





## Section 1:

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

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

Commented [1]: vocab

Commented [2]: vocab

Commented [3]: vocab

Commented [4]: vocab

Commented [5]: vocab

Commented [6]: leave

Commented [7]: vocab

Commented [8]: vocab

Commented [9]: vocab

Commented [10]: vocab

Commented [11]: vocab

Commented [12]: vocab

Commented [13]: vocab

Commented [14]: vocab

Commented [15]: vocab

Commented [16]: vocab

Commented [17]: Vocab

Commented [18]: vocab

Commented [19]: vocab

Commented [20]: Vocab

Commented [21]: vocab

Commented [22]: vocab

Commented [23]: This is referring to the boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania (which divided Northern from Southern states during the Civil War era)

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

The Army did not end up being his way out. He was passed over for opportunities, his ambition stunted. He would be discharged under murky circumstances and then labor in a series of service jobs for the rest of his life. Like all the black men and women in my family, he believed in hard work, but like all the black men and women in my family, no matter how hard he worked, he never got ahead.

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

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

Like most young people, I thought I understood so much, when in fact I understood so little. My father knew exactly what he was doing when he raised that flag. He knew that our people's contributions to building the richest and most powerful nation in the world were indelible, that the United States simply would not exist without us.

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

Commented [24]: this appears to our emotions because it's sad. she wants us to sympathize with her. she uses pathos to appeal to our emotions.

Commented [25]: vocab

Commented [26]: Her reasoning; Logos + Pathos

Commented [27]: thesis

Commented [28]: This isn't the thesis because it's a question and because it's only about her dad. BUT whatever the thesis is probably would work as the answer to this question.

Commented [29]: vocab

Commented [30]: vocab

Commented [31]: vocab

Commented [32]: thesis

Commented [33]: I give him this thesis

Commented [34]: This isn't the thesis because it isn't relevant to the story about her family and it also ISN'T WHAT SHE ACTUALLY BELIEVES. This is what she was taught. Her thesis is different.

Commented [35]: vocab

Commented [36]: vocab

Commented [37]: ethos

Commented [38]: vocab

Commented [39]: Vocab

Commented [40]: vocab

Commented [41]: Vocab

Commented [42]: This could also potentially work as the thesis.

Commented [43]: logos, she is using facts to state that without them the US wouldn't be the same, using evidence to connect back to her ideas

Commented [44]: Vocab

Commented [45]: vocab

Commented [46]: English = from England

Commented [47]: Ok

Commented [48]: logos and pathos

Before the abolishment of the international slave trade, 400,000 enslaved Africans would be sold into America. Those individuals and their descendants transformed the lands to which they'd been brought into some of the most successful colonies in the British Empire. Through backbreaking labor, they cleared the land across the Southeast. They taught the colonists to grow rice. They grew and picked the cotton that at the height of slavery was the nation's most valuable **commodity**, accounting for half of all American exports and 66 percent of the world's supply. They built the plantations of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, **sprawling** properties that today attract thousands of visitors from across the globe captivated by the history of the world's greatest democracy. They laid the foundations of the White House and the Capitol, even placing with their unfree hands the Statue of Freedom atop the Capitol dome. They **lugged** the heavy wooden tracks of the railroads that crisscrossed the South and that helped take the cotton they picked to the Northern **textile** mills, fueling the Industrial Revolution. They built **vast** fortunes for white people North and South — at one time, the second-richest man in the nation was a Rhode Island “slave trader.” Profits from black people's stolen labor helped the young nation pay off its war debts and financed some of our most **prestigious** universities. It was the relentless buying, selling, insuring and financing of their bodies and the products of their labor that **made Wall Street a thriving banking, insurance and trading sector and New York City the financial capital of the world.**

But it would be historically inaccurate to reduce the contributions of black people to the vast material wealth created by our bondage. **Black Americans have also been, and continue to be, foundational to the idea of American freedom. More than any other group in this country's history, we have served, generation after generation, in an overlooked but vital role: It is we who have been the perfecters of this democracy.**

Commented [49]: vocab

Commented [50]: Good

Commented [51]: vocab

Commented [52]: vocab

Commented [53]: Vocab

Commented [54]: Thanks

Commented [55]: vocab

Commented [56]: vocab

Commented [57]: Word choice

Commented [58]: vocab

Commented [59]: vocab

Commented [60]: vocab

Commented [61]: Vocab

Commented [62]: thesis

Commented [63]: thesis

Commented [64]: I agree

Commented [65]: Me too

Commented [66]: I agree as well

Commented [67]: This is an opinion. It could be the thesis because it is connecting her dad to the point she makes about history.

Commented [68]: I agree



A demonstrator at the 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery, led by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to fight for black suffrage. Bruce Davidson/Magnum Photos

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

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

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

My father, one of those many black Americans who answered the call, knew what it would take me years to understand: that the year 1619 is as important to the American story as 1776. That black Americans, as much as those men cast in alabaster in the

- Commented [69]: vocab
- Commented [70]: vocab
- Commented [71]: vocab
- Commented [72]: vocab
- Commented [73]: leave
- Commented [74]: vocab
- Commented [75]: logos and pathos
- Commented [76]: vocab
- Commented [77]: vocab
- Commented [78]: vocab
- Commented [79]: vocab
- Commented [80]: Word choice
- Commented [81]: thesis
- Commented [82]: i agree
- Commented [83]: i agree
- Commented [84]: i agree
- Commented [85]: i agree
- Commented [86]: This is an opinion, but the connection between the dad and American history in this sentence may not be as obvious. However, it does work as the answer to the question about her dad and the flag.
- Commented [87]: i agree
- Commented [88]: vocab
- Commented [89]: Good
- Commented [90]: this is just the guy's name.
- Commented [91]: vocab
- Commented [92]: vocab
- Commented [93]: Logos in the evidence and logos base on how she breaking it down
- Commented [94]: i agree
- Commented [95]: vocab
- Commented [96]: Good



nation's capital, are this nation's true "founding fathers." And that no people has a greater claim to that flag than us.

---

Commented [97]: thesis

## Section 2:

In June 1776, Thomas Jefferson sat at his portable writing desk in a rented room in Philadelphia and penned these words: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

For the last 243 years, this fierce assertion of the fundamental and natural rights of humankind to freedom and self-governance has defined our global reputation as a land of liberty. As Jefferson composed his inspiring words, however, a teenage boy who would enjoy none of those rights and liberties waited nearby to serve at his master’s beck and call. His name was Robert Hemings, and he was the half brother of Jefferson’s wife, born to Martha Jefferson’s father and a woman he owned. It was common for white enslavers to keep their half-black children in slavery. Jefferson had chosen Hemings, from among about 130 enslaved people that worked on the forced-labor camp he called Monticello, to accompany him to Philadelphia and ensure his every comfort as he drafted the text making the case for a new democratic republic based on the individual rights of men.

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

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

Commented [98]: Vocab

Commented [99]: =given. Related to dowry.

Commented [100]: vocab

Commented [101]: vocab

Commented [102]: Can't be taken away.

Commented [103]: This is the first sentence of the Declaration.

Commented [104]: This is an unexpected way of referring to Monticello, and she does this to remind the reader that Jefferson's whole life was made possible by the work of enslaved people.

Commented [105]: This is an appeal to pathos. Trying to get her readers to feel anger / sympathy for the enslaved people at Monticello

Commented [106]: thesis

Commented [107]: This is a fact, not an opinion, so I don't think it works as the thesis, but it IS an important piece of evidence.

Commented [108]: vocab

Commented [109]: This is an adjective and means "able to be inherited."

Commented [110]: vocab

Commented [111]: An abolitionist is someone who is fighting to get rid of something. In this case it's slavery.

Commented [112]: vocab

Commented [113]: kinship = family.

Yet in making the argument against Britain's **tyranny**, one of the colonists' favorite rhetorical devices was to claim that *they* were the slaves — to Britain. For this duplicity, they faced burning criticism both at home and abroad. As Samuel Johnson, an English writer and Tory opposed to American independence, **quipped**, "How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes?"

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

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

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

Commented [114]: vocab

Commented [115]: Related to tyrant. The state of using one's power for harm.

Commented [116]: vocab

Commented [117]: \_Marked as resolved\_

Commented [118]: \_Re-opened\_

Commented [119]: vocab

Commented [120]: thesis

Commented [121]: thesis?

Commented [122]: This could be her thesis. Note that this sentence is one of the most controversial points Jones makes.

Commented [123]: i agree

Commented [124]: I would be VERY intrigued to read a well-written paragraph arguing this as Hannah-Jones' thesis for this section (for students who want to challenge themselves more).

Commented [125]: vocab

Commented [126]: Prominence = fame / reputation

Commented [127]: vocab

Commented [128]: Chattel = movable property.

Commented [129]: vocab

Commented [130]: -ocracy means a system of rule so this means "slave rule."

Commented [131]: Vocab

Commented [132]: vocab

Commented [133]: vocab

Commented [134]: keen = sharp.

Commented [135]: thesis?

Commented [136]: This can't be the thesis because it's a fact.

Commented [137]: vocab

Commented [138]: me too

Commented [139]: enshrine = put something on a pedestal and make it official.

Commented [140]: vocab

Commented [141]: She thinks that the founders were aware that it didn't make sense to talk about human rights while still enslaving people.

Commented [142]: vocab

Commented [143]: Ambiguous = unclear, could go either way.



common sense would have used, [and] are evidently chosen to conceal from Europe, that in this enlightened country, the practice of slavery has its advocates among men in the highest stations.”

With independence, the founding fathers could no longer blame slavery on Britain. The sin became this nation’s own, and so, too, the need to cleanse it. The shameful paradox of continuing chattel slavery in a nation founded on individual freedom, scholars today assert, led to a hardening of the racial caste system. This ideology, reinforced not just by laws but by racist science and literature, maintained that black people were subhuman, a belief that allowed white Americans to live with their betrayal. By the early 1800s, according to the legal historians Leland B. Ware, Robert J. Cottrol and Raymond T. Diamond, white Americans, whether they engaged in slavery or not, “had a considerable psychological as well as economic investment in the doctrine of black inferiority.” While liberty was the inalienable right of the people who would be considered white, enslavement and subjugation became the natural station of people who had any discernible drop of “black” blood.

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

Commented [144]: contradiction

Commented [145]: vocab

Commented [146]: vocab

Commented [147]: A system where someone's status in society is determined by their race, and people cannot change their status because it is immovable.

Commented [148]: vocab

Commented [149]: below human

Commented [150]: The racist idea that black people were subhuman allowed white Americans to live with their hypocrisy in supposedly celebrating freedom but perpetuating slavery.

Commented [151]: thesis

Commented [152]: This could be the thesis!!!!

Commented [153]: vocab

Commented [154]: inalienable = cannot be taken away.

Commented [155]: there's this word again

Commented [156]: vocab

Commented [157]: growing or existing commonly in a particular place.

Commented [158]: Thesis

Commented [159]: This could also be the thesis!!!!

Correction August 15, 2019

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

Editors’ Note March 11, 2020

*A passage has been adjusted to make clear that a desire to protect slavery was among the motivations of some of the colonists who fought the Revolutionary War, not among the motivations of all of them. [Read more.](#)*

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

