where it is.

Copp’s Hill, say. I have been there and you might be.

Foremother, your name is the boat that brought you.

Pretend I see it in the stone, with a gruesome cherub.

Children come with thin paper and charcoal to touch you.

Pretend it drizzles and a man in an ugly plastic poncho

circles the Mathers, all but sniffing the air warily.

We don’t need to pretend for this part.

There is a plaque in the grass for Increase, and Cotton.

And Samuel, dead at 78, final son, who was there

on the day when they came looking for proof.

Eighteen of them watched you and they signed to say:

the Poems specified in the following Page, were (as we verily believe)

*written by Phillis, a young Negro Girl, who was but a few Years since,
brought an uncultivated Barbarian from Africa
and the abolitionists cheered at the blow to Kant
the Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling
and the enlightened ones bellowed at the strike against Hume
no ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences
Pretend I was there with you, Phillis, when you asked in a letter to no one:
How many iambs to be a real human girl?
Which turn of phrase evidences a righteous heart?
If I know of Ovid may I keep my children?
Pretend that on your grave there is a date
and it is so long before my heroes came along to call you a coon
for the praises you sang of your captors
who took you on discount because they assumed you would die
that it never ever hurt your feelings.
Or pretend you did not love America.
Phillis, I would like to think that after you were released unto the world,
when they jailed your husband for his debts*

*and you lay in the maid's quarters at night,
a free and poor woman with your last living boy,
that you thought of the Metamorphoses,
making the sign of Arachne in the tangle of your fingers.*

And here, after all, lay the proof:

The man in the plastic runs a thumb over stone. The gray is slick and tough.

Phillis Wheatley: thirty-one. Had misery enough.

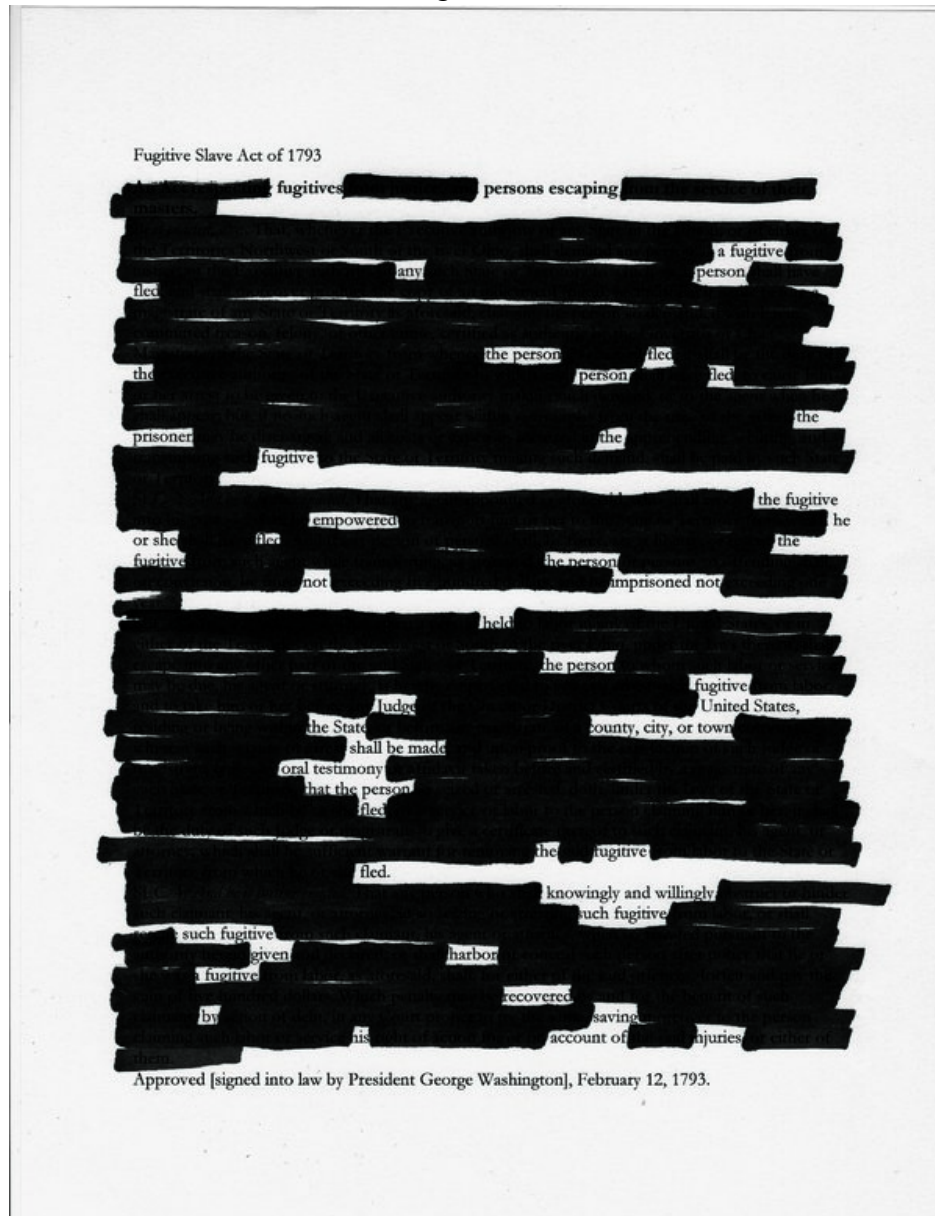
Eve L. Ewing is the author of “1919,” the “Ironheart” series, “Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago’s South Side” and “Electric Arches.” She is a professor at the University of Chicago.

- **Feb. 12, 1793**

A redacted poem by Reginald Dwayne Betts

In 1793, George Washington signed into law the first Fugitive Slave Act, which required United States citizens to return runaway enslaved people to the state from which they came.

ALT Text: The Fugitive Slave Act of 1793



- **Aug. 30, 1800**

Fiction by Barry Jenkins

In 1800, Gabriel Prosser, a 24-year-old literate blacksmith, organized one of the most extensively planned slave rebellions, with the intention of forming an independent black state in Virginia. After other enslaved people shared details of his plot, Gabriel's Rebellion was thwarted. He was later tried, found guilty and hanged.

ALT Text: Black and white photo illustration of a house



As he approached the Brook Swamp beneath the city of Richmond, Va., Gabriel ~~Prosser~~ looked to the sky. Up above, the clouds coalesced into an impenetrable black, bringing on darkness and a storm the ferocity of which the region had scarcely seen. He may have cried and he may have prayed but the thing Gabriel did not do was turn back. He was expecting fire on this night and would make no concessions for the coming rain.

And he was not alone. A hundred men; 500 men; *a thousand men* had gathered from all over the state on this 30th day of August 1800. Black men, African men — men from the fields and men from the house, men from the church and the smithy — men who could be called many things but after this night would not be called slaves gathered in the flooding basin armed with scythes, swords, bayonets and smuggled guns.

One of the men tested the rising water, citing the Gospel of John: “For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.” But the water would not

abate. As the night wore on and the storm persisted, Gabriel was overcome by a dawning truth: The Gospel would not save him. His army could not pass.

Gov. James Monroe was expecting them. Having returned from his appointment to France and built his sweeping Highland plantation on the periphery of Charlottesville, Monroe wrote to his mentor Thomas Jefferson seeking advice on his “fears of a negro insurrection.” When the Negroes Tom and Pharoah of the Sheppard plantation betrayed Gabriel’s plot on a Saturday morning, Monroe was not surprised. By virtue of the privilege bestowed upon him as his birthright, he was expecting them.

Gabriel ~~Prosser~~ was executed Oct. 10, 1800. Eighteen hundred; the year Denmark ~~Vesey~~ bought his freedom, the year of John Brown’s and Nat ~~Turner~~’s births. As he awaited the gallows near the foot of the James River, Gabriel could see all that was not to be — the first wave of men tasked to set fire to the city perimeter, the second to fell a city weakened by the diversion; the governor’s mansion, James Monroe brought to heel and served a lash for every man, woman and child enslaved on his Highland plantation; the Quakers, Methodists, Frenchmen and poor whites who would take up with his army and create a more perfect union from which they would spread the infection of freedom — Gabriel saw it all.

He even saw Tom and Pharoah, manumitted by the government of Virginia, a thousand dollars to their master as recompense; a thousand dollars for the sabotage of Gabriel’s thousand men. He did not see the other 25 men in his party executed. Instead, he saw Monroe in an audience he wanted no part of and paid little notice to. For Gabriel ~~Prosser~~ the blacksmith, leader of men and accepting no master’s name, had stepped into the troubled water. To the very last, he was whole. He was free.

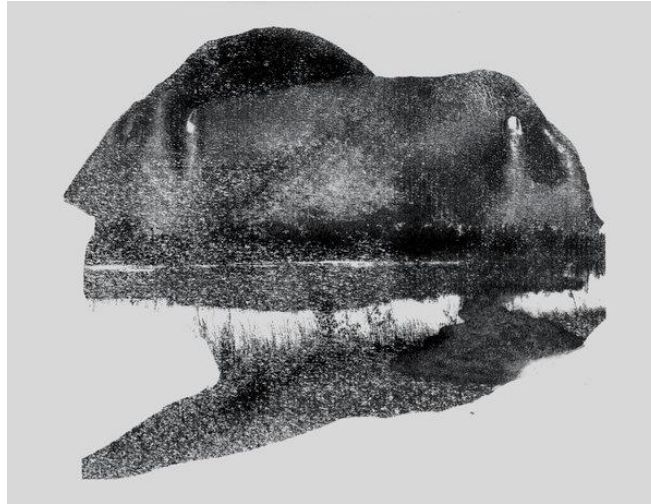
Barry Jenkins was born and raised in Miami. He is a director and writer known for his adaptation of James Baldwin’s “If Beale Street Could Talk” and “Moonlight,” which won the Academy Award for Best Picture. Photo illustration by Jon Key. House: Sergey Golub via Wikimedia. Landscape, right: Peter Traub via Wikimedia.

● Jan. 1, 1808

Fiction by Jesmyn Ward

In 1808, the Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves went into effect, banning the importation of enslaved people from abroad. But more than one million enslaved people who could be bought and sold were already in the country, and the breaking up of black families continued.

ALT Text: Black and white photo landscape illustration



The whisper run through the quarters like a river swelling to flood. We passed the story to each other in the night in our pallets, in the day over the well, in the fields as we pulled at the fallow earth. They ain't stealing us from over the water no more. We dreamed of those we was stolen from: our mothers who oiled and braided our hair to our scalps, our fathers who cut our first staffs, our sisters and brothers who we pinched for tattling on us, and we felt a cool light wind move through us for one breath. Felt like ease to imagine they remained, had not been stolen, would never be.

That be a foolish thing. We thought this later when the first Georgia Man come and roped us. Grabbed a girl on her way for morning water. Snatched a boy running to the stables. A woman after she left her babies blinking awake in their sack blankets. A man sharpening a hoe. They always came before dawn for us chosen to be sold south.

We didn't understand what it would be like, couldn't think beyond the panic, the prying, the crying, the begging and the screaming, the endless screaming from the mouth and beyond. Sounding through the whole body, breaking the heart with its volume. A blood keen. But the ones that owned and sold us was deaf to it. Was unfeeling of the tugging the children did on their

fathers' arms or the glance of a sister's palm over her sold sister's face for the last time. But we was all feeling, all seeing, all hearing, all smelling: We felt it for the terrible dying it was. Knowed we was walking out of one life and into another. An afterlife in a burning place.

The farther we marched, the hotter it got. Our skin grew around the rope. Our muscles melted to nothing. Our fat to bone. The land rolled to a flat bog, and in the middle of it, a city called New Orleans. When we shuffled into that town of the dead, they put us in pens. Fattened us. Tried to disguise our limps, oiled the pallor of sickness out of our skins, raped us to assess our soft parts, then told us lies about ourselves to make us into easier sells. Was told to answer yes when they asked us if we were master seamstresses, blacksmiths or lady's maids. Was told to disavow the wives we thought we heard calling our names when we first woke in the morning, the husbands we imagined lying with us, chest to back, while the night's torches burned, the children whose eyelashes we thought we could still feel on our cheeks when the rain turned to a fine mist while we stood in lines outside the pens waiting for our next hell to take legs and seek us out.

Trade our past lives for new deaths.

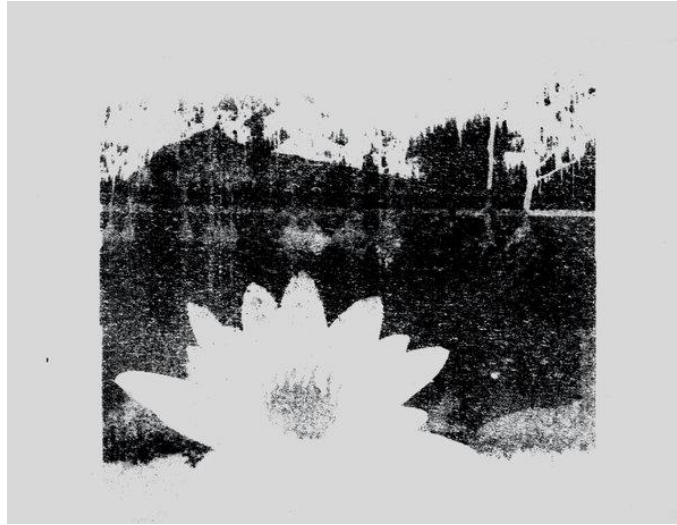
Jesmyn Ward is the author of "Sing, Unburied, Sing," which won a National Book Award. She was a 2017 MacArthur fellow. Photo illustration by Jon Key. Landscape: Peter Traub via Wikimedia.

● July 27, 1816

A poem by Tyehimba Jess

In 1816, American troops attacked Negro Fort, a stockade in Spanish Florida established by the British and left to the Black Seminoles, a Native American nation of Creek refugees, free black people and fugitives from slavery. Nearly all the soldiers, women and children in the fort were killed.

ALT Text: Black and white photo illustration by Jon Key. Cypress



They weren't headed north to freedom —
They fled away from the North Star,
turned their back on the Mason-Dixon line,
put their feet to freedom by fleeing
further south to Florida.

Ran to where 'gator and viper roamed
free in the mosquito swarm of Suwannee.

They slipped out deep after sunset,
shadow to shadow, shoulder to shoulder,
stealthingly southward, stealing themselves,
steeling their souls to run steel
through any slave catcher who'd dare
try stealing them back north.

They billeted in swamp mud,

saw grass and cypress —
they waded through waves
of water lily and duckweed.
They thinned themselves in thickets
and thorn bush hiding their young
from thieves of black skin marauding
under moonlight and cloud cover.
Many once knew another shore
an ocean away, whose language,
songs, stories were outlawed
on plantation ground. In swampland,
they raised flags of their native tongues
above whisper smoke
into billowing bonfires
of chant, drum and chatter.
They remembered themselves
with their own words
bleeding into English,
bonding into Spanish,
singing in Creek and Creole.
With their sweat
forging farms in
unforgiving heat,
never forgetting scars
of the lash, fighting
battle after battle
for generations.
Creeks called them *Seminole*
when they bonded with renegade Creeks.
Spaniards called them *cimarrones*,
runaways — escapees from Carolina

plantation death-prisons.
English simply called them *maroons*,
flattening the Spanish to make them
seem alone, abandoned, adrift —
but they were bonded,
side by side,
Black and Red,
in a blood red hue —
maroon.
Sovereignty soldiers,
Black refugees,
self-abolitionists, fighting
through America's history,
marooned in a land
they made their own,
acre after acre,
plot after plot,
war after war,
life after life.
They fought only
for America to let them be
marooned — left alone —
in their own unchained,
singing,
worthy
blood.

Tyehimba Jess is a poet from Detroit who teaches at the College of Staten Island. He is the author of two books of poetry, "Leadbelly" and "Olio," for which he received the 2017 Pulitzer Prize. Photo illustration by Jon Key. Cypress: Ron Clausen via Wikimedia

● Jan. 1, 1863

Fiction by Darryl Pinckney

In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing enslaved African-Americans in rebelling states. The text was read aloud at thousands of gatherings, including at a Union Army encampment in Port Royal, S.C.

Imagine the scene I cannot write. The Colonel steps onto the platform, reciting to himself: I'll tell you how the sun rose, a ribbon at a time. It is New Year's Day. The president has signed the historic war measure.

The Colonel was not alone in his feeling that after the disgrace of Bull Run, the Union needed to take Port Royal Island, and after the slaughter at Fredericksburg, Port Royal needs this convocation. White women in bonnets and white men in vests crowd the platform. The Colonel studies the First South Carolina Volunteers arrayed before him. It is the first black unit. The men of his regiment adore campfires, spelling books and tobacco, but none of them drink. Most have freed themselves. Take a ride on a federal gunboat and join the Cause. Everywhere, the Colonel sees black women in their Sunday kerchiefs. God's blessings are on dress parade.

The Colonel hands the Emancipation Proclamation to a penitent white man who used to be called Master over in Beaufort. The Colonel said Oof when he first got his copy. The orderly's breathing told him that he, too, had read the Proclamation, had felt power naked, actual armed-rebellion naked, suppressing said rebellion naked, shall be free naked, maintain freedom of said persons naked.

The prayer is over. The former master of cotton is no orator, but the Colonel is where power and freedom are forging God's naked sword. He marvels at the Lord's invention, the sheer darkness of his men. Is it not glorious to be handsome.

The Colonel receives regimental colors and the Union flag from a New Yorker who will not cease addressing him. Ten cows revolve on spits, and the New Yorker will not be still. The

Colonel fights to remain in this sacred place where every heart desires the same thing. Beyond the live oaks, another steamer arrives on the blue water.

Seated nearby are the camp's brilliant surgeon and its most beautiful schoolteacher, the Colonel's friends from home, Boston. The Surgeon reads his wife's letters to the Schoolteacher. It is not that she is a black woman and he a white man. A free black woman whose family is richer than either of theirs, the Colonel did not say. The Surgeon's beard is shining, and the Schoolteacher's head is uncovered.

The New Yorker will not yield the flag. The Colonel's wife is an invalid, and the Surgeon's wife is plain. The Schoolteacher is an unfair quadroon beauty, the Colonel has told his friend. She and the Surgeon love to talk of their love for horses, moonlight and the Cause.

The Colonel has the flag in the silence. He slowly waves the flag, thinking this is the first time it may hold true meaning for them. An elderly black voice begins, *My country, 'tis of thee*. A few black women add their voices. Suddenly, many. The Colonel quiets the white people so that only black people are singing.

The Schoolteacher continues to sing, and so does the Surgeon. *Let freedom ring*. This is war, the Colonel smiles.

Darryl Pinckney is the author of two novels, "High Cotton" and "Black Deutschland."

- **July 30, 1866**

Fiction by ZZ Packer

In 1866, during a constitutional convention called for by abolitionist leaders in response to the Louisiana Legislature's refusal to give black men the vote, armed white people attacked a crowd. More than 35 people died, mostly black men.

The bodies all around began to cook and swell in the heat: fingers the size of pickles, forearms rising like loaves until as big and gamy as hams festering in the noontime sun. When the Secesh police began their rounds, Lazarus got to crouching, then creeping, until — at last — he had to lie down among the dead, confining himself between two fallen neighbors, readying himself for the shot to the head.

Just hours earlier, all of colored New Orleans in their finest had come out: veterans from the Louisiana Native Guards had amassed at the procession's front, joined by one or more bands that began to blaze and bray their trumpets and trombones once struck up by some hidden concertmaster. Seamstresses, maids, cooks, bricklayers and longshoremen: They'd all come out at the behest of Roudanez, owner of the black folks' paper, as well as Dostie, the radical Republican dentist Democrats declared a race traitor and nigger lover. The white Republicans could not get votes over the Confederate Democrats without colored men, nor could the colored man get the vote without the whites who fought against the Confederate Redeemer cause.

"Thirty-seven niggers dead," Lazarus had heard someone say while he played possum. "And that fella Dostie."

Such a pus and rot he'd never smelled before. Needling choruses of gallinippers hiving above yards of bursting flesh. Rodents hurrying forth with their ratchet scratching at wounds. Midges inspecting tonsils on display. Then there was the nearly silent sound of worms at work, underworld missionaries unsewing men from their souls.

It wasn't until 3 o'clock that the military finally came and gave orders as to what should be done; the wounded were to go to the Freedmen's Hospital, which had once been Marine Hospital. The dead were to lie out in the hundred-degree heat until another wagon became available, and there was to be martial law for the rest of the night, lasting who knew until when.

The ride to the Freedmen's Hospital killed a few who weren't yet dead. A jolting ride over cobblestones, banquettes, undone roads, bricks from the riot left in the middle of the street, while the whole hospital was filled with big moans, the smell of grease and camphor, wet wool and kerosene.

They rolled him onto a flat cot, then put yet another man on top of him and jostled them both through a dark corridor. The blood from the man on top of him seeped into Lazarus's eyes, ran in thin tickling trickles into his ears, clumped in thick waxy clots in his nose, his hair.

It scared him to death to be so in the dark, and try as he might to push the dead man off him, he could not. They carried him into a room, a place that was even more foul-smelling than the stench of bodies swelling in the sun. When his cot passed the threshold, the men who'd been carrying it dropped it, sending the dead man falling to the floor, only the sound didn't sound like Lazarus expected it to, but more like a clank and clatter, as though the heavy doors of an armoire or chifforobe had been banged shut. The men who'd been holding the cot retched, one, then the other.

ZZ Packer is the author of a story collection, "Drinking Coffee Elsewhere." She was a 2005 Guggenheim fellow and a 2018-19 Hutchins fellow at Harvard.

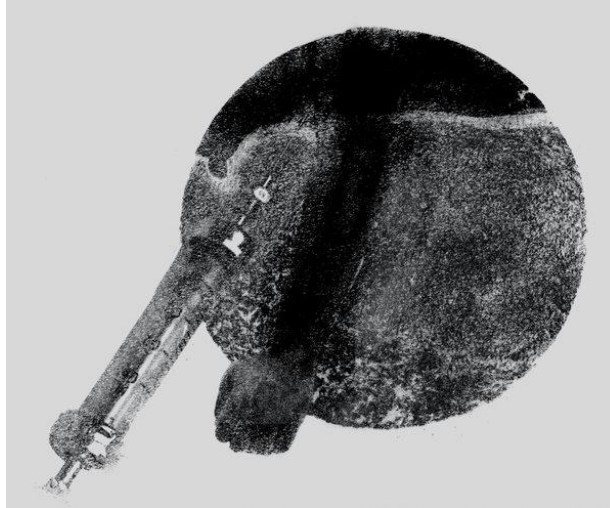
● 1932

Fiction by Yaa Gyasi

In 1932, the United States Public Health Service began the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male, with 600 subjects, approximately two-thirds of whom had syphilis. The subjects were told only that they were being treated for "bad blood." Approximately 100 died

from the disease. It was later revealed that for research purposes, the men were denied drugs that could have saved them.

ALT Text: Black and white photo illustration by Jon Key



Upon closer inspection, the leaf her 2-year-old was attempting to put in his mouth in the middle of the playground on that lovely fall day was in fact a used tampon. She snatched it from him and Puredled both of their hands before rushing them back to their apartment on Dean. She put him in the bath and scrubbed, and by the time her husband found them, they were both crying.

“We have to leave New York,” she said after he put the baby to bed. “Let’s move back home.”

“There are tampons in Alabama,” he said, and then, “What’s the worst that could happen?”

It was the question they’d played out since graduate school, when her hypochondria had been all-consuming. Back then, leaning into her fears, describing them, had given her some comfort, but then they had Booker and suddenly the worst looked so much worse.

“He could get an S.T.D., and then we’d be the black parents at the hospital with a baby with an S.T.D., and the pediatrician would call social services, and they would take him away, and we’d end up in jail.”

“O.K.,” he said slowly. “That would be bad, but it’s statistically very, very unlikely. Would it make you feel better if we called the doctor?”

She shook her head. Her husband only used the word “statistically” when he wanted to avoid using the words “you’re crazy.” She knew that the doctor would just tell her to trust him, but she also knew that when the worst happens in this country, it often happens to them.

She comes by her hypochondria and iatrophobia honestly. When she was growing up in Alabama, people still talked about their grandfathers, fathers and brothers who had died of bad blood. That was the catchall term for syphilis, anemia and just about anything that ailed you. The

600 men who were enrolled in the Tuskegee Study were told they’d get free medical care. Instead, from 1932 to 1972, researchers watched as the men developed lesions on their mouths and genitals. Watched as their lymph nodes swelled, as their hair fell out. Watched as the disease moved into its final stage, leaving the men blind and demented, leaving them to die. All this when they knew a simple penicillin shot would cure them. All this because they wanted to see what would happen. For years afterward, her grandmother refused to go to the hospital. Even at 89, perpetually hunched over in the throes of an endless cough, she’d repeat, “Anything but the doctor.” Bad blood begets bad blood.

She’s more trusting than her grandmother, but she still has her moments. Like many women, she was nervous about giving birth. All the more so because she was doing it in New York City, where black women are 12 times as likely to die in childbirth as white women. And in that very statistic, the indelible impression of Tuskegee. The lingering, niggling feeling that she is never fully safe in a country where doctors and researchers had no qualms about watching dozens of black men die — slowly, brutally — simply because they could. When she held Booker in her arms for the first time and saw her grandmother’s nose on his perfect face, love and fear rose up in her. “What’s the worst that could happen?” her husband asks, and she can’t speak it — the worst. Instead, she tries to turn off the little voice in her head, the one that wants to know: How exactly do you cure bad blood?

Yaa Gyasi was born in Ghana, raised in Huntsville, Ala., and lives in Brooklyn. Her first novel, “Homegoing,” won the PEN/Hemingway Award and the National Book Critics Circle’s John Leonard Prize. Photo illustration by Jon Key. Syringe: Science Museum, London, via Wellcome Collection.

● Feb. 12, 1946

Fiction by Jacqueline Woodson

In 1946, Isaac Woodard, a decorated 26-year-old Army sergeant, was severely beaten by white police officers while taking a bus to meet his wife. He was still wearing his uniform. Accused of drinking with other soldiers on the bus, Woodard was arrested on a charge of drunk and disorderly conduct and denied medical assistance. The attack left him permanently blind.

Keep an eye on the restrooms. They've always come for us through them. 'Cuz who doesn't ever have to use one? Straight peeps and trans peeps, black peeps and white peeps, we all have to go sometime. And back in the day, if the Colored Only signs didn't work or weren't enough, or still had black folks having the audacity to put on a uniform and go fight in a war — let's call this one World War II — they found other ways to come for us.

Feb. 12, 1946, 17 years to the day before I was born — and when I was born, know those Colored Only signs were still up all over the South — a South I would live in until I was 7 years old — Sgt. Isaac Woodard, in full uniform, boarded a bus in Georgia, heading home to his wife in Winnsboro, S.C. Ninety-eight miles away from the town in which I was raised, Sergeant Woodard asked the driver if there was time to use the restroom. This was near Augusta, S.C., where the driver said, “Hell no.” And then there was an argument. And the driver conceding with a “Go ahead then, but hurry back.”

Keep an eye on the history of black veterans in America. On the thousands that were attacked, assaulted, killed. Because they were black. Because they were in uniform. Because they had the audacity to believe that leaving this country to fight for it would indeed make it a better place for them to return to.

Keep an eye on a white Southern bus driver conceding to a black man. At a later stop, Sergeant Woodard was ordered off the bus by the local chief of police, Lynwood Shull, and another officer. Lynwood beat him blind. Two months later, Woodard’s family moved him from the V.A. hospital in Columbia, S.C., to New York City. At trial, Shull admitted to blinding Woodard. After 30 minutes of deliberation, an all-white jury acquitted him.

Keep an eye on the long, bleak legacy of police brutality against black men. It happened in America. It happened when many of us were living. It happened again and again. And as Woodard himself said, “Negro veterans that fought in this war ... don’t realize that the real battle has just begun in America.”

It happened on a Greyhound bus. To a man who was just trying to get himself home.

Jacqueline Woodson is the author of the National Book Award winner “Brown Girl Dreaming.” She serves as the Library of Congress’s national ambassador for young people’s literature. Her novel “Red at the Bone” will be published in September.

● Sept. 15, 1963

Poems by Rita Dove and Camille T. Dungy

In 1963, a group of Ku Klux Klansmen bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., a center of the civil rights movement. Four young girls were killed, and at least 14 people were injured. Years later, three of the four conspirators were brought to trial and convicted; the fourth died before he was tried.

ALT Text: Black and white photo illustration of four young girls



This morning's already good — summer's
cooling, Addie chattering like a magpie —
but today we are leading the congregation.

Ain't *that* a fine thing! All in white *like angels*,
they'll be sighing when we appear at the pulpit
and proclaim "Open your hymnals —"

Addie, what's the page number again?

Never mind, it'll be posted. I think. I hope.

Hold still, Carole, or else this sash will never
sit right! There. Now you do mine.

Almost eleven. I'm ready. My, don't we look —
what's that word the Reverend used in
last Sunday's sermon? Oh, I got it: *ethereal*.

— *Rita Dove*

My daughter's three months old. A nightmare

rocks me awake, and then fourteen words: Brevity.

As in four girls; Sunday dresses: bone, ash, bone, ash, bone.

The end. 1963, but still burning. My darkening girl

lies beside me, her tiny chest barely registering breath.

Had they lived beyond that morning, all the other explosions

shattering Birmingham — even some who called it home

called it Bombingham — three of the girls would be 70,

the other 67. Somebody's babies. The sentences I rescue

from that nightmare, I make a poem. Four names,

grayscaled at the bottom of the page:

Addie Mae Collins. Cynthia Wesley. Carole Robertson. Denise McNair.

Revision is a struggle toward truth. In my book I won't keep, The end.

For such terrible brevity — dear black girls! sweet babies — there's been no end.

— *Camille T. Dungy*

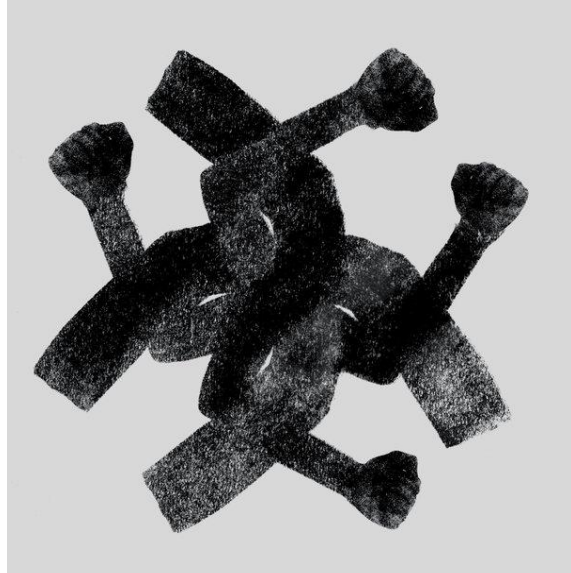
***Rita Dove** is a professor of English at the University of Virginia, a former United States poet laureate and the magazine's former poetry editor. She is a recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. **Camille T. Dungy** is the author of four books of poetry, including "Trophic Cascade," and the memoir-in-essays "Guidebook to Relative Strangers." Dungy is currently a professor at Colorado State University and a 2019 Guggenheim fellow. Photo illustration by Jon Key.Bow: Shutterstock.*

● Oct. 15, 1966

Poem by Joshua Bennett

1966, in response to police brutality against African-Americans, the Merritt College students Huey Newton and Bobby Seale created the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. The organization, declared an enemy of the government by J. Edgar Hoover's F.B.I., held that ending the economic exploitation of black people is central to achieving racial equity.

ALT Text:Black and white photo illustration of closed fists



With a line from Tavia Nyong'o

Anything that wants to be can be a panther. The black lion
or ocelot, the black cheetah or cornrowed uptown girl sprinting
up her neighborhood block just like one, in dogged pursuit
of the future world. In this frame, I imagine Huey and Bobby
as boys in the sense of gender and genre alike, an unbroken
line reading: *my life is an armor for the other*. Before black berets
or free breakfasts, then, there is friendship. Before gun laws
shifting in the wake of organized strength, leather jackets
shimmering like gypsum in the Northern California twilight —

or else magazine covers running the world over, compelling
everyday ordinary people across the spectrum of context
or color to sing *who wants to be a panther ought to be he can be it*
— there is love. The panther is a virtual animal. The panther
strikes only when it has been assailed. The panther is a human
vision, interminable refusal, our common call to adore ourselves
as what we are and live and die on terms we fashioned from the earth
like this. Our precious metal metonym. Our style of fire and stone.

Joshua Bennett is an assistant professor of English and creative writing at Dartmouth College and the author of “The Sobbing School.” His poetry book “Owed” will be published in 2020. Photo illustration by Jon Key. Bow: Shutterstock.

● Sept. 16, 1979

Fiction by Lynn Nottage

In 1979, During the 1970s, hip-hop evolved as an art form in the South Bronx. Often performed at street parties, the phenomenon went mainstream with Sugarhill Gang’s ‘Rapper’s Delight.’

Was it the loud distorted bass of a speaker rattling my windowpanes, beckoning me from my bedroom to a late-afternoon party in the schoolyard at P.S. 38? Or maybe it was the exuberance of teenagers streaming down my block toward what promised to be the end-of-the-summer jam.

Following the laughter, I found myself at one of those pop-up parties where everything felt improvised. The turntable was powered by jumper cables winding from the lamppost to the sound system, and the sparkling concrete was an unlikely dance floor. The schoolyard was so packed with hot, sweaty black and brown bodies that I had to scale the chain-link fence just to get a glimpse of the D.J. spinning the vinyl and the silky-smooth M.C. straining to punch his voice above a crowd hungry for his homespun rhymes. Everybody was dancing with a furious urgency, driven on by the spontaneous bursts of inspiration that tumbled from the M.C.'s lyrical tongue. Plucking records from a stack of milk crates, the D.J. worked overtime to keep his twin turntables pumping a continuous groove, deconstructing and repurposing the disco beats to meet our youthful energy. Scratching and mixing, his hands created syncopated rhythms that hit our ears like musical bombs.

Said

Hey! Ho!

Hey! Ho!

The M.C. led us through a call-and-response like a master conductor. His words, a provocation to be loud and unapologetically ourselves. How could we know that the braggadocio of this young black M.C. was the beginning of a revolution?

Rumors were flying that the Crazy Homicides, a Puerto Rican street gang, were going to battle the Tomahawks. The danger added an edge of excitement, but the music brokered the peace — no one dared interrupt the reverie. Hard rocks, B-boys and B-girls in coordinated outfits wore the names of their crews proudly splashed across their T-shirts, the lettering rendered in thick graffiti markers or colorful iron-on decals. Jockeying for space, they formed spontaneous dance circles to show off their intricate moves. Popping and rocking, their bodies contorted in impossible and

beautiful shapes that at once paid tribute to their African ancestors and the rebellious desire to be seen and heard in a city that had overlooked the majesty of their presence.

Then a dancer lost in the moment bumped the D.J.'s folding table, sending the needle screeching across the vinyl. An argument ensued — tempers that had been simmering throughout the evening threatened to bubble over. But the D.J. didn't lose a beat, offering a funky fresh musical salve to ease the tension.

Rock it out, y'all

Don't stop, y'all

Said hip hop

Dance 'til ya drop, y'all

Just as the M.C. resurrected the party, the power to the street lamp was shut off, and darkness brought a close to the festivities. Someone used a wrench to turn on the fire hydrant, and we all ran through the water to cool down our overheated bodies — the ritual cleansing marking an official ending to the party, but not the movement.

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

● July 17, 1984

Fiction by Kiese Laymon

In 1984, the Rev. Jesse Jackson gave a historic speech at the Moscone Center in San Francisco, where he described the need for a 'rainbow coalition.' Jackson, a Baptist minister who was the most prominent black candidate for president at the time, would lose the Democratic nomination to Walter Mondale.

ALT Text: Black and white photo illustration of a television



My older sister, Rae, makes me write 500 words every night before I go to bed. Tonight, I want to write five million because of this speech by Jesse Jackson, a black man with big, beautiful eyeballs.

While we were working on the Barnett house tonight, Rae kept saying that Jesse's speech was going to do for us what Ronald Reagan's speech did for white folks at the Neshoba County Fair four years ago. Ronald Reagan came to the fair and said some words about "states' rights." Those words made a lot of white folks at the fair happier than Christmas Eve. Those words made Rae, Mama, Granny and our whole church so scared we had to leave. When we got in the van, Rae told me that Ronald Reagan came to Mississippi to offer white folks an all-you-can-eat buffet of black suffering.

I asked Rae if white folks left full. She sucked her teeth.

Dafinas, who worked on the house with us this summer, stayed to watch the speech, too. He's from Oaxaca, Mexico, and his grandmother was just stolen by police and sent back to Oaxaca. I don't know if Rae and Dafinas go together, but they look at each other's hands like they do.

All of us watched Jesse Jackson say the names of people I never heard of at school. He talked about Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner. He talked about Fannie Lou Hamer, Martin King and Rabbi Abraham Heschel. He talked about Hispanic-Americans, Arab-Americans, African-Americans. He talked about lesbian and gay Americans having something called equal protection under the law. He talked about powerful coalitions made of rainbows.

When we walked out of the Barnett house, a house we were building, in a white neighborhood where none of us would ever be allowed to live, I watched Dafinas and Rae hug for eight seconds.

On the way home, I asked Rae why she seemed so sad. “Rainbows, they’re pretty, but they ain’t real,” she said. “Only thing real down here is suffering. And work. And love.”

I told Rae that I liked her more than apple Now and Later. But if believing in rainbows makes us love better, then rainbows can be just as real as work. And love. And if we really believed, we might be able to bring Dafinas’s granny back. And one day, instead of building houses for white folks, in neighborhoods we could never even visit if we weren’t working there, we could maybe build beautiful houses with gardens where all our grannies could sit on porches, and safely tell lies that sound true.

“I never seen a black-and-brown rainbow,” Rae said, “but I’ll always believe in us.”

“I’ll be sad when you go to college,” I told her. “But mostly, I’ll be fine, because I can’t stop believing that rainbows are real. And the land and the black and brown folks under those rainbows, we will one day be free.”

Kiese Laymon is a professor of English at the University of Mississippi and the author of “Long Division,” “How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America” and “Heavy: An American Memoir.” Photo illustration by Jon Key. Jackson: Paul Sequeira/Getty Images; Getty Images.

● August 2005

A poem by Clint Smith

In 2005, after Hurricane Katrina, 30,000 evacuees, most of them black, took refuge in the Louisiana Superdome. The chaotic, desperate scene that unfolded there would become a symbol of the city's rampant racial inequality.

A helicopter hovers overhead like a black cloud of smoke,
its blades dismembering the pewter sky. Men in uniform
stand outside with guns nested under their arms & the hot,
wet air of August licking their weary faces. Two women
push a homemade raft through warm, brown water that rises
up & hugs their chests. There is an old man inside the raft
who was once a stranger to them, when such a word meant
something other than please help me. Inside, children are running
across the emerald turf jumping through rings of light that
spill from the sky onto the field. Their small bodies sprinting
between the archipelago of sprawled cots. There is a mother
who sits high in the seats of the stadium rocking her baby
back & forth, her voice cocooning the child in a shell of song.
Before desperation descended under the rounded roof, before
the stench swept across the air like a heavy fog, before the

lights went out & the buses arrived, before the cameras came
inside & showed the failure of an indifferent nation, there were
families inside though there were some who failed to call them
families. There were children inside though there were some who
gave them a more callous name. There were people inside though
there were some who only saw a parade of disembodied shadows.

Clint Smith is a doctoral candidate at Harvard University and the author of the poetry collection “Counting Descent,” as well as a forthcoming nonfiction book, “How the Word Is Passed.”