

# The International Phenomenon of Freedom Colonies: the original resistance, the archetypal safe spaces

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to present an introduction to my introspective journey in researching the international phenomenon of freedom colony creation and history, through oral history and digital technology methodology, in the context of 21st century sensibilities of its Western cultural origins. Documentation reveals that the targeted people - mainly the indigenous populations and the Africans who had been enslaved by *Racialized Inheritable Phenotypic One-Drop - Chattel Atlantic Slave Trade Economy (RIPOD-CASTE)* slavery (my terminology to describe the unique-ness of this type of racialized, inheritable, phenotypic “slave camp” terrorism) - immediately escaped and created fortified communities of freedom to protect themselves.

*RIPOD-CASTE* slavery designates the uniquely Western colonial methods of enslaving people that the world had never seen before. With the creation of race as a social, economic, political and cultural construct for persecution and disenfranchisement, used by the European colonial elite to racialize the peoples they invaded, a system was developed to further justify the human rights abuses the colonists committed that defied their own Magna Carta. After creating a racialized slave caste based on phenotype and ancestry that was inherited by virtue of having any known African ancestors, thus becoming a “one-drop” rule determining who could be enslaved, the Atlantic Slave Trade’s triangular route was used to create the economic base of the European colonizers and their colonies. Human beings were forced into chattel, inherited, lifelong servitude along a skin color hierarchy of white supremacy, that created astronomical wealth for the colonial elite, and advantages and privileges for the European lower classes migrating to the colonies for “a better life” than they were living in their motherlands, where the resulting cultures of “whiteness” afforded them less opportunities to climb the feudal-descendent class structures than the newly colonized worlds, in which the inhabitants had been racialized as “not white.” This system succeeded in keeping the lower classes in line to the colonial elites’ goals of settler colonial resource extraction, rewarding the “newly minted whites”<sup>1</sup> (Powell) with the privilege of advantages denied to people now minted as “not white.” Nowhere has anything like this existed in the world, and thus makes the Western colonial projects - and those who escaped them to create “freedom colonies” - unique.

Over 580 such communities have been identified by Dr. Andrea Roberts’ Texas Freedom Colony Project in the US state of Texas alone, where they are explicitly known as “freedom colonies.” This terminology has become an umbrella term for all of these resistance communities along every pathway of the Western colonial circuit. From palenques in Colombia, quilombos and macombos in Brazil, maroon colonies in Jamaica and the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean, the freedom colony that became a country: Haiti, to the ‘freedmen’ settlements” in North America, Australia, Africa and southeast Asia, numerous of these communities exist and have existed. An estimated 5000 have been identified in the US , with the first one being founded in 1738, as Ft. Mose in what is now called Florida.

Well before the articulation of such ideas in the public square, communities that resisted Western colonialism sought to actively dismantle the settler colonial narrative, perspective, lens and

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<sup>1</sup> "Conscious Capitalism in a Globalized World | Newmella ...." 27 Apr. 2019, <https://newmella.co.za/news/conscious-capitalism-in-a-globalized-world/>. Accessed 25 May. 2020.

worldview of the colonizer culture targeting them, through a multi-layered process of decolonization and indigenization. This process included disrupting institutional white supremacy and its racist systems, structures, and foundations, by using the physical acts of freedom colony creation to create the "safe spaces" and foundations to do so. By disrupting the colonial narratives of the "white gaze" (Morrison), the "white imagination" (Rankine), and the "colonized mind" (Fanon) of the "racecraft" (Fields) that created these institutional racisms and systemic white supremacies that fail the "DuVernay Test" (Dargis) in the first place, these communities were able to claim sovereignty in many, if not all, areas of human life. #MappingFreedom will share the findings from such practices and explore how GIS and historical geography methods are uncovering many other novel practices these communities created, instituted and replicated.

Toni Morrison used the phrase "the white gaze" to highlight the narrative, perspective, and lens of "whiteness" - the cultural, social, economic and political results of white supremacy (the racialized systems of institutions the European colonial elite created to convince the European lower classes to leave their homelands to go work in the colonies as a step up to "a better life"). With the "white imagination" Claudia Rankine builds upon this concept, denoting the construct of a fantasy land - a Matrix-like delusion - that white supremacy creates where "white" and "not white" are made real and literal, with murderous results for those branded "not-white." Frantz Fanon's writings on the "colonized mind" reflects the results and effects of such practice on not only those branded "not white," but also those branded "white." The [Barbara and Karen] Fields sisters' research on "racecraft" illustrates the very environment that creates and sustains "race" has to be intentionally created, much like those that create the institutions and systems of witchcraft, in order for the belief in witchery and witches to be made real and actionable upon. *The New York Times* film critic Manohla Dargis coined the "DuVernay Test" as a metric of merely requiring that African Americans and other minoritized populations have fully realised lives in film, literature and other mediums of storytelling, rather than serve as scenery in "white" stories.

As the Ivy League's first Wikipedia Fellow, Wikimedian-In-Residence and Wikipedia Visiting Scholar (at Columbia from 2018-2020), and a "recovering" journalist/producer, I'm creating a digital map powered by Google's GIS technology, a database on Wikipedia to catalogue these spaces, and founding the International Association of Freedom Colonies (iAFC) as an investigative outreach project to identify further locations and house an oral history archive. As the Wikipedia Visiting Scholar at the Computer Graphics User Interface Lab and the Columbia University Libraries, I explored data intensive VR/AR/AI/ML and other XL possibilities for experiential onsite and offsite interaction with the histories and stories of these spaces, using the iAFC's archives.

I've also co-founded #DisruptWikipedia at the university libraries with Barnard College as an initiative to "disrupt," dismantle and eliminate the settler colonial bias causing 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-sourced, public research, and free culture spaces, to decolonize, and indigenize these intersections of technology and media. The project seeks to actively dismantle the settler colonial perspective, lens and worldview of the colonizer culture these public facing projects inhabit,

including the digital, data and other technological forms of neo-colonialism, through a process of decolonization and indigenization.

## 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 slavery, racism, whiteness, white supremacy, recentering the narrative, reclaiming the narrative, class, history, memory*



## HONORING<sup>2</sup> AND ACKNOWLEDGING<sup>3</sup> INDIGENOUS LAND<sup>4</sup> AND LIFEWAYS<sup>5</sup>

*"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." - Malcolm X<sup>6</sup>, TV interview (March 1964)*

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 Lenni Lenape & Wappinger land and acknowledge that as students, 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 of Indigenous students on campus.

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 & Wappinger, the ancestral traditional stewards of this land throughout the generations, who allow the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories, and the settler-university to occupy these lands known in Eurocentric epistemology as "Columbia University," "the USA" and "New York City." 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 institutions and systems we can do more to move toward decolonizing and indigenizing 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.

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](http://Native-land.ca).

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<sup>2</sup> "Guide to Indigenous Land and Territorial Acknowledgements for ...." <http://landacknowledgements.org/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

<sup>3</sup> "Indigenous Land Acknowledgement, Explained | Teen Vogue." 8 Feb. 2018, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/indigenous-land-acknowledgement-explained>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

<sup>4</sup> "Land Acknowledgement: Native American and Indigenous Initiatives ...." <https://www.northwestern.edu/native-american-and-indigenous-peoples/about/Land%20Acknowledgement.html>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

<sup>5</sup> "Honor Native Land: A Guide and Call to Acknowledgement." <https://usdac.us/nativeland>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

<sup>6</sup> "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.

## INTRODUCTION

*What? **Post**-colonialism? Have they left? -Bobbi Sykes*

The sun was shining one of those brutal “deep east Texas hot” shines. It seemed to get even hotter as he looked at me with that “black patrician” smirk I was so familiar with in these types of families.

“Of course they don’t want to tell these stories. It disrupts the narrative.”

The 75-year-old retired computer scientist-turned real estate developer-turned government contractor leaned on his walking stick and beckoned me closer. “That’s why we’ve been preserving our own spaces and telling our own stories. The con won’t last for much longer.”

As the COVID19 pandemic raged about and forced the [colonized] world to rethink its whole “way of life,” Harold Odom’s words could ring no truer.

It was the summer of 2019 and we were in Shankleville, Texas for the annual Texas Purple Hull Pea Fest, the 5th edition of the freedom colony’s efforts to celebrate its traditions and the cash crop which had brought prosperity to the early days of the community. We were waiting for the first of that day’s “Shankleville Walking Tours” and were discussing my thesis, and the article that I still had yet to turn in to *The New York Times*. I was sharing the disastrous and cringe-worthy discussions I’d had with various editors, along with the horror stories that other

journalists and storytellers branded “not white” had to endure, especially at prestige, mainstream institutions.

That previous fall (2018), the Columbia Journalism Review had published [“My life on the race beat.”](#)<sup>7</sup> by the AP’s Errin Haines Whack, a black woman who had shared her and her peers stories of the terrorisms they’d endured when pitching stories outside of the stereotypes that “people who need to be white” wanted to tell about people they “needed to be black.” Ta-Nehisi Coates’ phrasing “the need to be white” highlighted the psychology behind whiteness in a way that factually depicted American “culture,” contrary to mainstream depictions which tended to be fantastical, white-washing the deeply embedded white supremacy in society.

A striking passage from that piece had sparked our conversation: *“In the fifties, virtually every newsroom in America was white,” Roberts recalls. Many of the first black journalists whose job it was to focus on the black community got their start in mainstream media covering the unrest of the 1960s. Most white reporters attempting to cover urban America were met with skepticism by its residents, who typically encountered journalists only in times of crisis—as they were coming to cover crime or riots. Mainstream newsrooms rarely sought to depict the fullness of black life, only the tragedies. Race beat reporters were borne not out of a respect for diversity, but out of necessity.*

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<sup>7</sup> "My Life on the Race Beat - Columbia Journalism Review."  
[https://www.cjr.org/special\\_report/race-beat.php](https://www.cjr.org/special_report/race-beat.php). Accessed 31 May. 2020.



*In the late sixties, the treatment of black communities by major news outlets became a focus of the Kerner Commission. Otto Kerner, the governor of Illinois, had been tapped by President Lyndon B. Johnson to investigate the underlying causes of racial tension in the United States, and to recommend solutions. With a team of 11, Kerner identified more than 150 riots and other incidents of unrest in the first nine months of 1967 that resulted from white racism. “What white Americans have never fully understood but what the Negro can never forget,” the Kerner report stated, “is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.”*

It was the very reason why freedom colonies were founded, to get away from this very “white society” of “white institutions.” But why would people want to do this to other people in the first place?

I’d conceived of #HackingRacism - a social impact initiative - in part, to explore this very question, and was as surprised as anyone to find myself in a Columbia Business School incubator with resources to figure out how to make a business case out of it all. My co-founder, let’s call him Tom - a #DontCallMeWhite Westchester-American of Italian descent finishing a phd in education- had accompanied me down to Shankleville’s Sesquicentennial (I was the keynote speaker) and in awe of these people who had lived outside of his “Ellis Island Immigrant Descendant” sensibilities of who people he’d always been told were “not white,” had dubbed us descendants “black privilege.” This had sparked fury. The issues of race and class had now reared its ugly head, sparked by a white boy, at that.

The middle-aged Shankle descendants let loose. Ande Kindred - the first black staffer on the set of Star Trek - rained down expletives with fury. “How the \*\$%%# is it ‘privilege’ that your ancestors were forced to be racially enslaved for hundreds of years in a country which promoted freedom, and when finally freed, fought ungodly hard to get some of the most basic *human* necessities still denied to them?”

Lareatha Clay, a business consultant with an MBA from the University of Texas, and the daughter of the first “black” woman to be inducted into the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, turned to Tom and snidely condescended, “What? You wish your ancestors had been enslaved?”

Gerri Rowe, a Houston accountant - and the granddaughter of the first black councilman in East Texas - looked at Tom with pity, and then gave me that infamously “black woman look” of “why’d you bring *him* here?” I cringed so hard I was a pretzel.

But Tom had held fast. The ABD ph.d student in him was factually grounded. “If your ancestors escaped the conditions that most black people had to suffer over almost two hundred years ago, and carved out whole communities where they built economic, social, political and other power and advantages, then you’ve inherited the advantages of all of that. That is the definition of privilege. And if the society you live in has created systems of institutions that separate people and put them into categories of “race,” and “black” is the category they’ve deemed you of, then it is invariably ‘Black Privilege.’”

“Trust me,” he continued with a convincing wink, “I’m a white man, married to a feminist dancer-professor, about to have a female baby - I’m getting the hang of this privilege thing.” And Tom smiled charmingly, not all unnerved by the attacks. His wife would call this “male beauty privilege” - and claim that indeed because of it - contrary to popular opinion, it was *male* beauty, not female beauty, that brought power and advantages in a patriarchal society. Tom had worked as a model and was well aware of this.

But I digress. On many levels he was right. And those Shankle descendants actually grew to love Tom that very same day - he was definitely a charmer. I thought back to Lawrence Otis Graham’s 1997 bestseller “*Our Kind of People: Inside America’s Black Upper Class*” and how he’d opened a can of worms while discussing communities at the intersection of race and class. In the 2001 Harper Perennial edition he recounted some of the hostile conversations he found himself in:

*“Although I spent six years researching *Our Kind of People*, I could never have been prepared for the controversy that it elicited from various groups upon its initial publication. Although there is a constant cry for diversity in our media, our literature, our history books, and in our communities, it became obvious to me that there are certain narrow stereotypes—even within an integrated society—that people are simply unwilling to relinquish. The stereotype of the working-class black or impoverished black is one that whites, as well as blacks, have come to embrace and accept as an accurate and complete account of the black American experience. Our*

*Kind of People upset that stereotype. And it upset many people—particularly blacks—who have been taught never to challenge a stereotype that we had been saddled with since slavery.*

*Some...quietly told me that they were glad that I wrote the book because it was disproving the stereotypes, but that they could not publicly support the book because their white audiences would find the concept of rich, educated blacks too threatening and because their black audiences would find the subject too painful.”*

And of course *The New York Times* led the way with the resistance to deviate from the white supremacist stereotypes that had made it a success in the colonized world, reflecting the systemically triggered sensibilities of its owners, people who had explicitly come to this country “to be white.” At #HackingRacism, we had taken to saying “white is short for white supremacy” as there is no such thing as race, genetically, scientifically, or biologically. The con by the colonial elite to manipulate the European lower classes to leave their homelands to work in the colonies by creating a “racialized” social hierarchy where the peasant classes could “class up” into “whiteness” had worked for hundreds of years. And the “whitelash” against anything that shattered that delusion was swift and brutal.

“[Is There A Black Upper Class?](#)”<sup>8</sup> ran the headline of the Monte Williams article on March 7, 1999, as she reviewed Graham’s book. (Who else does this gets asked of? Can you imagine this being asked of the Jewish community? The latinx community? Literally, any other demographic

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<sup>8</sup> “Is There a Black Upper Class? - The New York Times.” 7 Mar. 1999, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/03/07/style/is-there-a-black-upper-class.html>. Accessed 31 May. 2020.

grouping of people? Only systemic white supremacy, which institutionalizes racism, could even conceive of such phrasing). She explored his detailing of an insular group of interrelated “black” families with generational memberships in HBCUs, and cultural, professional and civic organizations from childhood to elderhood. (Of course reporters don’t write their own headlines, so I’m intrigued to know the story behind who actually did!):

*“But it takes much more than money to belong to the upper class as Mr. Graham uses the term, following the tradition of bulwarks of white society like the Social Register. “It’s not just the money,” he said. “It’s where did this person’s grandfather go to medical school? How far does the family go back in a certain city? Did you go to the right school, the right boarding school? How far back were your family members professionals? Have they been summering in Oak Bluffs and Sag Harbor. Who are you married to?”*

*Mr. Graham, who is best known for rooting out racism in an all-white country club in Greenwich, Conn. -- he posed as a busboy and his experience landed him on the cover of New York magazine -- draws a parallel to another group that would seem far removed from the black elite. “I hate to use it, but they are like black WASP’s,” Mr. Graham said by phone from his large home in Chappaqua, N.Y. It has a swimming pool, tennis courts and a guest house. He left a corporate law firm to write and lecture, and lives with his wife, Pamela Thomas-Graham -- and their son.*

*Mr. Graham recounts how the world of black privilege was so insular when he was a boy that, during summers in Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard, "it never even occurred to me that white people had summer homes on Martha's Vineyard."<sup>9</sup>*

Even though I myself had grown up fully immersed in the results of this history and its traditions - multigenerational HBCU and other social, cultural institutional alumni, centuries old family traditions from reunions to land and farms, to inheritances, and other such effects of black respectability politics -I hadn't particularly paid them any attention as anything special. This history were things my grandparents and great grandparents treasured, and people like Graham were seen, by members of my parents generation, as "trying way too hard" and doing "way too much" to uphold the black respectability politics forced on minoritized and marginalized communities desperately trying to shield themselves from the terrorism of white supremacy. Sure, these traditions may have been interesting to outsiders, but Xennials (or OG Millennials) like me were a bit too far removed from any such purview of "The Struggle" to really have any understanding how unique it all was.

And my immediate family in particular had always been ambivalent about class, and parroted what LA Times reporter and "*Waking From the Dream: My Life in the Black Middle Class*" author Sam Fulwood III told Williams in that same article: that and \$2.50 will get you on the subway. *'There are no black Rockefellers, Vanderbilts or Kennedys, families who have sustained great wealth for generations,'* he told her. *"Members of [black middle class organizations like] the Boule, the Links, and Jack and Jill represent such a small piece of black America, they are*

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<sup>9</sup> "Is There a Black Upper Class? - The New York Times." 7 Mar. 1999, <https://www.nytimes.com/1999/03/07/style/is-there-a-black-upper-class.html>. Accessed 22 May. 2020.

*insignificant. It may be interesting but no more interesting than the way rare flowers are interesting."*

And this is precisely why Tom received such a backlash. Freedom colonies founding families- and many others now being called "elite" - had been doing "what they had to do," as the saying went, whether escaping from outright genocide and Racialized Inheritable Phenotypic One-Drop - Chattel Atlanctic Slave Trade Economy (**RIPOD-CASTE**) slavery (my terminology to describe the unique-ness of this type of racialized, inheritable, phenotypic "slave camp" terrorism) or the post Civil War horror coursing through America. Was establishing "safe spaces" for your family and community really such a novel thing?

Well, unfortunately, to "outsiders" in the Western world, it was. Especially, if they "needed to be white" and thus needed to have a group of people not only "branded not white," but also "branded black." Institutionalized racism needed to maintain a culture of systemic white supremacy. And ironically, Tom did have a point. On the way back to New York, I compromised with Tom, words like "privileged" and "elite" were too gauche. No matter the similarities and overlaps, freedom colony founding families did not identify with any sensibility of "black elite." We settled on these types of families, being much older than people dubbed by Graham as a "black elite," were more the "black patriciate" of the "black community." Black patricians.

It still made me cringe. Tom would spend the whole year sending me article after article, book after book, and telling me story after story of his experiences and fascination with "your kind of

people” as he called them. I tried to be interested in seeing things from his point of view, but it was exhausting evidence of the black tax, always having to bring oneself “down” to the level of “whiteness” as it tried to make sense of things outside of its purview, understanding and sensibilities.

I was also immensely disturbed that white supremacy *still* needed to rank these communities that disrupted its narrative into its settler colonial hierarchy of racialization. But I should not have been, this is what the colonizer and their systems of institutions have been doing ever since it imported its feudal culture onto the peoples it was invading in order to convince its massive lower classes to leave their homelands, and go and work in the colonies.

Brown University’s professor of Caribbean studies, Dixia Ramírez D’Oleo [explores this](#) particular peculiarity of colonizer culture in her LA Review of Books essay of the 2019 remake of Pet Sematary, *The Hills Are Alive: “Pet Sematary” and the Horror of Indigenous Sovereignty and Black Freedom*. She succinctly captures the spirit and the context of the need to create freedom colonies, and to protect these safe spaces from the colonizer culture seeking the ruin of it and its inhabitants:

*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.<sup>10</sup>*

In hindsight, the journey to tell my own family's story of, as "*having a life of their own,*" as a "*refuge of those who never agreed with the project of Western modernity,*" "*never to be fully subservient to the logics of settler colonialism*" and thus "*decentering*" the "*white man*" had really begun two decades ago in the Virginia Middle Peninsula tidewater county of Gloucester. This bastion of the FFV (First Families of Virginia), a luscious, beachfront, historic colonial town just north across the [York] river of America's Historic Triangle, in the country's first district, is a hotbed of old patrician blue-blooded slave camp ("plantation") families all claiming descent from the Powhatan, through Pocahontas.

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<sup>10</sup> "The Hills Are Alive: "Pet Sematary" and the Horror of ...." 17 May. 2019, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-hills-are-alive-pet-sematary-and-the-horror-of-indigenous-sovereignty-and-black-freedom/>. Accessed 22 May. 2020.

Those branded “black,” “white,” and “native” in the colonizer constructs of white supremacy all claimed this historic ancestry. I grew up with “black” Pages and “white” Pages, “black” Wallers and “white” Wallers, “black” Taliaferros and “white” Taliaferros, “black” Washingtons and “white” Washingtons. And yes, *those* Washingtons. George Washington’s great-great grandfather, Augustine Warner, was gifted the first European land parcel here by the English king James in 1645, where he built his massive slave camp, Warner Hall.

It still stands today, doubling as a quaint, antique bed and breakfast, as well as a local historic site - where yes, weddings take place, one of the many such slave camps open throughout the state, and featured as a special exhibit during the annual Garden Week - “America’s largest open house” - hosted by the Virginia Garden Club. And typical of the FFV, his descendants include the likes of the UK’s Queen Elizabeth II through the Bowes-Lyon family of the late Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, Confederate general Robert E. Lee, and Meriwether Lewis of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, among scores of others.

Growing up amidst all of this, in hindsight it’s no wonder my high school senior thesis explored the century old “black” family reunions of both my maternal and paternal families. My mother’s maternal family reunion hailed from the Asheville mountains of Western North Carolina where sixteen year old Gilbert Vance Baird - taken to the Confederacy as a “body servant” (or so the family lore goes, because surely he wouldn’t have *voluntarily* gone, right?) - had helped his “Massa Brother,” Confederate Captain Andrew Weaver Baird escape from certain death at battle

at Murfreesboro, Tennessee during the Civil War, bringing him - carrying him, as he couldn't walk, by most accounts - all the way through the mountains from Tennessee to the Baird family's homestead just north of Asheville in the town named after his equally posh maternal ancestors, the Weavers. That slave camp homestead, the Baird House, still stands today in all of its whiteness (physically and literally), in the process of being rehabbed by a coterie of local hipster ventures flooding the region, making Asheville the second "fastest growing city" in the country, second only to the seaport town of Charleston, South Carolina. Family lore has always held that our indigenous Cherokee relatives and ancestors would help our African ancestors escape from the mountainous RIPOD-CASTE enslavement, and when the Trail of Tears swept through, our African ancestors repaid the courtesy.

For his heroics, Gilbert's "Massa Brother" awarded him a sizable acreage of land (still held by his descendants today), a lifelong salary and supply of farming materials, equipment and animals after the war. He also petitioned for him to be awarded a Confederate pension, and with all of this, Gilbert gathered his numerous siblings (Calvin, Gilbert's youngest brother, is my great-great great-grandfather) and other family members and promptly founded what became "Hillside," the freedom colony where the "black" Bairds, Weavers, Vances, Rays and Brooks raised their families for generations. Captain Baird was also the nephew of North Carolina's most revered politician, the enslaver Confederate General Zebulon Baird Vance, the 37th and 43rd Governor of North Carolina, as well as its senator. A prolific writer, he was a leader of the "New South", and one of the most influential Southern leaders of the Civil War and postbellum periods. In 1897, the oldest black family reunion in the country would be established here, the

Baird Reunion, which has continued ever since, in stark defiance to the sustained attacks on the “black family” through the media, press, political establishment, and other cultural institutions. Grammy award winning singer Roberta Flack is Gilbert’s great granddaughter, and her niece Rory Flack, the first black woman to win at the US open for ice-skating, is his great-great granddaughter. The Baird relatives, the Flack-Council-Coleman families established the country’s second oldest family reunion in nearby Asheville in 1917. My maternal great grandmother, Avis Clipper, who married into the “black” Baird family descends from the Alabama Clipper family who would go on to help found the freedom colonies Blackdom and Vado in New Mexico, and Boley and Langston in Oklahoma.

My father’s family founded the freedom colony, Elam Springs, when their Cuba, Chalk and Curry ancestors walked off slave camps (plantations) in what is now Gilmer County, in East Texas. My ancestor Gilbert Cuba, a founder of Elam Springs, was also awarded a Confederate pension, although that story isn’t as clear as to how or why, but more than likely played some part in his financial capability to secure land and other resources necessary to found a town. My paternal great-grandmother, Frances Odom descends from the freedom colony founding family of Jim and Winnie Shankle, of Shankleville, through the Odom line that includes NFL wide receiver Steve Odom, Texas’ first black postmaster general Elzie Odom (who became the first black mayor of Arlington, Texas) and Larutha Odom Clay, the first black woman inducted into the Daughters of the Republic of Texas. Every single branch of my family going back at least eight generations all descend from this phenomenon of freedom colony founders. These families and their communities have always sought to retain ownership of their own soil, labor and

communities, fiercely rejecting, through their fugitivity, the settler colonial depravity that the colonizers constantly attempted to rain down upon them.

*“From the outset,” D’Oleo continues in her Pet Sematary review, “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.”<sup>11</sup>*

I am not saying that my co-founder Tom was explicitly conscious or even aware of the tropes he was fulfilling by his actions, or just existing as a settler branded “white” and “male” - although through #HackingRacism he was becoming increasingly aware of how explicitly his own family quite easily replicated these systemic and institutional effects. But that’s just the thing: the very institutions and systems built by colonialism to carry out these terrorisms were a machine that after 500 years needed no awareness at all. Just get out of its way, don’t try to disrupt, dismantle, or eliminate -i.e. “hack” it - and it will do what its supposed to do.

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<sup>11</sup> "The Hills Are Alive: “Pet Sematary” and the Horror of ...." 17 May. 2019, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-hills-are-alive-pet-sematary-and-the-horror-of-indigenous-sovereignty-and-black-freedom/>. Accessed 22 May. 2020.

D'Oleo's writing continued to piercingly expose such mechanisms: "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.*<sup>12</sup>

The creation, and continued existence, of freedom colonies, slave revolts, indigenous survival and other forms of colonial resistance expose this farce of the Western world's own illegitimacy. Disrupting the narrative, lens, and perspectives of "whiteness," and by extension "blackness" and all other forms of "not whiteness" created by the delusions of colonialism's racism, these patterns of resistances were detrimental to the "white consciousness" inherent in the colonized world of white supremacy. *"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,"* continues D'Oleo, *"refuge of those who never agreed with the project of Western modernity."*

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I ended up catching a ride from Harold and his wife Pat the three hours back to Houston where we dived into the history of Shankleville and its founding family, the Shankles. My paternal great grandmother, Frances Odom, is a direct descendant of Jim and Winnie Shankle, the founders. And when she married my paternal great grandfather Ilya Cuba, from the freedom colony of Elam Springs in East Texas, it wasn't the first time the family genealogical lines would connect. But that is another story. (Damn Creoles!).

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<sup>12</sup> "The Hills Are Alive: "Pet Sematary" and the Horror of ...." 17 May. 2019, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-hills-are-alive-pet-sematary-and-the-horror-of-indigenous-sovereignty-and-black-freedom/>. Accessed 22 May. 2020.

By the time I was dropped off at a cousin's place in Houston, my head was swimming with so many things to process. My cousin and I stayed up late into the night exploring the many different branches of our family's history and what our generation's obligations were. He was a Keppard - the great-great grandson of jazz great Louis Keppard - and we'd been researching the history and legacy of Louis and his brother Freddie's pioneering of jazz outside of New Orleans. Unfortunately, outside of our families' oral histories and their efforts to maintain control and ownership of the physical spaces, there wasn't much to go by. The media industrial complex hadn't bothered to cover "non-white" life that fell outside of its racist stereotypes, and government and cultural agencies steeped in institutional white supremacy either completely ignored them, or sought to attack them for the resources they did manage to squeeze out of a society bent on annihilating them. Thus, telling the stories of the international phenomenon of freedom colonies is by necessity, mainly an oral endeavor.

We also explored the intergenerational costs of creating and maintaining such traditions. It made me think of an incident the year before in Durham, NC, where I'd met up with Shankle cousins Lareatha Clay and Gerri Rowe at the inaugural Black Communities Conference.

*Bang! Bang! Bang!*

I knocked on the glass door rather impatiently, trying to catch anyone's attention, as the two middle-aged women waited with me. The rain was starting to come down harder and both women had covered their heads to protect their precious hair. Black women were very particular



about their hair - rain could destroy carefully constructed hairdos, and we still had another day and a half of conference to go.

“Boy, stop banging on that door,” Geri said looking around nervously.

“Yes!” echoed Lareatha, following her lead. “All we need is some crazy white person deciding you’re a little too uppity for them.”

“Remember where we are,” agreed Geri.

We were in Durham, North Carolina.

It was April 2018. It was the first ever Black Communities Conference, a partnership with many state and national institutions, including the University of North Carolina and Duke University. Gerri Rowe and Laretha Clay were officers of the Shankleville Historical Society, the governing body of the Shankleville Homecoming, where the summer before, in 2017, I’d keynoted the 150th anniversary of the freedom colony’s founding. Jim and Winnie Shankle, the founders of Shankleville, were our ancestors. We were at the conference to present on Shankleville, and the efforts the historical society and its members had taken to commemorate the community and its history. Well, they were. I’d just tagged along.

We'd just left one of the presentations, and had walked back the two blocks to their hotel, the Marriott, only to find that the doors were closed on the side street. To walk around would require exposure to the rain. My parents had raised me better than to expose black women to such injustices, especially those that could be mitigated so simply.

I looked at them askance. "Really?!" I laughed as I lifted my fist to bang again.

"Boy, don't do that!" Lareatha warned, already walking away to the front of the hotel.

"Come on, youngun!" Geri simultaneously grabbed my arm, pulling me away. "You're going to give us two old women a heart attack."

I understood them, I did. But I was tired of performing for white fragility. We'd been having conversations all week about the dangers that people who are branded "black" still face in the 21st century, how unfair all of it was, but how necessary it was to remain alive, to be able to carry on the tradition of "being our ancestors wildest dreams." I'd been apoplectic, I was a month away from 36 and was working on my "mid career" application to the Oral History Master's program at Columbia University in New York, and with Geri and Lareatha had been discussing what the best next steps would be in telling the stories of the phenomenon of the freedom colonies on a larger level, as I still owed *The New York Times* a story.

“STAY ALIVE!” they both had echoed, ruminating how on one hand it was refreshing to raise a generation that lived without the fear of immediate white reprisal, but on the other, they trembled with fear upon hearing, almost daily, how one black person after another had fallen victim to some injustice or other. No matter how much acclaim or prestige any member of any branch of my family branded “not-white” in a Western country had achieved, we were constantly reminded that our “wealth, prestige, degrees or any other such status object wouldn’t save us.” Butch Graves’ violent arrest over two decades ago on the MetroNorth at Grand Central Terminal in New York City constantly loomed as THE warning sign.<sup>13</sup>

Earl “Butch” Graves, Jr. had been born in Scarsdale, the wealthy suburb in Westchester County, to a prominent media family. His dad had founded Black Enterprise,<sup>14</sup> and Butch had been the basketball captain and tapped Skull & Bones at Yale (he currently still holds the all-time leading scorer record in Yale men's basketball history<sup>15</sup> and third all-time for the Ivy League), plus holds a MBA from Harvard, where upon graduation he’d been drafted into the NBA by the Philadelphia 76ers and later played for the Cleveland Cavaliers.

The egregious violence of the arrest - the age old “mistaken identity” - had roiled Black America, particularly the Black middle class. My parents, who’d, as I mentioned earlier, eschewed most media, faithfully subscribed to Black Enterprise. I was 12, and will never forget

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<sup>13</sup> Twenty years before James Blake, there was ex-NBA player Earl 'Butch' Graves Jr.'s disturbing run-in with cops. PAT LEONARD and WAYNE COFFEY. NEW YORK DAILY NEWS. SEP 10, 2015. <https://www.nydailynews.com/sports/more-sports/blake-arrest-reminds-ex-nbaer-similar-run-in-cops-article-1.2356202>

<sup>14</sup> "Black Enterprise." <https://www.blackenterprise.com/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

<sup>15</sup> "Where Are They Now? Butch Graves '84 - Yale." 1 Mar. 2019, <http://www.yalebulldogs.com/general/2018-19/releases/20190228oz9pju>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

the ripple of horror that reverberated throughout the “‘black’ community” as they were explicitly reminded that the terrorism of their parent’s generation and their own childhoods had, indeed not dissipated. An “uppity nigger” had been put in his place. Who did Butch think he was anyway? No amount of family, success, wealth, status, or education would erase the fact that in America, he was “black.” And we all KNEW what that meant.

And that day in 1995, we were reminded of it.

All of this was going through my head as Lareatha and Geri scolded me as we walked through the rain to the front of the hotel. It was the usual conversation - to anyone branded black in America, especially male - of how we had to be careful, there was a certain “culture” in this country. "The past is never dead. It's not even past," they quoted Faulkner’s seminal *Requiem for a Nun*. It hit me then that I could have easily been yet another hashtag trending on social media, if some low-level security guard or cop who “feared for his life,” had taken it into his head to put me down.

“I need a drink!” Lareatha exclaimed upon reaching the lobby. “You almost gave me a heart attack.”

“Whew,” Geri sighed as she sank into one of the plush black chairs. “Boy, sit down.”

I chuckled to cover up the embarrassment I felt as I contemplated the stress black women go through everyday for their male relatives.

“Drinks on me!” I declared, signaling to the waiter.

We launched into a conversation about the beauty of the inaugural Black Communities Conference, where for once we could focus on the real life existences of those of us labeled “black” in the Western dialectic, and of Shankleville, founded in 1867 by our ancestors, American freedmen escaping post-Civil War horror to create community, self-reliance and prosperity by groups of families banding together and maintaining a safe space from the terrorism of American culture. Instead of running north or sharecropping, these survivors 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 the freedom colonies, Shankleville has engaged in oral history methodology to archive, record, and otherwise document and recount history since its inception, celebrating the sesquicentennial of its founding in 2017 at the annual Homecoming, and celebrating the 30 year anniversary of its Historical Society last year in 2018.

Shankleville’s extensive efforts at preserving its history and traditions through oral history has been instrumental at preserving the community’s origin stories, family and kinship relationships and genealogy. Establishing a sense of community through cultural traditions and historic remembrances, the historical society has conducted extensive interviews with community members, garnering local and statewide recognition for its efforts. These efforts include

landmark designations for its founders, Jim and Winnie Shankle, and Stephen McBride, their son-in-law co-founder, who are also known as the first African Americans to purchase land and become leaders of the freedom colony after Emancipation. Through annual activities such as the Texas Purple Hull Pea Festival (TxPHP), Shankleville has established many cultural events commemorating different historical aspects of the community's traditions, in this case, purple-hull peas as a cash crop and staple of the local economy, that has historically been a large part of Shankleville's culture.

At the 150th anniversary celebrations, I immersed myself even further in this community of my paternal great-grandmother's family, taking a tour of the grounds, the historic and landmarked homes, and the infamous spring where it all began. The amazing oral history of the town has been kept alive for over 150 years. Through Shankle descendants like the historical society's Lareatha Clay, Geri Rowe, Harold Odom, and McBride family historian Joan McBride, I was entreated to many stories of the community.

Through a sustained practice of oral history, Shankleville has managed to document the efforts of a very unique community, and by incorporating walking tours have built a collection and study of historical information about Shankleville's history, individuals, families, important events, and everyday life. Community and family members have participated in and observed past events in interviews spanning 10 generations, and their memories and perceptions of these events have been uniquely preserved as a historical record for future generations.

I left the conference with a renewed appreciation of not just Shankleville and the 580+ other such communities in Texas, but of the international phenomenon of freedom colony resistance

throughout every colonial pathway in creating safe spaces for communities to escape the harsh realities of Western culture. Shankleville continues to preserve and share its history, and has successfully created the framework for documenting its history for generations to come. Many other freedom colonies follow suit, and there are freedom colony descendants and enthusiasts who want to help other families begin to resurrect their own unique stories.

But as Harold Odom had so bluntly put it, not everyone wanted these stories told.

*“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," Sitton and Conrad continued. "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's research had convinced them to write their book "Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans In The Time Of Jim Crow."<sup>16 17</sup>*

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 told in full.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> "Freedom Colonies Independent Black Texans in the Time of Jim Crow ...."  
<https://utpress.utexas.edu/books/sitcol>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

<sup>18</sup> "ssha2019." <http://ssha2019.ssha.org/abstracts/101017>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.



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 throughout Africa and Australia. All exist as testament to the resistance people targeted by Western colonialism immediately practiced. An archetype of #TheResistance, these practices have existed since the beginning of Western Colonialism, its mass genocides and the Atlantic Slave Trade.<sup>19</sup>

This worldwide resistance to Western colonialism by the people targeted by its terrorism and crimes against humanity - the indigenous genocide, The 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) Scholar<sup>20</sup> 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

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<sup>19</sup> “MappingFreedom - Squarespace.”

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/50d0a18de4b07abde41656e7/t/5cd5c6e38165f5f0238af3bd/1557513956294/OHMA+%23MappingFreedom+presentation-2.pdf>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

<sup>20</sup> “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.

on OHMA's blog ([here](#)<sup>21</sup> and [here](#)<sup>22</sup>), I was accused of "disrupting Wikipedia" and temporarily blocked several times.<sup>23</sup>

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 database of freedom colonies I had created "violated that ban." As a result, I promptly [founded](#)<sup>24</sup> [#DisruptWikipedia](#)<sup>25</sup> 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."<sup>26 27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Indigenous scholar's work informs new Columbia University + ...." 16 May. 2019, <http://oralhistory.columbia.edu/blog-posts/indigenous-scholars-work-informs-new-columbia-university-wikipedia-initiatives>. Accessed 12 Nov. 2019.

<sup>22</sup> "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.

<sup>23</sup> "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.

<sup>24</sup> "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.

<sup>25</sup> "Wikipedia:Do not disrupt Wikipedia to illustrate a point ...." [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/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.

<sup>26</sup> "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.

<sup>27</sup> "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 “*this dark image*” of people they “needed to be black,” 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”<sup>28</sup> were more than happy to continue this nefarious charade, sustaining such racist rhetoric even up unto the present day.

“[F]rom 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,” Hungarian-born Holocaust survivor, historian and researcher, Marika Sherwood’s 2001 *Race, empire and education: teaching racism* found. “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

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<sup>28</sup> "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.

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.”

Sherwood then details the racist rantings of European statesmen and notables as they rushed to justify colonialism along such lines. “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, 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 concluded 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. ”***

In 2017, The Washington Post published [“News media offers consistently warped portrayals of black families, study finds”](#), a report by journalist Tracy Jan.<sup>29</sup> 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*

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<sup>29</sup> "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.

*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...Over 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 rhetoric](#)<sup>30</sup> 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.”*

*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*

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<sup>30</sup> "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.

*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.<sup>31</sup>*

As Nancy Isenberg revealed in her New York Times bestseller<sup>32</sup> ***White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America***<sup>33</sup>, the colonial elite - the European royals, nobles and corporate emissaries - merely replicated the brutal 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.”<sup>34</sup> And this poor class, the peasantry (immigrants, indentured servants and other “undesirables”), also 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.

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<sup>31</sup> "News media offers consistently warped portrayals of black ...." 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 22 May. 2020.

<sup>32</sup> "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.

<sup>33</sup> "“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.

<sup>34</sup> "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.



Karen E. Fields, with her and her sister Barbara J. Fields' seminal tome, *RACECRAFT: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*, focus on the beginnings and origins of white supremacy, and how such an institution affects people, their history and their stories, in their unabashed honesty to tell a different narrative from the mainstream. Like *This is How You Lose Her* author Junot Diaz, I love “the simple elegance with which they hammer home that **race is a monstrous fiction, racism is a monstrous crime.**”<sup>35</sup> Because race/ism (ie White Supremacy) is what precipitated the need to create “colonies of freedom” in the first place, the Fields sisters’ findings that “most people assume that racism grows from a perception of human difference: the fact of race gives rise to the practice of race/ism when in reality, the practice of racism produces the illusion of race, through what she calls “racecraft,” disrupts the national narrative that race/ism is natural, and thus an inevitability of humanity. By proving that this phenomenon is so intimately entwined with other forms of inequality in American life, and so pervasive are the devices of racecraft in American history, economic doctrine, politics, and everyday thinking that the presence of racecraft itself goes unnoticed. That the promised post-racial age has not dawned, the authors argue, reflects the failure of Americans to develop a legitimate language for thinking about and discussing inequality. That failure should worry everyone who cares about democratic institutions.<sup>36</sup> “**Trying to remedy racism on its own intellectual terrain is like trying to extinguish a fire by striking another match,**” they say. “**The fiction must be unbelievably, the fire stamped out.**”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "Barbara J. Fields - Verso." <https://www.versobooks.com/authors/1739-barbara-j-fields>. Accessed 14 Nov. 2019.

<sup>36</sup> "Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life ...." <https://www.indiebound.org/book/9781844679942>. Accessed 14 Nov. 2019.

<sup>37</sup> "Mixed Race Studies » Barbara J. Fields." <http://www.mixedracestudies.org/?tag=barbara-j-fields>. Accessed 14 Nov. 2019.

In my attempts to create a Freedom Colonies Oral History Archives within the International Association of Freedom Colonies, I explore the descendants, scholars and supporters of such places' reaction and interrogation with such a statement, and in the Western cultural context, concept. For I'm finding that the majority of Westerners aren't versed in the fact that "race" isn't real, much less that it comes from race-ism, and not "natural human differences" as the mainstream narrative promotes to protect and justify its institutions. I find that "decolonization" becomes necessary - using facts to reveal new norms that disrupt the narratives that have been promoted and indoctrinated onto an unsuspecting, vulnerable population for centuries.

"Peasant culture" is the term my team at #HackingRacism has been using to denote the fact that Western Europe particularly spent thousands of years and all of its resources to make the majority of its population "peasants," (to the point of *needing* to get resources from other peoples), thus causing the Stockholm syndrome and epigenetic terror that could then be manipulated. Convincing these lower classes to go and work the colonies, and replicate the terrorism they experienced in Europe onto those there, was accomplished by the colonial elite creating the construct of race as a skin color class hierarchy based on first ethnic ancestry, and then phenotype. The European lower classes now had the opportunity to "class up" into "whiteness," and out of the "wretchedness of a multi-generational history of no resources," which Nancy Isenberg, award winning author of *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* explores in depth in [The Daily Beast](#):

*While land was the source of wealth and class status in early America, landlessness was rampant. The word "white trash" evolved by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup>*

The colonial elite - European royals, nobles and emissaries - merely replicated their brutal 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.” 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. Freedom colonies were the cure. The Fields sisters exposed the fact that the systems and institutions of white supremacy were the foundational framework and reason for the colonial culture, and the victims of such did all in their power to still carve out spaces for some semblance of autonomy and substantive living:

*I have already devoted more time to topics regarding the color line than my grandmother would have approved of. I need to pause to say something about this fact. Gram would be*

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<sup>38</sup> "Dismissing Trump Fans As White Trash Gets Our Class ...." 30 Jul. 2016, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/dismissing-trump-fans-as-white-trash-gets-our-class-system-all-wrong>. Accessed 31 May. 2020.

*the first to say that Lemon Swamp is about her own life, not about the racist system that partly enclosed it. Matters of race and color are a permanent presence without being her principal subject. They are constituent to life, but they do not define life. So, for example, Gram fondly remembers the details of her very fancy wedding-a black affair, from beginning to end-but yet notices that curious white people from the neighborhood slipped into Wesley Church's gallery, silently, to behold the occasion's splendor. On the other hand, when she decided to go to Boston to get her trousseau and took the Clyde Line Ship, she did not at first remember whether it was segregated. The point was the adventure. She did not pay attention to where white people were on the ship.<sup>39</sup>*

This paragraph encapsulates the sentiment of the freedom colony descendants I've come into contact with. No matter what "the heathen raging noisily around us did," as was put to me, "we lived our own lives, made our own love, had our own children and families, and careers, educations, and hobbies," in a pointed reference to the sustained resistance to genocide, enslavement, rape, forced family separations and other such terrorism that accompanied colonialism's white supremacy. With this in mind, my oral history interviews can focus on the interior lives of its inhabitants, giving only minimal, contextual shrift to the framework of which necessitated its creation. The Fields sisters provide a great framework for navigating the fraught intersections of the colonized world of "free" and "unfree," terrorism and ecstasy, pain and pleasure, and "black" and "white" that are indelibly embedded in the narratives of the freedom colonies. To this, I am grateful and thankful for their work.

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<sup>39</sup> "Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life: Fields ...."  
<https://www.amazon.com/Racecraft-Soul-Inequality-American-Life/dp/1781683131>. Accessed 22 May, 2020.

## CONCLUSION

*“Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them.” -Assata Shakur*

Challenging these carefully constructed, centuries long nationalized narratives that hundreds of millions, if not billions, have constructed their "new" identities around could cause major shifts.

By creating the International Association of Freedom Colonies (iAFC) and its Oral History Archives, we can dedicate research focus in areas of history, literature and academia, and the influence of these communities on the modern "colonizer culture" of today.

The iAFC and its oral history archives exist within a larger project, [#MappingFreedom](#), a public-facing, crowd-sourced, open knowledge, digital tech initiative <sup>40</sup> interactively documenting and digitally mapping all of the "freedom colonies" - and every piece of digital information associated with them (video, audio, text, etc) - on the planet. 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 and Australia. 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

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<sup>40</sup> "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.

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*. It was also a finalist for **Columbia's 2019 Masters Synthesis** competition (presentation is [here](#)).<sup>41</sup>

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 *New York Times* 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 the phenomenon.

These freedom colonies 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. In a profile for *Next City*,<sup>42</sup> Dr. Andrea Roberts explains that most freedom colonies made sure to stay hidden from the violent and often deadly racism of white supremacy. “Despite their important role in reconstruction, many Freedom

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<sup>41</sup> "MappingFreedom - Squarespace."

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

<sup>42</sup> "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.

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* as “uppity,” and consistently targeted for terrorism, as evidence in the numerous lynchings and the violent massacres of freedom colonies such as Greenwood in Tulsa, Oklahoma,<sup>43</sup> Rosewood in Florida,<sup>44</sup> Slocum in Texas,<sup>45</sup> Colfax in Louisiana,<sup>46</sup> and Elaine, Arkansas.<sup>47</sup> 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.”

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<sup>43</sup> "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.

<sup>44</sup> "Rosewood Massacre - HISTORY." 4 May. 2018, <https://www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/rosewood-massacre>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

<sup>45</sup> "Remembering The Slocum Massacre – Texas Monthly." 1 Feb. 2016, <https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-daily-post/remembering-the-slocum-massacre/>. Accessed 27 Jun. 2019.

<sup>46</sup> "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.

<sup>47</sup> "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.

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. When the first slave ship pulled into what is now Cartagena, Colombia, the enslaved Africans jumped ship to escape the Spanish enslavers and ran for the hills, fleeing the terrorism of the racialized “one-drop” life-long inheritable chattel enslavement that the West created with its Atlantic Slave Trade. Away from the genocidal racism Western colonizers 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. 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. 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."

Some RIPOD-CASTE enslaved peoples escaped some of the greatest horrors to ever exist in the world to create community, self-reliance and prosperity by groups of families banding together and maintaining a safe space from the terrorism of Western colonialism. Instead of running to join their invader-captor colonizers, or sharecropping on former slave camps, freedom colony residents created thousands of settlements that were established on the ancestral pre-colonial indigenous Native lands they found themselves currently, many being Native-descended themselves. As Cat Cardenas reported in her January 2019 Texas Monthly column on the Texas freedom colony County Line, in Upshaw, Texas, "these people created a sense of independence for their families and provided a safe place to raise children."<sup>48</sup>

"Africans became hash marks on census reports when they reached America and were enslaved, leaving them, ultimately, without an understanding of their heritage or connection to their homeland," Andrea Roberts told Texas A&M today. "These self-sufficient freedom colonies were established under the most difficult of circumstances by industrious, intelligent and

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<sup>48</sup> "Telling the Story of a Texas Freedom Colony Through Decades." 29 Jan. 2019, <https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-culture/telling-story-texas-freedom-colony-through-decades-photos/>. Accessed 25 May. 2020.

organized people acting much like current-day city planners — and some of their descendants are performing the work of preservationists today.”<sup>49</sup>

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.”<sup>50</sup>

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.

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<sup>49</sup> "Documenting Historic Black Settlements In Texas - Texas A&M ...." 8 Oct. 2018, <https://today.tamu.edu/2018/10/08/texas-am-professor-documenting-historic-black-settlements-in-texas/>. Accessed 16 May. 2020.

<sup>50</sup> "Telling the Story of a Texas Freedom Colony Through Decades." 29 Jan. 2019, <https://www.texasmonthly.com/the-culture/telling-story-texas-freedom-colony-through-decades-photos/>. Accessed 20 May. 2020.

I 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" 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 Jamestown where both of my military veteran parents served, I'm delighted to see the restoring, rebuilding and conserving 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, and developing best practices, while also raising awareness.

We can all take part in continuing this legacy of remembrance and celebration, and the numerous preservation, conservation and restoration efforts across the globe, in this 528th year of Columbus's ill-fated voyage.

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