

The Challenges and Opportunities for
#MappingFreedom:
the international phenomenon of “freedom colonies”
the initial resistance, the original safe spaces

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ABSTRACT

According to Conrad and Sitton (2005): *“Historians largely missed the more general response of the freedmen’s settlements, where ex-slaves remained in the South to establish all-black landowner communities as far away from white authority as possible. Numbers are difficult to estimate, but this ubiquitous, unremarked internal “exodus” to local “freedom colonies” must have dwarfed the famous move north.”* This paper presents findings on the challenges and opportunities facing #MappingFreedom¹, and its efforts² to create a digital database and interactive GIS- & Wiki-enabled map of all of the freedom colonies, as a framework for an

¹ "Freedom Colonies: the initial resistance, the original safe"

<http://oralhistory.columbia.edu/freedomcolonies-the-initial-resistance-the-original-safe-spaces>. Accessed 20 Nov. 2019.

² "MappingFreedom - Squarespace."

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/50d0a18de4b07abde41656e7/t/5cd5c6e38165f5f0238af3bd/1557513956294/OHMA+%23MappingFreedom+presentation-2.pdf>. Accessed 20 Nov. 2019.

international UNESCO World Heritage Trail of each community (modeled after Colonial Williamsburg & Jamestown), and create the International Association of Freedom Colonies (iAFC) and the iAFC's Oral History Archives as a public-private partnership. Over 5,000 freedom colonies have been identified in the US alone (and 580+ in Texas), with the first one being founded in 1738, Ft. Mose, Florida. Numerous others exist along every pathway of the Western colonial circuit, from palenques, quilombos, and maroon colonies in Colombia, Brazil, and Jamaica and the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean including Haiti, to the "black/brown 'freedmen' settlements" in North America, Australia, Africa and Asia - people defended themselves by creating "colonies of freedom." As the Ivy League's first ever Wikipedia Fellow, Wikimedian-In-Residence and Wikipedia Visiting Scholar (and the first in any of these roles at Columbia), and a former journalist/producer, I'm creating a database on Wikipedia to catalogue these spaces, using the iAFC as an investigative outreach project to further identify locations. As the Wikipedia Visiting Scholar at the Computer Graphics User Interface Lab and the Columbia University Libraries, we're exploring VR/AR/AR/ML and other XL possibilities for experiential onsite and offsite interaction with the histories and stories of these places, using the iAFC's archives. We've also founded #DisruptWikipedia at the Libraries with Barnard College as an initiative to "disrupt," dismantle and eliminate the institutional white supremacy and systemic racism endemic to Wikipedia and its Wikimedia sister tools like WikiData, WikiResearch and WikiCommons, and other open access, open source, crowd-source, public research, and free culture spaces to decolonize, and indigenize these intersections of technology and media. We actively seek to dismantle the settler colonial perspective, lens and worldview of the colonizer culture these public facing projects inhabit, and reverse the resulting fragile, white patriarchal supremacy of its content, structures and foundations, thus disrupting, dismantling and eliminating the "white gaze" (Morrison³) and the "white imagination" (Rankine⁴) of the "racecraft" (Fields⁵) that create these institutional racisms and systemic white supremacies (which are inherently patriarchal, toxic white male fragility) in the first place.⁶

KEYWORDS: *institutional knowledge, institutional memory, disruption, interrogating the narrative, lens as data, lens as narrative, narrative as lens, data as narrative, narrative as data, data as lens, perspective, colonialism, decolonize, anti-colonial, indigenize, indigeneity, feudalism, European, African, American, indigenous, value systems, belief systems, terrorism, human rights, freedom colonies, maroons, palenques, quilombos, macombos, black towns, freedmen settlements, hinterlands, freedom, free, New World, Old World, censorship, community, settlements, feudal, Eurocentric, slavery, race, racialization, institutionalized*

³ "Morrison speaks on evil, language and 'the white gaze'" 11 Mar. 2013, <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2013/03/morrison-speaks-evil-language-and-white-gaze>. Accessed 27 Nov. 2019.

⁴ "Claudia Rankine - The Guardian." 27 Dec. 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/27/claudia-rankine-poet-citizen-american-lyric-feature>. Accessed 27 Nov. 2019.

⁵ "How Race Is Conjured - Jacobin." 29 Jun. 2015, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/06/karen-barbara-fields-racecraft-dolezal-racism/>. Accessed 13 Dec. 2019.

⁶ "Black writers courageously staring down the white gaze – this" 31 Dec. 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/dec/31/black-writers-courageously-staring-down-the-white-gaze-this-is-why-we-all-must-read-them>. Accessed 27 Nov. 2019.

slavery, racism, whiteness, white supremacy, recentering the narrative, reclaiming the narrative, racecraft, white gaze, white imagination, whiteness, human rights, Magna Carta

HONORING⁷ AND ACKNOWLEDGING⁸ INDIGENOUS LAND⁹ AND LIFEWAYS¹⁰

*“What?! **POST**-colonialism? Have they left?” -Bobbi Sykes*

In 1964 Malcolm X¹¹ said in a TV interview, “If you stick a knife in my back nine inches and pull it out six inches, there's no progress. If you pull it all the way out that's not progress. Progress is healing the wound that the blow made. And they haven't even pulled the knife out, much less healed the wound. They won't even admit the knife is there.” Well, we admit the knife is there, and we commit to the full scope of healing and progress - not only pulling out the knife and healing the wound, but providing restitution and restoring equity and parity through holistic decolonization and indigenizing methods and efforts.

We acknowledge that “Columbia University” is on dispossessed and unceded Lenni Lenape & Wappinger land and that “Chicago” is on dispossessed and unceded Peoria, Bodéwadmiakiwen (Potawatomi), Miami and Illinois land. We acknowledge that as scholars and inhabitants here, we benefit from the continued dispossession of Indigenous lands and peoples. Today, we celebrate the achievements and resilience of Native communities and use our position to amplify the voices and resistance movements of Indigenous communities the world over.

We respectfully acknowledge that the land on which we gather is occupied, unceded and seized territory. We honour and give thanks of gratitude to the Lenni Lenape & the Wappinger on the coast, and the Peoria, Bodéwadmiakiwen (Potawatomi), Miami and Illinois of the plains - the ancestral traditional stewards of these lands throughout the generations, who allow the enduring relationship that exists between these sovereigns and their traditional territories, and the settler-universities, to occupy these lands known in Eurocentric epistemology as “Columbia University,” “Chicago,” “New York City,” and “the USA.” We pay respects to their elders past and present. To teach our children that “America” was “discovered” erases the millions of Indigenous people who were the original stewards of the land we now call the United States of America. It also erases the Indigenous people that thrive and care for this earth. As individual members of these such institutions and systems we can do more to move toward decolonizing practices in all aspects of our lives.

Every community owes its existence and vitality to generations from around the world who contributed their hopes, dreams, and energy to making the history that led to this moment. Some were brought here against their will, some were drawn to leave their distant homes in hope of a better life, and some have lived on this land for more generations than can be counted. Truth and acknowledgment are critical to building mutual respect and connection across all barriers of heritage and difference. We begin this effort to acknowledge what has been buried by honoring the truth.

⁷ “Guide to Indigenous Land and Territorial Acknowledgements for” <http://landacknowledgements.org/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁸ “Indigenous Land Acknowledgement, Explained | Teen Vogue.” 8 Feb. 2018, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/indigenous-land-acknowledgement-explained>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁹ “Land Acknowledgement: Native American and Indigenous Initiatives” <https://www.northwestern.edu/native-american-and-indigenous-peoples/about/Land%20Acknowledgement.html>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

¹⁰ “Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgement.” <https://usdac.us/nativeland>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

¹¹ “Falling in Love with Malcolm X—and His Mastery of Metaphor” 10 Apr. 2019, <https://lithub.com/falling-in-love-with-malcolm-x-and-his-mastery-of-metaphor/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

Please take a moment to consider the many legacies of violence, displacement, migration, and settlement that bring us together here today. And please join us in uncovering such truths at any and all events. You can begin by using websites such as Native-land.ca.

There are many challenges for this public facing historical big data project, but even more opportunities as well. Let's explore.

"We live in an extremely repressive era, and we fail to realize how repressive it is." -Sean Parker



Spinning Gold Out of Thin And Polluted Air: resisting western colonialism to create free communities

“So compelling to historians has been this dark image of the “degradation of landless blacks”—of the rise of sharecropping, “debt slavery,” the “neo-plantation,” and Jim Crow apartheid—that they often failed to notice a counter-movement.

*Focused as they were on the triumph of sharecropping and the accompanying “degradation of blacks in the Deep South,” historians neglected the counter-current of black landowner settlements. No account of them had appeared in the *Journal of Southern History* by 2003. Likewise, the scholarly journal of the Texas State Historical Association, the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, still had not published a single article about black landowner communities by 2003, although the association’s six-volume reference work, the *New Handbook of Texas*, listed over two hundred such places. Historians of the black experience after Emancipation focused instead upon the rise of sharecropping as a replacement for slavery, the move of some Texas blacks into segregated “quarters” adjacent to white market towns, the development of*

Jim Crow segregation, and the “exodus” of a few thousand Texas freedmen to black developer towns in Kansas and Oklahoma during the 1870s and 1880s.

*Historians largely missed the similar and more general response of the freedmen’s settlements, where ex-slaves remained in the South to establish all-black landowner communities as far away from white authority as possible. Numbers are difficult to estimate, but **this ubiquitous, unremarked internal “exodus” to local “freedom colonies” must have dwarfed the famous move north.***

“Such places were defensive communities, where black property owners had circled the wagons against outsiders—a “fortress without walls. Freedmen’s settlements were black enclaves that kept to themselves and until the end of Jim Crow few whites wished—or dared—to live there.”

***“Reason[s] for the scholarly neglect of freedmen’s settlements may have been the decidedly counter-current (even “politically incorrect”) aspects of their story.”** -James H. Conrad and Thad Sitton, *Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans In The Time Of Jim Crow.*^{12 13}*

According to Texas A&M’s Dr. Andrea Roberts **“Texas Freedom Colonies Project”¹⁴** there are over 580 of such “freedom colonies” in Texas, and at least 5000 are expected to have existed in the US alone - with the first being Ft. Mose, founded in 1738 in what is now called Florida. There are tens of thousands more of these communities throughout the planet - dating back to the beginning of Western colonialism over 500 years ago. Everywhere Western “colonists” invaded, the people they targeted resisted, escaped, and took matters into their own hands to create their own communities of freedom where freedom could reign (and ring).

And for the most part, this international story of resistance has never been fully told.¹⁵

OPPORTUNITIES

The liquidation of colonialism is a trend of the times which no force can hold back. -Kim Jong Il

The opportunities are endless. The public-facing, crowd-sourced, open knowledge, digital tech initiative **#MappingFreedom**,¹⁶ interactively documents and digitally maps all of these “freedom colonies” - and every piece of digital information associated with them (video, audio, text, etc) - on the planet. Since the inception of Western colonialism, the targeted peoples escaped the terrorism of **Racialized Inheritable Phenotypic One-Drop - Chattel Atlantic Slave Trade Economy**

¹² Sitton, Thad and Conrad, James H..”Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans in the Time of Jim Crow” (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005. ISBN0-292-70618-9.

¹³ “Freedom Colonies Independent Black Texans in the Time of Jim Crow” <https://utpress.utexas.edu/books/sitcol>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

¹⁴ “The Texas Freedom Colonies Project.” <http://www.thetexasfreedomcoloniesproject.com/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

¹⁵ “ssha2019.” <http://ssha2019.ssha.org/abstracts/101017>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

¹⁶ “Freedom Colonies: the initial resistance, the original safe spaces” <http://oralhistory.columbia.edu/freedomcolonies-the-initial-resistance-the-original-safe-spaces>. Accessed 1 Jul. 2019.

(RIPOD-CASTE) slavery¹⁷, indigenous mass genocides, Jim Crow, Black Codes, and other human rights abuses, creating their own “colonies of freedom” and successfully protecting these “safe spaces.” The interactive map, replete with features developed by emerging technologies seeks to also digitally recreate these communities at varying stages and times in their histories.

Palenques in Colombia, quilombos and mocambos in Brazil, maroons throughout the Caribbean, Latin America, the Great Dismal Swamp region of North America and Asia, “freedom countries” like Haiti, and Liberia, and the numerous “freedmen settlements” across the North American continent, as well as such other communities, exist throughout Africa, Asia, and Australia. Thousands more exist along every pathway of Western colonialism, and I endeavor to find every single one, plot them on an international, interactive, digital GIS mapping apparatus, and connect the available data on these communities to their corresponding map plot points. #MappingFreedom merges the disciplines of digital humanities, emerging technologies, art, photography and journalism, and was featured at Columbia’s 2019 [*InterViews: An Interactive Oral History Exhibition*](#).¹⁸ It is also a finalist for [*Columbia's 2019 Masters Synthesis competition*](#)¹⁹ (presentation is [here](#)²⁰).

As we enter the third decade of the five centuries anniversary of Western colonialism, I’ve founded the International Association of Freedom Colonies (iAFC) to embark on an oral history project (the iAFC’s Oral History Archives) that will document the substantive role of resistance communities - freedom colonies - established to protect themselves from the human rights abuses committed by Western forces. iAFC’s Oral History Archives will dedicated research focus in areas of history, literature and academia, and the influence of these communities on the modern “colonizer” culture of today. The project will undertake in-depth interviews with descendants, scholars, and other such affiliates of these communities. The project envisions weaving the biographies, experiences, and analyses of those interviewed into a deep analytical history of the “international phenomenon of freedom colonies.”

The goal of this project aims to understand: a) resistance communities as a changing imprint and a source of cultural influence on modern society; b) their capacity to promote and sustain the relevance of area studies as a tool for training new generations of freedom colonies scholars, decision-makers, regional experts, and cultural diplomats; and c) preservationists and conservationists role in shaping policy and academic studies on the history of these

¹⁷ "America Wasn't a Democracy, Until Black Americans Made It One" 14 Aug. 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html>. Accessed 19 Aug. 2019.

¹⁸ "Freedom Colonies: the initial resistance, the original safe" <http://oralhistory.columbia.edu/freedomcolonies-the-initial-resistance-the-original-safe-spaces>. Accessed 6 Dec. 2019.

¹⁹ Five Minutes, Four Slides, No Notes: Students Present Their Research at GSAS Master’s SynThesis Competition <https://gsas.columbia.edu/blog/five-minutes-four-slides-no-notes-students-present-their-research-gsas-masters-synthesis>. Accessed 6 Dec. 2019

²⁰ "MappingFreedom - Squarespace." <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/50d0a18de4b07abde41656e7/t/5cd5c6e38165f5f0238af3bd/1557513956294/OHMA+%23MappingFreedom+presentation-2.pdf>. Accessed 1 Jul. 2019.

communities, backdropped by the issue of human rights. Upon its completion, the project will result in a powerful analytical and public record of achievements, challenges, limitations, and lessons learned. The iAFC is in the process of engaging the Columbia Center for Oral History Research to implement the project.

As a graduate candidate at Columbia's Oral History Masters of Arts (OHMA) program,²¹ I am centering oral histories to develop #MappingFreedom, and am creating a **Freedom Colonies Oral History Archive** with interviews of descendants, historical societies, scholars, conservationists, and other enthusiasts working to preserve and revive these historic communities. The archives will be a central part of the **International Association of Freedom Colonies (iAFC)** - an organization and summit series founded as a public private partnership (P3) dedicated to preservation, conservation and edu-tourism (inspired by Colonial Williamsburg and the Jamestown Foundation in Virginia near my hometown of Gloucester, Virginia where I was raised in a multi-centuries old military family and my parents served with the foundation).

The iAFC's mission is to help develop policy and best practices around the protection, preservation and conservation of the freedom colonies, using Colonial Williamsburg and the Jamestown Foundation, and other such sites, as successful models. (For example, **Weeksville**, the freedom colony in Brooklyn, NY - one of my thesis case studies- recently won a fight to get the city to make its Heritage Center a line item in its budget, becoming the first "black" cultural institution in Brooklyn to be so supported^{22,23}). I'm working to establish an **UN/ESCO World Heritage Freedom Colonies Trail**, identifying all of the freedom colonies around the world for edu-tourism and research purposes as well. Collecting oral histories and integrating them into an interactive, crowd-sourced digital map is a digital humanities project that is the result of a successful collaboration with many partners, and a result of my life's work and career.

My internal advisor is [Columbia's Obama Presidency Oral History Project](#)'s lead co-investigator [Mary Marshall Clark](#), who is also the director of the [Columbia Center for Oral History Research](#) and co-founder of [Columbia's Oral History Master of Arts](#) program, my external thesis advisor is Harvard Kennedy School's Director of Culture Change & Social Justice Initiatives at the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy. As a descendant of numerous of these communities, including *Hillside (Asheville)* in Buncombe County, NC; *Shankleville (Newton)* and *Elam Springs (Gilmer)* TX; *Blackdom* and *Vado* in NM; and *Boley* in OK, I draw upon interdisciplinary approach of storytelling and documentation. My essay about the importance of preserving the freedom

²¹ "Darold Cuba, MA Candidate in Oral History | Columbia | Graduate" 13 May. 2019, <https://gsas.columbia.edu/blog/Darold-Cuba-MA-Candidate-Oral-History>. Accessed 1 Jul. 2019.

²² "Weeksville will be first black city-funded cultural institution in Brooklyn." 14 Jun. 2019, <https://brooklyneagle.com/articles/2019/06/14/weeksville-will-be-first-black-city-funded-cultural-institution-in-brooklyn/>. Accessed 18 Aug. 2019.

²³ "Weeksville Heritage Center will receive funding through coveted city" 14 Jun. 2019, <https://ny.curbed.com/2019/6/14/18679516/nyc-brooklyn-weeksville-heritage-center-grants-cultural-institutions-group>. Accessed 18 Aug. 2019.

colonies has been published in the Spring 2019 issue of the **Houston Center for Photography's SPOT Magazine** ([here](#)).²⁴

I've presented #MappingFreedom at the "[Storytelling and Digital Preservation: Creators and Curators](#)" roundtable panel at the [15th International Conference on Digital Preservation \(iPress\)](#) in Sept. 2018, and launched [#MappingFreedom's Wikipedia database](#) at the [2018 WikiConference North America](#) in Oct, 2018. It was an interactive, multi-media digital poster at the **University of the West Indies' (Trinidad and Tobago) Biennial Conference on Education** in February 2019, and part of a roundtable discussion with the Amazon Conservation Team's Mapping and Programs Support Manager Rudo Kemper, at **NYU's Culture Mapping Migrations Digital Culture/s Colloquium** in April. I chaired the [Segregation and Inequality session \(88\)](#)²⁵ at the [Social Sciences History Association \(SSHA\) 2019 conference](#) in November²⁶ where #MappingFreedom presented at the [Public Facing Historical Big Data Projects: Challenges and Opportunities session \(820\)](#).²⁷ #MappingFreedom is also featured in the [Diversity in Public Art: Reclaiming the Hall: Empowering Community Voices at the Hall of Fame for Great Americans](#)²⁸ juried exhibition from Sept 21 - Oct 21st (2019) at **The Hall of Fame For Great Americans** - the first Hall of Fame in the US - to "*express perspectives on inclusion, diversity, and bias in defining Great Americans through visual art, music, dance, spoken work, media and performance.*" I was also selected to present **#MappingFreedom at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights' (ISHR) U.S. Local Racial Redress Conference**, on October 25 and 26, 2019; on "*The Voices of Those Wronged*" panel, about "historical racial injustice where narratives will go beyond illuminating historical dialogues to consider accountability and reconciliation," and as a Career Week Presenter at The Learning Tree, an independent school in the Bronx, NY on Oct 29th, I was a guest on Cumulus Media's **The Faith GRIND Inspire Podcast** (part of the OG Network at Madison Square Garden) on November 13, 2019, discussing the project, and have been invited to present #MappingFreedom at the #1619Project inspired **The Legacies of Slavery and Colonization -Confronting the Past; Informing the Future** conference at the [NY State Park's John Brown Farm State Historic Site](#) in February, and the International Oral History Conference in Singapore, in June of 2020.

The digital humanities project endeavors to produce a book, documentary, docu-series, and tv-show, and will build upon similar themes of media representation, tech innovation, solutions and problem solving, confronting colonialism and its results through decolonizing and indigenizing efforts at the intersections of creative innovations in tech, media and art. An "Oregon Trail meets Sims" like gaming idea centering the freedom colonies and their histories is

²⁴ "The Importance of Preserving the Histories of Freedmen's Towns" 29 May. 2019, <https://hcponline.org/spot/the-importance-of-preserving-the-histories-of-freedmens-towns/>. Accessed 1 Jul. 2019.

²⁵ "Session 88 Segregation and Inequality - ssha2019." <http://ssha2019.ssha.org/sessions/88>. Accessed 1 Jul. 2019.

²⁶ "Annual Conference - Social Science History Association." <https://ssha.org/conference/>. Accessed 1 Jul. 2019.

²⁷ "228. Public Facing Historical Big Data Projects - ssha2019." <http://ssha2019.ssha.org/sessions/228>. Accessed 1 Jul. 2019.

²⁸ "Upcoming Events - Five Boro Story Project." <http://www.fiveborostoryproject.org/upcoming-events/>. Accessed 4 Sep. 2019.

being explored as well. ([The Rosewood Heritage and VR Project](#) is one example of the many interdisciplinary and multimedia projects being explored.²⁹)

My intent is to create a body of work on the international “freedom colony” phenomenon centered in Oral History, because no one such work exists. Initially for an investigative story at The New York Times about the people who resisted Western colonialism and created the initial “resistance,” and the original “safe spaces” by creating their own fortified communities, this digital humanities project has become an interdisciplinary, interactive, multimedia work of international scope.

I am a direct descendant of many of these communities and their founding families, and it is another way to honor my ancestors and their untold stories. We have the oft-told narrative of the “Great Migration” - the successive waves of people branded “black” in the Western dialectic leaving the American South in droves to escape Jim Crow terrorism, most recently in the example of the prize winning book “The Warmth of Other Suns,” by former NYT Chicago Bureau Chief Isabel Wilkerson, but there hasn’t been a study of the phenomenon of people who stayed and created their “own place in the sun,” particularly in the oral tradition. I interview descendants and associates of the freedom colonies, their historical and preservation organizations and societies, and the scholars who have started to work on regional parts of this phenomenon (like TAMU’s Dr. Andrea Roberts and her Texas Freedom Colonies Project.)

CHALLENGES

If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it. -Zora Neale Hurston

The major obstacles to creating a digital database and interactive map of these communities aren’t technical, but structural. The systems and institutions that necessitated the creation of these spaces in the first place, continue to replicate the same - if not worse - cultural conditions that suppress the study, scholarship and awareness of these communities and their stakeholders. In her seminal work *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (1979)³⁰ Audre Lorde explores the need to create community that these freedom colonies so exemplify. “Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist...[S]urvival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring

²⁹ "Virtual World – Rosewood Heritage & VR Project - Virtual Rosewood."
<https://www.virtualrosewood.com/vr/>. Accessed 19 Aug. 2019.

³⁰The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House. Audre Lorde. 1979.
<https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/lordedismantle.html>

about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support."

In "[The Invention of the White People](#)"³¹ Columbia University professor Hamid Dabashi³² remind us that the construct of "race" was created as a justifier of the racism that colonialism engendered, and not the other way around, as western societies usually desperately try to prove. The 2017 Al Jazeera America piece eviscerated the mainstream industrial complex's multilevel systemic and institutional mechanisms (academia, media, publishing, etc) to justify and normalize the now more visible structural racism (electoral college) that had elected Donald Trump:

"There are no white people. There are no black people. There are no red, yellow, brown, blue, purple, crimson or any other colour people. These are all socially constructed delusions. Delusions though with real, frightful, murderous, and genocidal consequences.

None of these facts have been hidden to us. There is a vast body of scholarly literature on the social construction of race, gender, and ethnicity.

In his monumental two-volume study, [The Invention of the White Race \(Revised edition, 2012\)](#)³³, as early as in the 1960s Theodore W. Allen had documented the manner in which the ruling elite in the United States had devised the category of "white people" by way of economic exploitation of the African slaves and the social control of the emerging polities. More recently, in her [Birth of a White Nation: The Invention of White People and Its Relevance Today \(2013\)](#),³⁴ Jacqueline Battalora has offered an examination of the enduring issue of race in the US tracing it back to when "white people" were invented through legislations and enactment of laws.

The problem with this scholarly body of literature is not only the fact that its erudite message does not get through the thick skulls of illiterate racists like Donald Trump's white supremacist supporters. The problem is that such archaeology of hatred does not erase the fact that a massive body of humanity has suffered precisely because they have been branded as "black" or "red," or "yellow" or "brown". Racially constituted to divide and rule, those colourful delusions have become social facts.

Central to all such socially constructed delusions are the relations of power they entail and sustain - whether colour-coded, classed, racialised, or gendered. "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman", Simone de Beauvoir declared in her path-breaking book [The Second Sex](#)

³¹ "Dabashi, Hamid ".The Invention of the White People." Al Jazeera Opinion. 28 Aug 2017 <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/08/invention-white-people-170824095046840.html>

³² "MESAAS | Hamid Dabashi - Columbia University." <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/mesaas/faculty/directory/dabashi.html>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

³³ "The Invention of the White Race, Volume 1: Racial Oppression and" <https://www.amazon.com/Invention-White-Race-Oppression-Control/dp/1844677699>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

³⁴ "Birth of a White Nation: The Invention of White People and Its" <https://www.amazon.com/Birth-White-Nation-Invention-Relevance/dp/1622127226>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

(1949). In later, critical expansion of this idea, scholars like Judith Butler have shown how varied social practices are definitive to the social constitution of gender. The same is true about race or ethnicity. One is not born, we may extend de Beauvoir's insight, but rather becomes white, or black, etc."

As he set about "Dismantling of the murderous myth that is "White People" to "break down the backbone of the racist ideology," Dabashi explored how and why such systems and institutions were created in the first place, with a section called "**The Almost Whites**": "The distinguished novelist and Nobel Prize laureate Toni Morrison has keenly observed³⁵: "All immigrants to the United States know (and knew) that if they want to become real, authentic Americans they must reduce their fealty to their native country and regard it as secondary, subordinate, in order to emphasize their whiteness."

But the question is not fealty to any "native country". The question is rather the systematic subordination of all immigrants, regardless of how they have been colour-coded, to the myth of the "white people" and the violent fantasies of their civilizing missions. No brown, black, or any other thus coloured person can ever be completely "white". But their trying to pass as white is a mechanism of humiliation and denigration they willingly play to presume they are part of the power structure and a more "normal" human being."

In *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (1998),³⁶ Karen Brodtkin has put forward one line of argument as to how since World War II American Jews began to pose and perform themselves as "white". The practice is not peculiar to American Jews, of course. Upon their arrivals and one generation into a successful economic status, other recent immigrants, Muslims and Hindus alike, have also sought to posit and pass themselves as (almost) white.

Becoming white has always been the most potent way for racialised "minorities" to overcome their violently alienated personhood in order to become something they could (and should) never be.

Towards a Dialectic of Emancipation

By replicating and reenacting the racial politics of their European origin and now their US benefactors upon Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular, the Zionists are the living testimonials as to how racial hatred is manufactured and sustained as means of political domination. The term "Israeli Arab" invented by Zionists for Palestinians in their own homeland is the epitome of European racism carried to its most obscene colonial conclusions.

³⁵ "Making America White Again | The New Yorker." 14 Nov. 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/21/making-america-white-again>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

³⁶ "How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in" <https://www.amazon.com/Became-White-Folks-About-America/dp/081352590X>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

Struggle for racial justice must commence and continue with the full knowledge of how racial divides were socially manufactured and politically sustained before we can learn how to overcome them. The full acknowledgment of the murderous history of racism in the US and Europe is the first step towards dismantling it. No postmodern or poststructuralist dismantling of race can disregard the sustained history of racism as coterminous with capitalist modernity. It must acknowledge, sublate, in order to overcome it.”

President Lyndon B. Johnson famously observed "If you can convince the lowest white man he's better than the best colored man, he won't notice you're picking his pocket. Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he'll empty his pockets for you."³⁷ This mantra has been implemented by the colonial elite to manage its colonial projects to this day.

Toni Morrison’s incisive New Yorker article, [“Making America White Again](#), mentioned above, explored this con even further, amidst the backdrop of the USA’s 2016 election of reality tv host Donald Trump. *“On Election Day, how eagerly so many white voters—both the poorly educated and the well educated—embraced the shame and fear sowed by Donald Trump. The candidate whose company has been sued by the Justice Department for not renting apartments to black people. The candidate who questioned whether Barack Obama was born in the United States, and who seemed to condone the beating of a Black Lives Matter protester at a campaign rally. The candidate who kept black workers off the floors of his casinos. The candidate who is beloved by David Duke and endorsed by the Ku Klux Klan.*

*In order to limit the possibility of this untenable change, **and restore whiteness to its former status as a marker of national identity, a number of white Americans are sacrificing themselves. They have begun to do things they clearly don’t really want to be doing, and, to do so, they are (1) abandoning their sense of human dignity and (2) risking the appearance of cowardice. Much as they may hate their behavior, and know full well how craven it is, they are willing to kill small children attending Sunday school and slaughter churchgoers who invite a white boy to pray. Embarrassing as the obvious display of cowardice must be, they are willing to set fire to churches, and to start firing in them while the members are at prayer. And, shameful as such demonstrations of weakness are, they are willing to shoot black children in the street.***

To keep alive the perception of white superiority, these white Americans tuck their heads under cone-shaped hats and American flags and deny themselves the dignity of face-to-face confrontation, training their guns on the unarmed, the innocent, the scared, on subjects who are running away, exposing their unthreatening backs to bullets. Surely, shooting a fleeing man in the back hurts the presumption of white strength? The sad plight of grown white men, crouching beneath their (better) selves, to slaughter the innocent during traffic stops, to push black women’s faces into the dirt, to handcuff black children. Only the frightened would do that. Right?”³⁸

³⁷ "Opinion | 'The Lowest White Man' - The New York Times." 11 Jan. 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/11/opinion/trump-immigration-white-supremacy.html>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

³⁸ "Making America White Again | The New Yorker." 14 Nov. 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/21/making-america-white-again>. Accessed 1 Jul. 2019.

This worldwide resistance to Western colonialism by the people targeted by its terrorism and crimes against humanity - the mass indigenous genocides, the centuries of Atlantic Slave Trade, and racism & white supremacy - is one of the best kept secrets in the history of the world. So much so that I, as the Ivy League's first Wikipedia Fellow, university-wide Wikimedian-In-Residence and Wikipedia Visiting (Research) Scholar³⁹ was prohibited from creating a page on that very platform about this phenomenon because there was "insufficient sourcing." And when I continued to challenge the inherent, systemic, institutional and structural bias in this line of reasoning, calling out the systemic racism and institutionalized white supremacy endemic to Wikipedia's content worldview as a settler colonial and patriarchal narrative, "on-wiki" and also on my department's blog ([here](#)⁴⁰ and [here](#)⁴¹), I was accused of "disrupting Wikipedia" and temporary blocked several times.⁴²

Ultimately, a "consensus" of Wikipedians "collaborated" to "indefinitely ban" me from editing about "race, racism, racial history and politics, slavery, or white supremacy all very broadly construed." And that adding to the draft database of freedom colonies I had created on-wiki "violated that ban." As a result, I promptly [co-founded](#)⁴³ [#DisruptWikipedia](#)⁴⁴ with the [Columbia and Barnard Libraries](#) "to use the wealth of resources of the academy, its libraries and archives - especially at peer institutions - to "disrupt," dismantle and eliminate this systemic and institutional bias, inequity and representation on Wikimedia platforms like Wikipedia and its sister tools like WikiData, WikiSource and WikiCommons, and in other free-culture, open access, open content, open source and open-source-software movements."⁴⁵

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³⁹ "Darold Cuba (2018) — Oral History Master of Arts." 2 Aug. 2018, <http://oralhistory.columbia.edu/current-student-bios/People/darold-cuba-2018>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁴⁰ "Indigenous scholar's work informs new Columbia University +" 16 May. 2019, <http://oralhistory.columbia.edu/blog-posts/indigenous-scholars-work-informs-new-columbia-university-wiki-pedia-initiatives>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2019.

⁴¹ "Wikimedia to the Rescue? How Wikipedia's Crowdsourcing" 22 Dec. 2018, <http://oralhistory.columbia.edu/blog-posts/wikimedia-to-the-rescue-how-wikipedias-crowdsourcing-model-could-catalyze-the-field-of-oral-history>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2019.

⁴² "MSW Students Join in Campaign to Make Wikipedia More" 31 Oct. 2019, <https://socialwork.columbia.edu/news/msw-students-join-in-campaign-to-make-wikipedia-more-inclusive/>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2019.

⁴³ "MSW Students Join in Campaign to Make Wikipedia More" 31 Oct. 2019, <https://socialwork.columbia.edu/news/msw-students-join-in-campaign-to-make-wikipedia-more-inclusive/>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2019.

⁴⁴ "Wikipedia:Do not disrupt Wikipedia to illustrate a point" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Do_not_disrupt_Wikipedia_to_illustrate_a_point. Accessed 9 Nov. 2019.

⁴⁵ "MSW Students Join in Campaign to Make Wikipedia More" 31 Oct. 2019, <https://socialwork.columbia.edu/news/msw-students-join-in-campaign-to-make-wikipedia-more-inclusive/>. Accessed 9 Nov. 2019.

⁴⁶ "DHC Weekly 9/18- Asking more of Wikipedia | Diving into the" 18 Sep. 2019, <http://barnarddhcblog.com/dhc-weekly/dhc-weekly-9-18-asking-more-of-wikipedia/>. Accessed 9 Nov. 2019.

In keeping with “historian’s” need to propagate an image of **“this dark image of the degradation of landless blacks”—of the rise of sharecropping, “debt slavery,” the “neo-plantation,” and Jim Crow apartheid,”** the media-publishing and political-industrial -complexes, in an effort to **“justify slavery, Jim Crow, mass incarceration, widespread economic inequity and urban disinvestment — as well as to gain and maintain political and social power,”**⁴⁷ were more than happy to join in this nefarious charade, continuing with such racist rhetoric even up unto the present day. In 2017, The Washington Post published [“News media offers consistently warped portrayals of black families, study finds”](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/12/13/news-media-offers-consistently-warped-portrayals-of-black-families-study-finds/), a report by Tracy Jan.⁴⁸ It found that *“Major media outlets routinely present a distorted picture of black families — portraying them as dependent and dysfunctional — while white families are more likely to be depicted as sources of social stability, according to the report released Wednesday by Color of Change, a racial justice organization, and Family Story, an advocate of diverse family arrangements.*

“This leaves people with the opinion that black people are plagued with self-imposed dysfunction that creates family instability and therefore, all their problems,” said Travis L. Dixon, a communications professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign who conducted the study.”

The same article found that *“[o]ver time, however, political leaders and the media have “worked to pathologize black families in the American imagination to justify slavery, Jim Crow, mass incarceration, widespread economic inequity and urban disinvestment — as well as to gain and maintain political and social power,” wrote Nicole Rodgers, founder of Family Story.”* It concluded that *“such stereotypes fuel political rhetoric⁴⁹ and inform public policy, such as Congress’s consideration to “gut social safety net programs,” he said. Stricter work requirements, drug testing and other welfare restrictions are likely to be supported by a public exposed to inaccurate portrayals of black families, the report said. Legislators can point to media coverage of black families in their zeal to further limit welfare programs and say, “It’s all their fault. They just need to get their ducks in a row,” Dixon said.”*

The research methods to determine these findings were meticulous. *“Researchers reviewed more than 800 local and national news stories and commentary pieces published or aired between January 2015 and December 2016, randomly sampling the most highly rated news programs for each of the major broadcast and cable networks. Those included ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox News and MSNBC.*

⁴⁷ “News media offers consistently warped portrayals of black families” 13 Dec. 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/12/13/news-media-offers-consistently-warped-portrayals-of-black-families-study-finds/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁴⁸ “News media offers consistently warped portrayals of black families” 13 Dec. 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/12/13/news-media-offers-consistently-warped-portrayals-of-black-families-study-finds/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁴⁹ “Welfare queens and red-blooded Americans: How Russia tapped into” 17 Nov. 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/11/17/welfare-queens-and-red-blooded-americans-how-russia-tapped-into-our-racial-anxieties-to-fuel-social-divide/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

Also included in the study: newspapers of national influence such as The Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, USA Today, Los Angeles Times and the Chicago Tribune as well as regional newspapers, conservative websites such as Breitbart, and Christian news sources like the Christian Post.

The study concluded both ideologically driven news sources as well as traditional newspapers and broadcasts furthered false narratives about black families, helping to shape public assumptions that they are “uniquely and irrevocably pathological and undeserving,” Dixon said.

“There are dire consequences for black people when these outlandish archetypes rule the day: abusive treatment by police, less attention from doctors, harsher sentences from judges,” Rashad Robinson, executive director of Color of Change, wrote in the report.

Dixon said racial tropes of the absentee black father or family dysfunction were frequently invoked during new shows featuring political commentary. Pundits were often allowed to spout inaccurate generalizations about black families without being challenged by hosts.

“Let’s say the actual topic was the Black Lives Matter movement and police citizen interactions,” Dixon said. “This idea of the problematic black family would keep coming up, almost out of nowhere, even if the topic was not about the black family.”

The report makes several recommendations for the news industry, including setting stronger standards for sourcing information and experts, providing greater social and historical context, and including people of color in setting editorial standards.”

Just a month earlier the same Post journalist had reported that “[h]ollywood essentially “whitewashes” the narratives that influence the country, with shows that ignore or gloss over racial injustice, in the article [How white TV writers decide the stories Hollywood tells America](#).⁵⁰ “White-dominated writers’ rooms are more likely to produce shows with stereotypical story lines and one-dimensional black “sidekicks” to white central characters.”

The same article featured the report, “[an] 83-page study [that] examined 234 comedy and drama series across 18 broadcast, cable and digital platforms in the 2016-2017 season. Fewer than 10 percent of the shows were led by minority showrunners, and only 14 percent of writers across all shows were members of a minority group, even though minorities represent nearly 40 percent of the population. Two-thirds of the shows had no black writers. Black writers overall accounted for less than 5 percent of the 3,817 writers across the shows, even though black people make up 13 percent of the population.”

“The lack of diversity extended across all platforms, including digital spaces such as Hulu,” it went on to find. “The report also singled out AMC and Amazon for failing to include black showrunners and writers. (Jeffrey P. Bezos, the founder and chief executive of Amazon, owns

⁵⁰ "How white TV writers decide the stories Hollywood tells America - The" 6 Nov. 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2017/11/06/how-white-tv-writers-shape-the-stories-hollywood-tells-america/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

The Washington Post). The report said the lack of diversity at AMC and Amazon was especially troubling given their relatively new status as influencers of TV content. And more than 90 percent of the shows on CBS — which aired 25 scripted shows last season, second only to Netflix, and is the most-watched network — had either just one black writer or none at all.

“We need to change that because television is not just entertainment,” Hunt said. “Media images do matter, particularly for people who don’t have a lot of face-to-face encounters with people who are not like them. A lot of what they learn about people is what they see in these images.”

And of course it comes as no surprise that *“Representatives of the networks either declined to speak on the record or did not respond to requests for comment.”*

The systemic, institutional and structural inferiority complex⁵¹ of Western white supremacy projected⁵² onto the peoples it targeted for disenfranchisement and other human rights abuses knows no bounds and has replicated a culture of European medieval feudalism into the 21st century. Like a virus, it has wiped out many other cultures, installing a deadly disease in their place, manifesting as “colonies.”

Freedom colonies, as resistance to this, are the foil.

As Nancy Isenberg revealed in her 2016 New York Times bestseller⁵³ ***White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America***⁵⁴, European royals, nobles and high-ranking emissaries merely replicated their brutal, elitist, cultural, social, economic and political class systems of their medieval, “Dark Age” feudalistic cultures onto the peoples and lands they invaded, creating “dumping grounds for the European poor.”⁵⁵ And this poor class, the peasantry (immigrants, indentured servants and other “undesirables”), suffering from centuries of epigenetic levels of trauma-induced Stockholm syndrome, has carried out the inhumane atrocities -crimes against humanity- in service to their overlords ever since.

⁵¹ "White supremacy's inferiority complex | Politics | Al Jazeera." 30 Nov. 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2016/11/white-supremacy-racial-inferiority-complex-161129104031285.html>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁵² "The (sexual) Inferiority Complex of White Supremacists: Charlottesville" 21 Aug. 2017, <http://bridge.georgetown.edu/sexual-inferiority-complex-white-supremacists-charlottesville-call-white-shari-a/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁵³ "White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America: Nancy" <https://www.amazon.com/White-Trash-400-Year-History-America/dp/0143129678>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁵⁴ "“White Trash” — a cultural and political history of an American" 23 Jun. 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/book-party/wp/2016/06/23/a-cultural-and-political-history-of-white-trash-america/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁵⁵ "A Look at America's Long and Troubled History of White Poverty - The" 25 Jun. 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/26/books/review/white-trash-by-nancy-isenberg.html>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

Isenberg explored the effects of this systemic replication of European feudal institutions into the colonies in The Daily Beast's [Dismissing Trump Fans As White Trash Gets Our Class System All Wrong](#). *"Why are Americans so reluctant to talk about the real and enduring character of our class system? What has muted class as a meaningful category? In short, the American Dream. From the Revolution forward, citizens have been told that the promise of upward mobility is quintessentially American. In fact, though, we inherited the British fixation with idleness, whereby the poor are blamed for failing to work hard, buy land, produce healthy heirs, and have an economic stake in society. While land was the source of wealth and class status in early American, landlessness was rampant. The word "white trash" evolved by the mid-19th century from the term that British colonizers had used to describe the worthless dregs who were dumped in the New World: "waste people." Both Thomas Jefferson and Abigail Adams unhesitatingly described the poor that surrounded them as "rubbish." And what of the noble pioneers? Our landless migrants were called "squatters" and "crackers." Trespassing on public and private lands or in Indian territory, they were routinely dismissed as "vermin," the women as "idle sluts," who lived in "grotesque log cabins," surrounded by their ragged brood of "yellow" children.*

Americans continue to tell themselves that they believe in social equality, but history tells a different story. Southern slave owners who lived lavishly convinced themselves they were descendants of Cavalier stock—aristocrats. The most articulate defender of the southern class system, Alabaman Daniel Hundley, laid out seven different classes in 1860. At the bottom he placed "bullies" and "poor white trash," the latter who he claimed traced their degenerate lineage back to the wretched poor from the back alleys of London. (His "bullies" today would be called rednecks.) Well into the 20th century, the conventional wisdom was that class identity was inherited from parent to child, that "like breeds like."

Class has never been simply about wealth or occupation alone, but about pedigree and breeding."

In [The White Trash Theory of Donald Trump](#), Sarah Marsh explores this even further for The New Republic.⁵⁶ *"Isenberg demonstrates that colonial America could never have existed without a large and forgotten class of "waste people": the convicts and orphans and indentured servants who made America habitable for religious extremists and political idealists.*

Isenberg's argument is based on painstakingly supported factual analysis, and studded with narratives as horrific—and as disturbingly familiar—as that of Jamestown's Jane Dickenson, the wife of an indentured servant. Captured by Native Americans in 1622, she was freed nearly a year later only to find that she owed an exorbitant sum to her dead husband's master. Jane's husband had not lived long enough to complete his period of indenture, so it was Jane's job to work it off for him. The specter of indentured servitude itself—in which servants worked off the cost of their passage to the colonies on arrival—is chillingly familiar in an America where debt can follow us across national borders, through the decades, and even beyond the grave.

⁵⁶ "The White Trash Theory of Donald Trump | The New Republic." 6 Jul. 2016, <https://newrepublic.com/article/134875/white-trash-theory-donald-trump>. Accessed 27 Nov. 2019.

Yet perhaps even more illuminating is Isenberg's conception of the role America played in the British imagination. From the beginning, Isenberg shows us, America was, to many Britons, not a "Citty upon a Hill" or a "Holy Experiment," but a cesspool. "During the 1600s," Isenberg writes, "Far from being ranked as valued British subjects, the great majority of early colonists were classified as surplus population and expendable 'rubbish.'" When it came to disposing of the "rubbish" class, the theory went that:

Either nature would reduce the burden of the poor through food shortages, starvation, and disease, or, drawn into crime, they might end up on the gallows. Finally, some would be impressed by force or lured by bounties to fight and die in foreign wars, or else be shipped off to the colonies... Once there, it was hoped, the drones would be energized as worker bees.

Before we had a government or even a national identity, we had a foundation of disposable Americans who could best play their mandated role in society by either working or dying. But what do we do with those perverse individuals who refuse to do either? What do we do with those Americans who can neither be "energized as worker bees," nor relied upon to relieve their country of the burden of providing for them?

"Those who fail to rise in America are a crucial part of who we are as a civilization," Isenberg writes. Perhaps most meaningfully, they demonstrate that America is and always has been a country where one can fail to rise: A country where debt begets debt and money dries to nothing, where poverty is inescapable, and where there is and always has been liberty and justice for some.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Donald Trump's campaign has been his ability to turn disenfranchised citizens into "worker bees" by alchemizing their alienation into votes. Such a class of Americans has always existed, and so has their often all too justified belief that their government is unable or unwilling to provide for their needs. Whether Trump's success suggests an increase in this demographic's size is ultimately less relevant than the question of why, as Americans, we remain so compelled to perpetuate a mythology that ignores our country's very foundation—and what might happen, quite simply, if we accepted our heritage as a trash nation. Would doing so allow us to better care for the Americans we have done our best to forget?"

She continues to explore the present-day con game played upon the European non-elites through the lens of Trump's own lifelong dedication to class warfare. "Perhaps the only accident that could hurt Trump's numbers would be a hot mic that revealed him as thoughtful, empathetic, or even kind. So far, the closest thing we have to a moment like this might be a scene from a 2007 episode of *The Apprentice*, in which Trump took sudden and surprising umbrage at a contestant describing himself as "white trash."

“You shouldn’t use that expression anymore,” Trump said, after firing the contestant. “It’s a terrible expression. It’s not a nice expression.”

If Donald Trump sees white trash as his core demographic, he isn’t telling. Doing so, after all, might mean facing the fact that his constituents are drawn to him not because they are impassioned by his message, but because they have been rendered voiceless for so long that they are happy to have anyone speak on their behalf. It might mean facing the fact that his own rise, in business and in politics, is based on exploiting others’ weakness. It might mean realizing that such a vast class of desperate, marginalized people has always existed but does not need to exist, and that, if America was “great,” there would simply be no one left to vote for him.”

And this “wasteland” of “white” people have lived in abject terror ever since the creation of such a con, projecting and transferring that fear as “white rage” upon the people their colonial overlords told them were “not-white.” Brown University professor of Caribbean studies, [Dixa Ramirez D’Oleo](#) explores the effects of this iteration of Western colonialism’s unmitigated cancer, and the unprecedented multi-layered terrorism that afflicts its people “who need to be white” (Coates, 2015). [The Hills Are Alive: “Pet Sematary” and the Horror of Indigenous Sovereignty and Black Freedom](#) explores the subculture of colonizer horror through storytelling, particular the stereotyped tropes of “the unknown” and “the space beyond the edge” -represented, in no small part, by freedom colonies - for the LA Review of Books, backdropped by the 2019 remake of Pet Sematary (based on the eponymous book by Stephen King). Drawing on the exploration of the fear and anger of the “white imagination” (Rankine, 2016) and “the white gaze” (Morrison 1975), which have been constructed through “racecraft” (Fields & Fields, 2012), D’Oleo demonstrates the incessant fear and rage that “whiteness” - the culture of institutional white supremacy (systemic racism) - has created through the construct of racialization, which itself has been created to justify Western colonialism:

“This space beyond the edge hosts flora and fauna not yet and perhaps never to be fully subservient to the logics of settler colonialism, the plantation, and capitalism. From another perspective, the hills are the refuge of those who never agreed with the project of Western modernity. In countless books and films, the Negro, the Indian, the inbred hillbilly, the toothless hag, and so on, scratch scratch scratch at the idealized American family’s windows.

The message of much of US horror storytelling is that no world is more terrifying for a white man than the one that decenters him, and, as such, destroys him. The very concept of (white) Man came to exist only in relation to others: indigenous peoples hand over their lands then disappear, white women extend Man’s property, and blacks multiply it through physical labor, including black women’s reproduction. The concept of an ideal subject of the Western world comes into being only through this structure. Without it, Man might be forced to face what

Calvin Warren calls “the horror of nothing.” The Western world order alchemizes nonwhite subjects into tools for Man’s (and many white women’s) cobbled individualism. Unfortunately for Man, these appendages or objects have always had a life of their own.

From the outset, Man assumed that the soil, emptied (literally or figuratively) of its original inhabitants, is fecund and pliant, as is the enslaved labor that turns this soil into profit. But the intertwined histories of settler colonialism and slavery are also always about fugitivity; the first enslaved Africans brought to the Americas fled into the mountains of Hispaniola, already home to indigenous maroons. Landscapes inhospitable to white settlers became the refuge of nonwhite fugitives. Amoral, the soil not only gave fruit and profit to whoever exploited it, but also yielded the tools of rebellion: poisonous plants to halt a forced pregnancy or, perhaps, to kill the master and rapist; herbs to heal wounds inflicted through work and punishment; and zombies to turn against humans.

Soil — evil from one perspective and sheltering from another — emerges as a central trope in the original 1989 film adaptation of Stephen King’s novel *Pet Sematary* (1983), directed by Mary Lambert. Following Hollywood tradition, directors Kevin Kölsch and Dennis Widmyer released a remake in April of this year. While the new version hews fairly close to the original adaptation, it removes the scenes that transformed this otherwise shlocky horror fare into a film worth considering in relation to settler colonialism and slavery. Inspired by the uninspired remake, I revisited the 1989 version and was newly awed by how much the film revolves around white patriarchal anxiety over land. White male children die before they can become the heirs necessary to maintain Man’s project in the Americas. Even worse, they return as zombies intent on destroying their fathers.

Pet Sematary centers around the Creeds, the Platonic ideal of a white American family with a strapping young doctor, Louis, presiding over his Nordically attractive wife, a Pisces-mooned little girl, and a doomed boychild. Church, a talkative and rotund cat named after Winston Churchill (of course), is the real star in the film. Wanting to spend more time with the family, Louis leaves a busy practice in Chicago and accepts a new job as a doctor in rural Maine. They move into an old, colonial-style house fronted by a sunny lawn and surrounded by untamed woods beyond. A cheery and homey musical score accompanies the nesting family as they settle

into their new digs. But soon enough the film begins to chip away at the already frail veneer of WASPy family comfort.

Filmed from below to emphasize their weight and speed, cargo trucks barrel down the country highway by the front yard at what seems to be hundreds of miles per hour. A creepy little “sematary” full of ancient pets loved and lost sits just beyond the house. And then there’s the housekeeper who hangs herself in a basement. Things go truly awry when, spoiler alert, both cat and boychild are killed by speeding trucks. Jud Crandall, a friendly local who lives in overalls, leads a despondent Dr. Louis to a hilled part of the woods beyond the pet cemetery. The rocky hilltop, Jud informs Louis, comprises an old “Micmac Indian” burial ground that contains the power to animate former life-beings. Described as “sour” by several characters in the film, this soil yields zombies instead of crops.

According to Jud, the original inhabitants — the Mi’kmaq Nation — willingly fled their land because an evil force haunts it. Both the novel and the new version of the film name the force the wiindigoo, a terrifying creature that appears in many North American tribes’ stories. The wiindigoo — and the Mi’kmaw’s willful escape — elides the violent history of the removal of indigenous people in what is now called the United States, and their continuous struggles for sovereignty. In Jud’s retelling of the cemetery’s lore, the town’s subsequent white settlers avoided the evil hilltop because taking advantage of the soil’s powers of animation had resulted in disaster. But the residents are not terrorized by the hilltop, per se, but by the outsized speeding trucks. Put differently, the Creeds and other white locals are terrorized by the capitalist mechanisms of modernity, on the one hand, and what I like to call the hills, on the other.

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In the Caribbean, where I was born, the hills, el monte, or les mornes represent black and indigenous freedom, especially through marronage. Monte spirits, benevolent and otherwise, populate Caribbean written and oral storytelling. But do not call these stories “magical realism,” a marketing invention that presumes that those spirits are less concrete than a house with a zinc roof. Indigenous and afro-descendent subjects’ conversations with the land and its energies, regardless of the demands of so-called modernity, are real. Must we shapeshift in abortive attempts to become Enlightenment’s Man? It might be best to welcome the lurk.

Blackness, indigeneity, and whiteness — as imagined categories made real through law and violence — are unevenly entangled in the Americas and have worked out quite well for white settlers: stolen indigenous lands minus indigenous peoples plus black (and, in other ways, Asian) labor equals white property. Musing on land in Mother England, a bratty John Locke wrote: “Thus the grass my horse has bit; the turfs my servant has cut; and the ore I have digged in any place [...] become my property, without the assignation or consent of any body.” Of course, Mother England had just begun enfolding most of the world, including what is now the United States and much of the Caribbean, into her capacious stranglehold. The multispecies inhabitants and energies of the hills are an active rejection of Locke. Out of sync with Enlightenment common sense, its soil holds the memory of unsettled debts. “Ghosts,” writes Renée Bergland, “are the things that we try to bury, but that refuse to stay buried.”

*Horror stories, especially those that recycle the tropes about shifty-eyed Negroes and spectral Indians, hinge repeatedly on the anxieties that plague the property-owning white man. The questions looming over the narratives, which often remain unspoken, are themselves translations of even more suppressed and unspoken worries. “Will that black man rape my white wife or daughter?” disguises a worse potential: “Does my white wife or daughter prefer to have sex with that black man?” **And it most certainly sublimates the reality that this country was founded in great part on white men’s rape of enslaved black women. The worry that “we have moved into a house built on Indian burial grounds” obscures the needling thought that, perhaps, the entire edifice of the Western world order is built on stolen land.***

James H. Conrad and Thad Sitton further explored these issues through the egregious erasure of the freedom colonies phenomenon from the Western mainstream narrative, and were forced to concede that layers upon layers of intentional cultural erasure, white-washing and revisioning still go on today as institutions commit to their white supremacist narratives in order to replicate the status quo of systemic disenfranchisement. The need to erase, suppress, white-wash and otherwise denigrate narratives that disrupted their need to dehumanize the people they invaded has not only continued, but has been exponentially replicated through all of its ensuing systems, institutions and structural foundations. On the one hand, it isn’t surprising that communities which resisted such terrorism were not only further targeted for destruction, particularly their narratives, but the continued intentioned, well-orchestrated attacks on these communities are so egregious that a closer study is warranted.

This was evident during my own tenure as a journalist and producer at the New York Times where this story began while I was incubating a social initiative startup, #HackingRacism, at Columbia’s IE@Columbia (Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Columbia) at the Business

School, with my two white cofounders, who were married and expecting a baby and trying to figure out how to raise a child who would be branded “white” in a culture that was STILL unmistakably systemically white supremacist and institutionally racist - in 2017. He was an elementary school teacher in Westchester County, NY (where he was also from) finishing up a Ph.D in education at Fordham (he had two Masters and a Fulbright as well), and she was a dance professor at Barnard with her own dance company and dance app startup. A meeting with the publishing house HarpersCollins convinced us that one way to “hack racism” was through storytelling of narratives of people branded “not-white” that defied mainstream stereotypes. As we commenced to compiling hundreds of stories to be told, the Shankleville Historical Society in Texas asked me to be the keynote speaker for the 150th anniversary service of the town of Shankleville. My male co-founder accompanied me there and was astounded at the stories of all of the “first black” success of these communities and its families (my family) and I pitched it to the Times as a story they could map of all of these “freedom colonies” around the world.

The majority white [and male] editors looked at me as if I’d grown three extra heads. They’d never heard of anything like this, many of them relayed to me, sure they knew of a few black towns, but the 580 that TAMU professor Andrea Roberts had found in Texas alone, the 5000 she estimated existed across the country, with thousands more across every colonial pathway, was far too much for their “white imagination, gaze, lens, perspective and narrative,” endemic of the mainstream media industrial complex that the Times (which still has the whitest newsroom of all of its peers) fancied itself at the top of. Plus, they’d already run the Harriet Tubman story where they mapped her journey from Maryland to northern freedom, and decided instead to pledge resources to the excruciatingly data heavy [“Extensive Data Shows Punishing Reach of Racism for Black Boys”](#)⁵⁷ story in their “Upshot” section, pushing the narrative that the “black sons of millionaires will do worse than the poorest white boys” that coincidentally dovetailed with what the Trump base REALLY wanted to hear. The NYTimes has been accused of pandering to Trump and his base because of the profitability of having right wingers purchase subscriptions because they see themselves in the pages, i.e Richard Spencer, Gavin McGINNESS (VICE and Proud Boy founder) and [“the Nazi Next Door”](#)⁵⁸ profiles the Times began to run as it covered the constituencies that voted for Trump, in an effort to “understand them better.” Or so it [claimed](#).⁵⁹

This prompted my retreat to academia, to build an oral history archive in order to center the voices of these communities and their stories that disrupt the status quo narratives of Western culture, while building the database at Wikipedia and mapping them all on a public facing map to help bring home to the public the sheer numbers of communities that resisted the terrorism of colonialism.

⁵⁷ “Extensive Data Shows Punishing Reach of Racism for Black” 19 Mar. 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/03/19/upshot/race-class-white-and-black-men.html>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2019.

⁵⁸ “A Voice of Hate in America's Heartland - The New York Times.” 25 Nov. 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/25/us/ohio-hovater-white-nationalist.html>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2019.

⁵⁹ “The problem with the New York Times' normalizing profile of” 25 Nov. 2017, <https://qz.com/1138080/the-problem-with-the-new-york-times-normalizing-profile-of-nazi-sympathizer-tony-hovater/>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2019.

I constantly think about what noted freedom colony descendant (Eatonville, Florida) and Barnard's first black graduate, who famously said about the five centuries of western terrorism plaguing the planet; **"If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it."** Zora Neale Hurston saw the futility in adhering to the recessive practices of a humanity-deficient culture for "protection" or "wealth," and I intend to follow her lead. I do understand that the terrorism was so deadly during the heyday of the freedom colonies that staying mum and hidden was strictly survival, but the storyteller in me won't allow me to shy away from telling these stories in all of their intensities now that I have a chance to.

In the documentary *Take this Hammer*,⁶⁰ James Baldwin famously says **"what you say about somebody else, anybody else, reveals you...We have invented the nigger - I didn't invent him - White people invented him...If I am not the nigger, and if it's true that your invention reveals you, then who is the nigger? ... Well, he's unnecessary to me, so he must be necessary to you. I'm going to give you your problem back: You're the nigger, baby, it isn't me."**⁶¹ He minces no words as he explores the issues of the invading western cultures and their egregious crimes against humanity. His sharp ability to flip the stereotypes on their heads and fearlessly expose the deep seated deficiencies in Western culture are gifts that keep on giving as I explore the beginnings of these safe spaces, and the initial need to create them. As systemic, institutional and structural inequalities from redlining to "urban renewal," from mining to oil industries converge over centuries to exponentially replicate the displacement, destruction and erasure of these historic "colonies of freedom," the necessity of preserving these places and their stories are now more important than ever. As many layers of systemic racism and institutional White Supremacy work to structurally erase their existences, these inspirational stories that upend the West's racist narratives, replicated and sustained by a hostile media-industrial-complex, is top priority to support and elevate. I come back constantly to his words, as I myself struggle to understand the context of not only the origins of the freedom colonies and their founders and residents, but the people that carried out the atrocities that contributed to the need for them in the first place.

In despair, Lena Horne further reflected on this in her 1996 *episode of PBS Master's: In Their Own Words: The American Masters Digital Archive*. **"Maybe it's because I'm a black woman, but maybe because I'm a woman, I don't see as much as I wanted. I think it's worsened, and it's like the French say, 'the more we change, the more it stays the same.' I'm hearing the same old stories and seeing the same old incidents I saw before 1960. And when Paul Robeson told me, 'that's alright, your grandchildren will see it better' he didn't know I'd still have to wait. Now I've got a great-grandson and wonder how long he's going to have to wait."**⁶²

⁶⁰ "Take This Hammer with James Baldwin | THIRTEEN." 7 Feb. 2018, <https://www.thirteen.org/blog-post/take-this-hammer-with-james-baldwin/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁶¹ "Hilton Als Discusses James Baldwin's Legacy - Paris Review." 26 Oct. 2016, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2016/10/26/love-jimmy-hilton-als-jacqueline-goldsby-conversation/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁶² "Legendary Lena Horne Talks Racial Injustice - Black Enterprise." 14 Jul. 2016, <https://www.blackenterprise.com/lena-horne-talks-racial-injustice/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

The fact that this institutional racist status quo has continued unabated, regardless of all of the individual efforts to curb or eradicate it, is sickening. But Lena Horne's words have guided my interrogations of my own reality, as the "post-racial" delusions of the 21st century mainstream media industrial complex are consistently shattered. As I've set out to document the stories of the freedom colonies, and their mechanisms for coming into being and sustaining themselves throughout history, I can't escape the starting point: European cultures inflicting the biggest mass genocide known to humans (100 million plus) through white supremacy racism, which, amongst other things, resulted in racialized "one-drop" inheritable, life-long chattel enslavement, and the centuries-long Atlantic Slave Trade, Jim Crow, Black Codes and the many other such atrocities, onto the world.

Writing at Mic in ["The Terence Crutcher shooting shows how the white imagination distorts black realities,"](#) Zak Cheney-Rice noted that "[i]n a 2015 interview with the *Guardian*,⁶³ poet Claudia Rankine observed that **"blackness in the white imagination has nothing to do with black people."** She was responding to a question about her poem, "Stop and Frisk," part of which reads, **"Because white men can't/ police their imagination/ black men are dying."**

*Her point was that **black lives are beholden to white fantasies.** Black people are imagined as inherently dangerous, she suggests, and killed because of the threat they are presumed to pose, even if it has nothing to do with who they are as humans beings.*

"When white men are shooting black people, some of it is malice and some an out-of-control image of blackness in their minds," Rankine explained.

*Terence Crutcher was alive when Rankine wrote these lines. But white imagination was no doubt a factor in his death. In Crutcher's case, to observe the white imagination as it is applied to black people is to recognize its fatal limits: It leaves little room for black humanity. **Blackness itself is viewed as a threat, and a threat that must be met with violence.***

On Friday, a Tulsa, Oklahoma, police officer [quipped](#) from a helicopter, "That looks like a bad dude," as his fellow officers approached the stranded, black motorist with their guns drawn below. Since then, Crutcher has joined the swelling ranks of unarmed black men killed by police under questionable circumstances.

It's a familiar story."

*Cheyney-Rice goes on to write "What seems clear in this shooting is that "Crutcher the man" factored less into Officer Shelby's decision to open fire than "Crutcher the potential threat." **This is what the white imagination does, in Rankine's estimation: It ingests select pieces of information — Crutcher's appearance, his blackness — and regurgitates them as fictional menaces — Crutcher's "badness," his intent to do harm."***

⁶³ "Claudia Rankine - The Guardian." 27 Dec. 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/27/claudia-rankine-poet-citizen-american-lyric-feature>. Accessed 28 Nov. 2019.

This is the culture the freedom colonies were -are - responding to, a genocidal system of terror, with feudal institutions that created “whiteness” as the culture of white supremacy, replicating European feudalism onto the colonies by further weaponizing a false premise, “race.” Further exploring *This is How You Lose Her* author Junot Diaz praise for the Fields sisters RACECRAFT’s “I love the simple elegance with which they hammer home that **race is a monstrous fiction, racism is a monstrous crime**” explains The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s vital point in his 1967 speech [The Other America](#): “In the final analysis, racism is evil because its ultimate logic is genocide.”⁶⁴

As these were communities the targeted people created to escape from such human rights abuses, I’m inspired to create space and mechanisms to gather the stories and document the experiences, insights, and sensibilities of those who resisted. My intent is to create a living body of work of this international “freedom colony” phenomenon centered in Oral History, not only because no one such work exists, but to add to the public knowledge a new narrative of the enslaved and indigenous communities. Initially for an investigative story, this project has become an interdisciplinary, interactive, multimedia work of international scope.

I’ve slowly become aware that the broader Western public has little to no idea of the sheer magnitude of the resistance the freedom colonies created, nor of the “safe spaces” they engendered. We have the oft-told stories of the “Great Migration” - the successive waves of people branded “black” in the Western dialectic leaving the American South in droves to escape Jim Crow terrorism- but there hasn’t been a comprehensive study of the international phenomenon of people who stayed and created their “own place in the sun.”

As Columbia finally approved the creation of an African American and African Diaspora Studies Department⁶⁵ this school year (as a university senator and graduate councilor, I was present for the deciding vote⁶⁶), I know first-hand the institutionalized bias against telling stories that a media-academic-cultural-industrial-complex has convinced itself isn’t part of the narrative of people they need to label “*not-white*,” and especially those they need to brand as “*black*.”

But this malpractice is not news. Systemic white supremacy has always been upfront about its intentions, and thus has been “exposed” since its creation to convince lower class Europeans to not overthrow the colonial elite, by creating “race” as another rung of people for its peasants to feel that they are above, as Nancy Isenberg exposes. From the 1492 writings of Christopher Columbus' own [diary](#) where he admired the beauty, hospitality and peacefulness of the Arawak who helped him and his crew as he crash-landed into their island, to days later deciding that he would invade and steal their island and enslave “at least 50 of them” to bring back to the King

⁶⁴ “Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Address “The Other America” March” <https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.friendscentral.org/dist/3/28/files/2009/01/theotheramerica2-13-1968.pdf>. Accessed 28 Nov. 2019.

⁶⁵ “How 4 faculty helped create Columbia's first African American and” 25 Feb. 2019, <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2019/02/25/how-4-faculty-helped-create-columbias-first-african-american-and-african-diaspora-studies-department-2/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁶⁶ “Columbia Senate Approves African-American and African Diaspora” 1 Oct. 2018, <https://diverseeducation.com/article/128045/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

and Queen of Spain⁶⁷, to his own men turning on him and writing to the royals of his inhumane atrocities and terrorism, causing him to be imprisoned, the current practices of erasure, white-washing and denial only extend a long tradition of Western colonial practices.

In [Race, empire and education: teaching racism](#)⁶⁸ (January 1, 2001), Hungarian-born Holocaust survivor, historian and researcher, **Marika Sherwood** explores the ways in which colonial practices of white supremacy were created to justify disenfranchisement of Africans and other indigenous peoples.

Quite clearly, virulent anti-Black racism (racial stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination) had its origins in Europe with the trade in enslaved Africans. But there is evidence to indicate that, until the early to mid-nineteenth century, attitudes in Britain towards Black peoples were ambivalent. While many Britons must have benefited from the 'nefarious trade', directly and indirectly, it is quite possible that the majority knew little of it and even less of the racist justifications for enslavement. How and why did a racialized view of the world become so widespread in Britain that it became endemic?

This is an attempt to answer that question. I shall argue that, from the mid-nineteenth century, political and commercial developments, the building of an empire and the containment of labour troubles at home, as well as the necessity of providing appropriately lucrative employment for the new middle classes and the younger sons of the nobility required the institutionalising of an earlier myth of the superior Englishman, now with a civilising mission. It required also the derogation of everyone else into an immutable racial hierarchy whose bottom rung was occupied by Africans. The myth of superiority/inferiority, held to justify the expropriation of land and the extreme exploitation of labour, was **propagated through and by all levels of society and by every available means. It was absolutely necessary for the conquest and settlement of empire and for social cohesion at home.**

*"The **writers, philosophers, economists, scientists and politicians, the churches and their missionaries, empire societies, children's and women's organisations** for the working class (mostly led by the middle class), the purveyors of popular culture, including magazines and the formal education system, all played their role in producing this new national ideology of beneficent imperialism, of English superiority and of national unity." (48) She then details the racist rantings of European statesmen and notables as they rushed to justify colonialism. "The politicians and empire-builders...are the men who held sway, who caught the public imagination, who set the tone of discourse, whose attitudes were emulated. A very brief selection of quotes is sufficient to indicate their attitudes."*

In 1895 Cecil Rhodes claimed that "in order to save the 40 million inhabitants of the UK from a bloody civil war, we colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population,

⁶⁷ "The life of Christopher Columbus: from his own letters and journals" <http://library.umac.mo/ebooks/b13617424.pdf>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁶⁸ Sherwood, Marika. "Race, empire and education: teaching racism." 2001 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0306396801423001>

to provide new markets for the goods produced by them . . . If you want to avoid civil war you must become imperialists.” (50) **Joseph Chamberlain**, in **1896** stated that “local government . . . is the curse of the West Indies. In many islands it means only the rule of a local oligarchy of whites and half-breeds . . . In other cases it is the rule of the Negroes - totally unfit for representative institutions.” (51) In 1896 **Earl Grey** (on the death of Hubert Hervey in the second Matabele war) boviated that “it is a grand thing to die for the expansion of Empire . . . He sacrificed [himself] for duty . . . the type of Englishman [who] made the British Empire what it is today.” (52) And **Joseph Chamberlain**, again in **1900** said in defense of the creation of scientific racism: “I believe in this race, the greatest governing race, so proud, self-confident and determined, this race, which neither climate nor change can degenerate, which will infallibly be the predominant force of future history and universal civilisation.” In 1901, **Lord Milner** in a despatch to Chamberlain claimed “I do not mean that they [Africans] should be educated like Europeans, for their requirements and capacities are very different . . . Undoubtedly the greatest benefit that could be bestowed upon them would be to teach them habits of regular and skilled labour.” (54)

In **1912 Lord Milner** continued: “It is we who have been foremost in opening up the great waste spaces of the New World, and filling them with peoples of a high standard of civilisation. It is we who have brought peace and justice, and given orderly and humane government, to hundreds of millions of the weaker or more backward races. These new lands of immense promise inhabited by men of our race, these ancient lands restored to order and civilisation by our agency, are the two great moral assets of Imperialism.” (55). **Sir Harry Johnston** in **1920**: “On the continent of Africa we have little but backward peoples to deal with . . . There is sufficient white blood in the Abyssinian to let one hope they may some day of their own free will enter the fold of civilized peoples . . . The chief and obvious distinction between backward and forward peoples is that the former . . . are of coloured skin . . . Obviously the foremost nations of the world are the British and the regions of the British Empire in which the white race predominates.” (56)

General Sir Ian Hamilton in **1936** (on the death of Rudyard Kipling): “His death seems to me to place a full stop to the period when war was a romance and the expansion of the Empire a duty.” (57) **Sir Fiennes Cecil Arthur Barrett-Lennard, retired Chief Justice of Jamaica**, pontificated in **1934**: “Cruelty is a characteristic of the Negro . . . Contacts between Africans and Europeans often result in infecting the higher race with one or more of the vices of the inferior race.” (58)

Sherwood would go on to conclude that “Empire in the nineteenth century sense is long gone. What we are left with is racism, personal and institutional. Research indicates that racism is embedded in all the institutions of our society. The education system and the books in use in schools have not improved. I doubt that more school children today would know where to find Uganda on a world map than knew sixty-odd years ago.(121)

All too little has been done by the government to overcome the racism engendered in the previous one hundred years. Furthermore, the new imperialism, whether perpetrated by the

IMF, the World Bank, the multinationals, western governments or sex tourists, continues to be based on notions of white (racial) superiority.⁶⁹

“Racism in America is so normalized that it is often rendered invisible,” Michael Williams, a columnist at the Richmond Times-Dispatch in Virginia explains in the February 22, 2019 issue of the Columbia Journalism Review (CJR)⁷⁰ as he reveals that even “casual symbolic racism such as blackface is connected to systemic institutionalized racism.” He goes on to conclude that even the recent coverage of the blackface epidemic careening throughout the country is deficient: “America’s newsrooms are not nearly diverse enough. Black journalists are underrepresented at the statehouse, at the White House, and, within newsrooms, at the decision-making table. So our impact in guiding these stories is limited.”

Indeed, the social activism of #JournalismSoWhite, #MediaSoWhite, #PublishingSoWhite and #HollywoodSoWhite has continued the tradition of exposing the systemic efforts to suppress the narratives that don't "align with [white colleagues] mainstream beliefs about black people," of which the AP's Erinn Whack reiterated in her “My Life on the Race Beat” column in the Fall 2018 issue of CJR.⁷¹ They continue a long tradition of **B**[lack] **I**[ndigenous] **P**[eople] **O**[f] **C**[olor] **[BIPOC]** telling the stories the mainstream white (supremacy) media choose to neglect, suppress or deny, while at the same time exposing such erasure and manipulation.

The depth of the deception-con is as startling as it is consistently hidden. Samuel Cornish and John Brown Russwurm started the first African-American periodical, Freedom's Journal, in 1827.⁷² The Cherokee Nation founded The Cherokee Phoenix the next year in 1828, becoming the first newspaper to be produced by any American Indian tribe⁷³, the first newspaper in Oklahoma & the first bilingual newspaper in the United States. Ida B. Wells-Barnett's The Memphis Free Speech and Headlight,⁷⁴ Frederick Douglas's The North Star,⁷⁵ Robert Sengstacke Abbott's The Chicago Defender,⁷⁶ John Mitchell, Jr.'s Richmond Planet⁷⁷ (who was also

⁶⁹ "Race, Empire and Education: Teaching Racism - Marika"

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0306396801423001>. Accessed 8 Nov. 2019.

⁷⁰ "Virginia blackface scandal: Journalists share their experiences" 22 Feb. 2019, https://www.cjr.org/local_news/virginia-blackface-scandal-journalists.php. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁷¹ "My Life on the Race Beat - Columbia Journalism Review." https://www.cjr.org/special_report/race-beat.php. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁷² "Freedom's Journal - PBS." https://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/newbios/nwsppr/freedom/freedom.html. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁷³ "Cherokee Phoenix archives - The Online Books Page." <https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/serial?id=cherokeephoenix>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁷⁴ "Ida B. Wells-The Memphis Free Speech - PBS." https://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/wells.html. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁷⁵ "Frederick Douglas-The North Star - PBS." https://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/douglass.html. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁷⁶ "The Chicago Defender - PBS." https://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/defender.html. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁷⁷ "John Mitchell, Jr., and the Richmond Planet - Library of Virginia." <http://www.lva.virginia.gov/exhibits/mitchell/ajax.htm>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

president of the National Afro-American Press Association)⁷⁸, Anthony Overton's *Chicago Bee*,⁷⁹ Robert Lee Vann's *Pittsburgh Courier*,⁸⁰ Claude Albert Barnett's *Associated Negro Press*⁸¹ are just a few of the most famous cases where targeted people created their own news agencies and told their own stories. University of Houston historian Dr. Gerald Horne has estimated that at least 12,000 newspapers alone were founded by freedmen between 1865 to 1900, for a readership of at least 4 million.⁸² Wherever people branded "not-white" in the Western colonial era have gone, they have always created ways of documenting, preserving and sharing their experiences, stories and narratives, across many different platforms.

FREEDOM! BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY

"It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and expose lies."
— Noam Chomsky

The more I think about how intentional these systemic, institutional and structural erasures and white-washings are, the more I'm forced to consider how *The New Jim Crow*⁸³ author Michelle Alexander has said she had to retreat to the Union Theological Seminary at Columbia to process the terrorisms of these specific instances of White Supremacy. I myself have succumbed to the possibility of a Ph.D - but only if I can do it in Divinity as well (maybe exploring the differences in the value systems and belief institutions of the colonizers vs the colonized.)

These freedom colonies (also known as "freedmen's settlements" and "black towns" in the US) were intentionally constructed away from "white controlled" spaces and had a greater measure of protection from the direct effects of racist terrorism like Atlantic Slave Trade terrorism, Black Codes, and Jim Crow. **"Such places were defensive communities, where black property owners had circled the wagons against outsiders—a "fortress without walls,"** Sitton and Conrad found. **"Freedmen's settlements were black enclaves that kept to themselves and until the end of Jim Crow few whites wished—or dared—to live there."**

"Reason[s] for the scholarly neglect of freedmen's settlements may have been the decidedly counter-current (even "politically incorrect") aspects of their story," Sitton and Conrad continue, as *"people who need to be white"* (to adopt Tanehisi Coates's exposure of the psychologically destructive foundations of White Supremacy race/ism) created an inhumane

⁷⁸ "African-American Press Association - Library of Virginia."

<http://www.lva.virginia.gov/exhibits/mitchell/a-apress.htm>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁷⁹ "The Chicago Bee (1926–1946) | The Black Past: Remembered and"

<https://www.blackpast.org/aah/chicago-bee-1926-1946>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁸⁰ "The Pittsburgh Courier - PBS." https://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/courier.html. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁸¹ "Associated Negro Press Collection - The University of Chicago Library."

https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/bmrc/view.php?eadid=BMRC.UIC.ASSO_NEGRO_PRESS.SURVEY.

Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁸² "Gerald Horne | The Rise and Fall of the Associated Negro ... - UI Press."

<https://www.press.uillinois.edu/books/catalog/47sgy6mb9780252041198.html>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁸³ "The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness"

<https://www.amazon.com/New-Jim-Crow-Incarceration-Colorblindness/dp/1595586431>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

demand that “people they branded as ‘black’” be below them in every way, shape and form. They were certainly not interested in exploring a narrative that disrupted such fantasies of white supremacy.

In a profile for [Next City](#),⁸⁴ [Texas Freedom Colony Project founder,] TAMU’s Dr. Andrea Roberts explains that most freedom colonies made sure to stay hidden from the violent, deadly racism of white supremacy. “Despite their important role in reconstruction, many Freedom Colonies never sought recognition from state or local government. Courthouses were a little bit dangerous to show up at in 1890 and declare ‘hi, I’m an African-American and I own all this land.”

“Blacks” who acquired land, education, and other markers of wealth and cultured prosperity were branded by [those *who needed to be*] *white[s]* as “uppity,” and consistently targeted for terrorism, as evidenced in the numerous lynchings and the violent massacres of freedom colonies such as Greenwood in Tulsa, Oklahoma,⁸⁵ Rosewood in Florida,⁸⁶ Slocum in Texas,⁸⁷ Colfax in Louisiana,⁸⁸ and Elaine, Arkansas.⁸⁹ Of course, these are just a few that have become famous due to the horrific use of institutional forces like the National Guard, police departments and other law enforcement to carry out systemic “*white extremacy*,” the escalation of more visible brutality and intimidation than the everyday day hum of structural white supremacy. It’s no wonder, then, that mainstream (i.e. “white”) “historians” overlooked this “more general response of the freedmen’s settlements.”

But these stories of the Texas and US freedom colonies, are not unusual occurrences, just widely underreported ones. Hundreds of thousands, if not more, exist, since the inception of Western colonialism, waiting to be told. As the slave ships pulled into what is now Cartagena, Colombia, the enslaved Africans began to escape the Spanish enslavers and run for the hills, fleeing the terrorism of the racialized “one-drop” life-long inheritable chattel enslavement that was the foundation of Western colonialism. Away from the genocidal racism Western invaders

⁸⁴ "Confronting Urban Design's Diversity Crisis With a Return ... - Next City." 17 Apr. 2017, <https://nextcity.org/features/view/urban-design-diversity-urban-planning-shankleville-texas>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁸⁵ "Before the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre, Greenwood was known as" 11 Oct. 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2018/10/11/we-lived-like-we-were-wall-street/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁸⁶ "Rosewood Massacre - HISTORY." 4 May. 2018, <https://www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/rosewood-massacre>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁸⁷ "Remembering The Slocum Massacre – Texas Monthly." 1 Feb. 2016, <https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-daily-post/remembering-the-slocum-massacre/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁸⁸ "The Deadliest Massacre in Reconstruction-Era Louisiana Happened" 28 Sep. 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/story-deadliest-massacre-reconstruction-era-louisiana-180970420/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

⁸⁹ "What Was the Elaine Massacre? | History | Smithsonian." 2 Aug. 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/death-hundreds-elaine-massacre-led-supreme-court-take-major-step-toward-equal-justice-african-americans-180969863/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

inflicted upon the hundred million indigenous inhabitants, while forcing tens of millions of Africans to a whole “new world” in their attempts to install global white supremacy with systems, institutions and social-economic-political and cultural constructs, these escapees created one of the first freedom colonies in the world, San Basilio de Palenque. By 1605, the colonial Governor of Cartagena, Gerónimo de Suazo y Casasola, unable to defeat the “Village of the Maroons” as it was then known, offered a peace treaty. But as was common, the governor broke this treaty in 1619 to capture and execute one of its founders, the former Mande-Kabuu Mandinka King, Domingo “Benkos” Biohó, originally captured from a kingdom off of the coast of Guinea-Bissau.

A veritable T’Challa, this king was certainly the Black Panther of this Wakanda, dedicating his life to the rescue, livelihood and protection of the palenque, freeing most, if not all of the enslaved Africans brought into the port. This betrayal by the Spanish colonial government has contributed to the history of distrust of Columbia’s government ever since. In 1691, the Spanish crown officially recognized San Basilio de Palenque by Royal Decree, thus guaranteeing its freedom. In 2005, UNESCO declared it a Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity heritage site.

There are many, many other such stories, and places for UNESCO and state and local governments, agencies and organizations to extend their conservation efforts. Again, 5,000 have been identified in the US (and 558 in Texas alone, by Dr. Andrea Roberts’ groundbreaking research at Texas A&M), with the first one being founded in 1738 at Ft. Mose, in what is now Florida. An untold number of others exist along every pathway of the Western colonial circuit. Rudo Kemper, the GIS & Digital Storytelling Manager at the Amazon Conservation Team (ACT) and lead of one of their current projects in Suriname, explains that they’ve “been working with the Afro-descendant Maroon communities to document their place-based oral histories,” for some time now.

Which is why I highlight the importance of the work that the freedom colonies themselves undertook. Continuing the long-lasting traditions of preservation, oral history and conservation since the inception, the efforts to these communities are vastly understated and undertold. I happily share the interviews of the descendants and associates of these “colonies of freedom,” their historical and preservation organizations and societies, and the scholars who have started to work on regional parts of the phenomenon.

Long before America’s most lovable morning tv show host Michael Strahan’s ancestral family heritage in the freedom colony of Shankleville, Texas was shared with the world by Harvard’s Dr. Henry Louis “Skip” Gates on his hit PBS show “Finding Your Roots,” Shankleville and the thousands of other such freedom colonies around the world have been documenting, preserving and sharing their histories since inception, including Houston’s own, Freedmen’s Town (also known as The Fourth Ward). Before the glitz and glam of prestige mainstream media, the Ivy League, and mega-celebrity collided in the 400th year of the Atlantic Slave Trade in these English colonies, the residents, supporters, descendants, scholars and admirers always documented these families and communities’ “places in the sun.”

American freedmen escaped some of the greatest horrors known to man to create community, self-reliance and prosperity by groups of families banding together and maintaining a safe space from the terrorism of US culture. Instead of “running north” or sharecropping, freedmen created at least 580 such settlements that were established in what is now called Texas in the USA, on the ancestral pre-colonial lands of the Caddo. As is common of these freedom colonies, Strahan’s own family’s Shankleville has archived, recorded, documented and recounted their own history since its inception in 1867, celebrating the sesquicentennial of its founding in 2017 at the annual Homecoming (which I keynoted), and celebrating the 30 year anniversary of its Historical Society last year in 2018. As Cat Cardenas reported in her January Texas Monthly column, “these people created a sense of independence for their families and provided a safe place to raise children.”⁹⁰

Photographer Richard Orton has created ‘The Upshaws of County Line,’ a new [book](#) and exhibit about the freedom colony County Line, and one its the families intent on preserving the colony and its historical narrative. “That was no small feat and no guarantee for black folks back then. That’s huge, and it’s not something that we learn in school,” Orton says, after revealing “it went against everything [he] thought he knew about Texas history. From elementary through high school, he saw the civil rights movement play out on television. It wasn’t until he enrolled in college at the University of North Texas that he even met a black student. So when he began photographing the Upshaw family, he knew he had a chance to tell a story someone like him had never heard before.”⁹¹

CONCLUSION

“If I were to remain silent, I’d be guilty of complicity.” — Albert Einstein

Because of the centuries of systemic, institutional and structural racism now being exposed as creating the white-washing, revisioning and erasure of these places and their narratives, many others are joining in to help these long standing traditions continue their efforts. The freedom colonies are the inceptive archetypes of #TheResistance and created the original “safe spaces,” ever since 1492 when Christopher Columbus invaded the Americas and began Western colonialism, changing the world in ways unimaginable.

I seek to also interrogate my own family’s history and dynamics as well, particularly as it pertains to respectability politics, and more perniciously, “black respectability” politics: adopting, because of our relative proximity to whiteness, usage of high society systems of “posh and polished” white supremacy (education, military, economics, family structures, etc) to provide a buffer between us and “others” who aren’t afforded the same privileges. (As much as we’d like to say otherwise, we aren’t immune to Western colonialism’s effects, or the “double consciousness” that W.E.B. DuBois, Frantz Fanon, and many other “decolonization scholars”

⁹⁰ “Telling the Story of a Texas Freedom Colony Through” 29 Jan. 2019, <https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-culture/telling-story-texas-freedom-colony-through-decades-photos/>. Accessed 16 Nov. 2019.

⁹¹ “The Upshaws of County Line: An American Family: Richard S” <https://www.amazon.com/Upshaws-County-Line-American-Family/dp/1574415719>. Accessed 16 Nov. 2019.

explore in their work, where people “branded” not-white perform “magic negro-dom” just to survive in a culture of violent white supremacy.) I’m exploring by what degree in creating these freedom colonies were these families really free.

Growing up in the town “across the river” from Colonial Williamsburg and the Jamestown Foundation where my parents served, I’m delighted to see the restoring, rebuilding and conserving of some of the world’s most important settlements enter a new age of acknowledgement, visibility and effort. The International Association of Freedom Colonies (IAFC) will not only house a centralized Oral History Archives for these communities, but will create a public-private partnership that allows for investment and resource allocations using emerging technologies, while also raising awareness with conferences, art shows, and events

We can all take part in continuing the legacy of Freedmen’s Town, the Shankleville Historical Society & their Purple Hull Pea Fest, Eatonville, Florida’s ZoraFest, Dr. Andrea Robert’s Texas Freedom Colony Project, and the many, many other freedom colonies preservation, conservation and restoration efforts across the globe, as we enter the 527th year of Columbus’s fated voyage.

Opportunities for the public to get involved immediately include adding to the Wikipedia [draft database of freedom colonies](#)⁹² “on-wiki” and finding sources to support the moving it from its draft userspace to a fully published article. It can then continued to be developed indefinitely as more of these communities are re-discovered throughout the world. There is also a digital map in beta being converted to public crowd-sourced use for open access. This provides the opportunity for anyone to add not only the freedom colonies themselves onto the map, but all sourcing (digital, audio, video, etc) relevant to them to each node. Numerous freedom colonies have existed - and still exist- throughout the colonial pathways, with thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of them still waiting to be “rediscovered.” Local communities the world over hold remnants of these communities even if they have been long bulldozed over for highways and other forms of gentrification. Their stories wait to be told in the most unsuspecting of places.

The opportunities and challenges for this public facing historical big data project are both of extensive magnitude - the systemic and institutional issues that have brought us here, where the phenomenon of the freedom colonies as resistance to western colonialism remains largely untold and unexplored in the academy, the press, and other spaces, are the same reasons why there is now such a “black ocean” of opportunity for the public to assist with research, storytelling and mapping expeditions in the academy, press and beyond.

“The worst thing that colonialism did was to cloud our view of our past.”
— **Barack Obama, Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance**

⁹² "Submissions:2018/Wiki Mapping Freedom - WikiConference" 17 Oct. 2018, https://wikiconference.org/wiki/Submissions:2018/Wiki_Mapping_Freedom. Accessed 20 Nov. 2019.