

“American history is inextricably entrenched in slavery. In ‘The Idea of America,’ Nikole Hannah-Jones (2019) shows how America could not exist as it does today without the institution of slavery and the slave trade. Hannah-Jones traces the conception of America to 1619 rather than 1776, highlighting the contributions of enslaved African people to the founding and wealth accumulation of the United States.... [this piece] deepened my understanding of the power and privilege that white people hold today, specifically in the context of higher education administration. They do so, for me, by showing how we got to where we are and the need for mindful administrative practice....By slowing down to reflect on one’s positionality and considering how a decision may affect students (and specifically minoritized students), we combat automatic decision making. The automatic decisions that administrators make are the result of a long history of slavery and injustice in higher education, and on a broader scale, American society (Democracy Now!, 2013; Hannah-Jones, 2019).” - JH

Nicole Hannah-Jones’s personal experiences and the general history of slave trade in America truly display how deeply engrained [slavery] is. Systemically, everything is based on the contributions of slaves, even in modern day. The profiting off of slavery is a consistent theme throughout our history that is yet to end. However, the victims of the slave trade receive almost no recognition for the extremely significant role that their lives and labor played. America would’ve never been able to progress as quickly without free labor, and the progression is not limited to higher education, but essentially the entire country as we know it today. The buildings, the land, and culture is all based off of someone’s unknown legacy. As Jones expressed disdain of her father’s patriotism, she realized his perspective was based on his pride of his people, not solely the pride of his country. And that the pride of his country would not be as powerful, if not for the contributions of his people. Jones’s thought process behind her father’s pride really stood out. “He knew that our people’s contributions to building the richest and most powerful nation in the world were indelible, that the United States would not exist without us.”(Hannah-Jones 2019). This quote showcases the true reason behind his pride, and describes when she finally understood her father’s perspective... Everything has been built upon the foundation that slave trade created, but no credit was ever given where it was due. HT

In "The Idea of America" (2019), Hannah Jones discusses that the formation of America has been built due to slave labor and the exploitation of incorrect biases of Black people. Without the free labor of slaves, there would be no American economy, the large infrastructure we now have today, or the information we have. Hannah-Jones discusses how elite white men were able to create "Black" as a race to categorize them as non-human, just to protect their ability to use their

labor to line their pockets (Hannah-Jones, 2019, p.17). The founding fathers knowingly created the first American laws and policies by suggesting that Black people were only good for free labor and that this was to be permanent and inherent (Hannah-Jones, 2019, p. 17). It wasn't Thomas Jefferson who built the first buildings in the birth of America, it was his slaves. It wasn't the plantation owner tending to the fields, it was the slaves he bought and abused. Their labor is the reason that these powerful, elite families were able to be powerful and rich, which impacted every area of life, especially colleges and universities...The Ivy League schools are standing today because of the slaves that built them. Not only are the slaves responsible for the physical infrastructure, but also the information being taught in the classrooms. JL

When reading “The Idea of America” by Nikole Hannah-Jones, you get the sense that the higher education system would not be where it is if not for slavery. Hannah-Jones states “The United States is a nation founded on both an ideal and a lie. Our Declaration of Independence signed on July 4, 1776 proclaims that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights” (p. 16). Although Black people were not allowed to be educated in any form, the colleges and universities that were built in as early as the 1600s made sure to have an enslaved person on campus to care for the campus. Presidents of universities such as Harvard, Princeton, William & Mary continued to have ties to the northern slave trade with West Indies in order to continue to run their plantations. AT

Hannah-Jones (2019) describes how leaders applied the concepts of liberty and equality in different ways throughout American history, including when it came to Black Americans. At one point, these leaders attempted to protect the institution of slavery and enshrined this belief as a part of the official Declaration of Independence. As a result, the societal systems in law, science, and literature contributed to "the racial caste system" (Hannah-Jones, 2019, p. 19). This is an example of how leaders use their power to maintain their privilege, and as a result, inequity could be generated. No matter how illogical, this justification process worked long because those in power had the resources to invest. Power maintains the privilege systematically to influence every direction for cleansing their inconvenience. History repeated when Lincoln opened the remarks on funds to ship enslaved people to leave America, their home. Not surprisingly, the legislators focused on the education of newly freed people, then the expansion of human and civil rights witnessed through the Amendment. They fought for the liberty and equality of most Americans to get back their status: a citizen denoted in a system...In higher education, leadership is crucial. The history of higher education shows how education and the economy used slavery to secure their fortunes. Although leaders in the past made decisions to protect their values, their actions left a legacy of inequality that still affects us today. SJ