

Echoes of Enslavement — Not Only in the South, But Everywhere

BY URSULA WOLFE-ROCCA

This lesson is part of a suite of activities developed to accompany How the Word Is Passed by a Zinn Education Project curriculum collective, which also includes Jesse Hagopian, Cierra Kaler-Jones, Ana Rosado, and Bill Bigelow.

ASK ANY GROUP — CHILDREN OR ADULTS — raised in the United States where slavery occurred in the country, and you will get an overwhelming response: the South. Of course, the question itself is disingenuous. Slavery was a national institution. It “happened” everywhere. Yet the popular discourse of U.S. history suggests otherwise. We read about “slave states” and “free states” or the “antislavery North” and the “pro-slavery South.” It becomes all too easy to adopt a host of misconceptions: Slavery was limited in scope; it was a regional anachronism; it did not shape the economy and politics of places

where it was illegal to own enslaved people. And critically, it suggests that when we consider the legacies of slavery — as we have in recent national conversations about everything from Confederate monuments to *The New York Times* 1619 Project, racist policing to reparations — we are talking mostly about only one part of the country.

This lesson uses excerpts from Clint Smith’s [*How the Word Is Passed: A Reckoning with the History of Slavery Across America*](#) to invite students to examine their own locales — North and South, East and West, rural and urban — as sites of slavery’s remembering and forgetting. It asks students to scan their surroundings for historical traces that live beyond the pages of books, to analyze how these sites help or hinder a clear-eyed view of slavery’s legacy, and to share their critical analysis with each other to “map” slavery’s echoes in their own backyards.



The bronze statue of Thomas Jefferson is severed from its base at Jefferson High School in Portland, Oregon, on June 15, 2020, after it was torn down by protesters the night before.

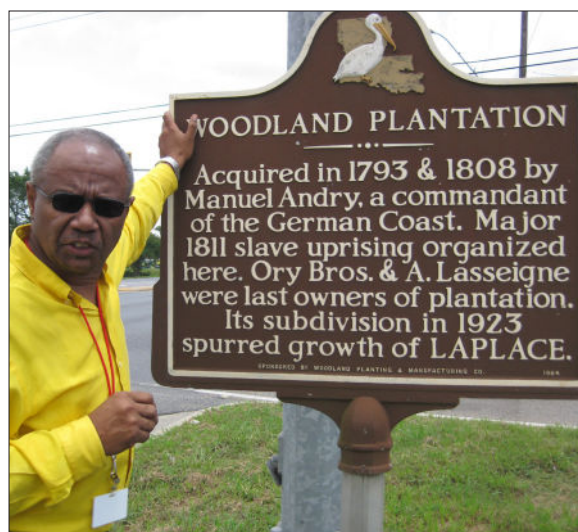
Sipa USA/Alamy Live News

Time Required

No less than two 90-minute class periods. This lesson could take up to two weeks, depending on how much time you give students to devote to research and writing.

Suggested Procedure

1. Read pp. 3-6 of the prologue, all but the last paragraph, with students. There are many ways to do this. I like to layer multiple readings. The first layer is generally a read-aloud, where I read while students follow along on their own copies, marking lines or ideas that stand out to them for any reason. After a quick round of clarifying questions (usually just defining vocabulary), I send students to do another layer of independent reading and annotation, a “talkback,” where they read silently, raising questions and making comments and connections in the margins. (The text is included as a handout for this lesson. While I hope students have copies of the book to read in full, the handout allows them to mark up the text for this exercise.)
2. After students have had plenty of time to marinate in the text, ask them to discuss, either in small groups, or as a whole class, what they read. Some possible questions for discussion:
 - a. Who is Leon Waters? What do you think he would say about why his work is important?
 - b. Smith writes on p. 6 that “The echo of enslavement is everywhere.” Why do you think Smith used the word “echo”? What is he saying about slavery by using that word? List all the “echoes” he mentions in this excerpt.
 - c. What is Smith’s connection to New Orleans? How does he come to see the city differently?
3. Tell students, “On the first page of the excerpt we read, Smith talks about the Mississippi River being a site where slavery happened. What other examples like this does



Leon Waters stands next to the only historic marker that references the 1811 Slave Revolt.

Smith reference in this excerpt?” Answers might include: plaques, statues, monuments, street and school names, shops and restaurants on sites that used to hold slave pens and auction blocks, levees and roads. As the example of the Mississippi River suggests, there are places not as obvious as a plaque or monument.

Try to coax students to think about the finance and insurance industries’ ties to enslavement, for example: “Can you think of individuals or institutions in the North that benefited from slavery?” Once students learn that banks (JPMorgan Chase) and insurers (AIG, Aetna) still with us today were in the business of slavery, even a city street in the “free” north blaring a blue and white Chase Bank sign can reveal the traces of slavery. This brainstorming is important, because it will enable students to make the leap to their own locales.

4. Ask students to think about their own state, city, or town as also a place where slavery happened. Remind students that Smith’s piece includes sites of remembering that he lauds (the work of the New Orleans Committee to Erect Markers on the Slave Trade) and sites that he thinks perpetuate forgetting, lies, or distortion. Although students should use Smith’s examples as a starting point,

encourage them think creatively and more broadly as well.

Have students work in small groups to generate a few ideas to share out with the whole class. You could either curate some websites (your local historical society would be a good place to start) or let students' inquiry proceed more organically. As groups share, invite other students to contribute additional examples in the same vein, while you record their answers on a shared document. For example, if a student notes that a Madison High School or a Jefferson Parkway are named after presidents who enslaved people, ask students to think about other school and street names.

Depending on where we teach, this brainstorming may require heavier facilitation and perhaps an additional lesson. For example, in the Pacific Northwest, where I live, the traces of slavery are less visible than in the Louisiana of Smith's prologue. My students might say, "Oregon didn't even become a state until the year before the Civil War started, and it was a free state!" Using document stations (online or in person), I would spend a class period asking students to investigate slavery's role in Oregon. It is true that slavery was outlawed by Oregon's 1857 constitution, but before that it was more complicated, because enslaved people could be brought into the state (for a maximum of three years) by their owners. So yes, literally, slavery "happened"

in Oregon.

Oregon also has an infamous history of Black exclusion laws rooted in the same racist rationalizations and white supremacist assumptions as slavery itself. I might ask my students, "Is anti-Black racism itself an echo of slavery?" If that is the case, then sites that reflect that racism — from high schools named after the white supremacist Woodrow Wilson or James Madison, a president who enslaved people, to neighborhoods segregated by racially restrictive real estate covenants, to the terrible racist caricatures that adorned local restaurants — would fit the bill.

Oregon also boasts a lot of public history about Lewis and Clark. Not only was there an enslaved person, York, on the famous expedition, but the exploration itself was made possible by the resistance and rebellion of enslaved people in Haiti, which led to the Louisiana Purchase.

Below is a partial list of places created for Oregon. Although it will be directly applicable to only a few educators, I hope it will serve as a model for your own state. We invite you to share places you and your students discover in your own locale. Email us at: zep@zinnedproject.org

5. Once you and your class have compiled a lengthy list of sites, tell students that it is time for them to choose one site about which they want to learn more. Eventually, they will be

Sites of Slavery's Remembering and Forgetting: Oregon

Here are examples of places in Oregon with [many more listed online](#).

Schools Names

- Harriet Tubman Middle School
- Lincoln High School
- McDaniel High School (formerly Madison High School)
- Jefferson High School
- Ida B. Wells-Barnett High School (formerly Woodrow Wilson High School)

College Campuses

- Lewis and Clark College
- Deady Hall

Street Names

- Stark St.
- Calhoun St.

Place Names

- Jim Crow Sands
- John Brown Canyon

Gravesites of Formerly Enslaved People Who Lived and Died in Oregon

- [Letitia Carson](#)
- [Louis Southworth](#)

Monuments

- [Lewis and Clark](#) and York at University of Portland
- [York](#) at Lewis and Clark College in Portland

doing some writing, à la Clint Smith, about this site, and its relationship to slavery and how we remember it. It is important to give students enough time to click around and learn a little about a number of places so that they can land on one about which they are enthusiastic and curious. Once students have selected their sites, give them a chunk of a class period to research and gather information. Below are some basic questions that might guide their inquiry and analysis:

- a. Where is this place? Who is likely to visit this place? Is it a prominently displayed site or one people will likely miss?
- b. What does the site look like? Describe as many sensory details as possible.
- c. How is it connected to the history of slavery?
- d. Does this place address slavery explicitly? Or is the connection to slavery hidden?
- e. Who, if anyone, is being honored at this site? What is their story? Stories?
- f. Who, if anyone, is being forgotten at this site? What is their story? Stories?
- g. What important events are related to this site? How does the site address those events, if at all?
- h. Does this site provide any explanatory materials for visitors? Do those materials mention slavery? If so, what do they say? If not, do you think they should? Why or why not?
- i. What changes, if any, have been proposed about this site? Would you be in favor of making changes to this site? Why? Why not?

Encourage students to chat with each other about their findings as they go along to ignite each other's thinking. Halfway through class, you might even do two or three rounds of a mixer, where students meet each other

one-on-one and share a bit about what they've learned.

6. Tell students, "We're going to read some more of Clint Smith's book now. We're reading not just to learn more about the echoes of slavery and to appreciate the beauty of his prose, but also to use his writing as a guide for our own."

The excerpts in Handout Two include passages from three of the eight places Smith analyzes: Monticello Plantation, Blandford (Confederate) Cemetery, and New York City.

As before, I recommend doing a layered reading of these texts. First, assign students (or let them choose) one of the three excerpts (everyone should read the short prologue). Encourage them to mark up what they like, what moves them, what "works" in the piece, what questions it raises for them.

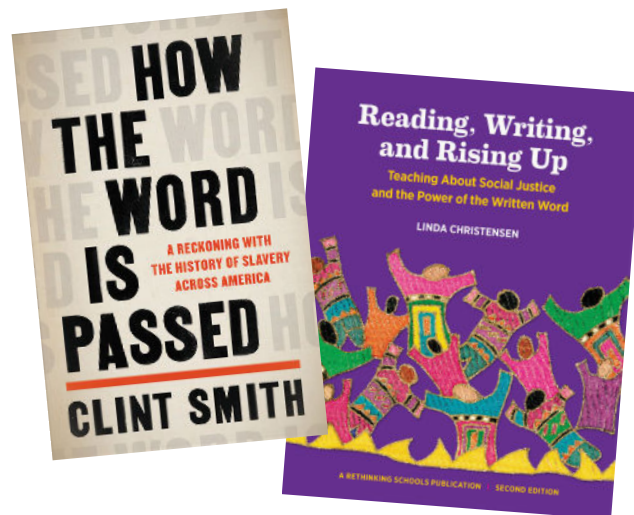
Next, group students who read the same excerpt. Give them a chance to share their ideas with each other. Then ask them to prepare for a large group discussion to "raise the bones" of Smith's style and craft.

7. "Raising the bones" comes from Rethinking Schools editor and Oregon Writing Project director Linda Christensen. It refers to the practice of re-reading a piece with the goal of noticing how an author creates sentences that sing, writes lines that make your throat tight with emotion, or builds a paragraph that causes you to think really hard about something important. Raising the bones — naming the strategies that make a piece work — is a critical way of demystifying writing so that it becomes accessible to all of us.

There are lots of ways to start this discussion. You might say, "I love that opening paragraph of the second excerpt that begins, 'The cemetery was as still as its cloudless sky.' What does Smith do that makes this paragraph so compelling?" Students will likely notice his use of sensory details: the "soft din of lawnmowers buzzed" and "the scent of freshly cut grass." They might also notice that

he includes powerful historical facts: Buried in the cemetery are the bodies of 30,000 Confederate soldiers. As the conversation continues, make sure to keep a running list of the “bones” that students can refer back to when they begin their own writing. This list might include:

- a. Sensory details.
 - b. Lots of physical description of places.
 - c. Historical background and context.
 - d. Startling facts about the past and the present.
 - e. Interior monologue — what Smith is thinking.
 - f. Quotations from people, books, and primary sources.
 - g. Uses first, second, and third person.
 - h. Powerful statistics.
8. Tell students that it is time to write. If possible, try to build in at least a block of writing time right after #7, while ideas are still fresh in students’ minds. Tell students that they should pull facts, information, and analysis from their research (and answers to the questions in step #5), but that the structure and form of the writing is up to them. Remind them to use Smith’s text as a mentor; if they get stuck, look at the way he starts a paragraph or sentence and see if that might work for them, too. If possible, allow time for students to share with each other in small groups some of what they’ve written, which helps seed ideas, and democratizes the writing process.
9. Obviously, how long you provide students to work on their writing will vary. Some teachers may choose to make this a multidraft process; some may give students only a single class period to work. But whenever your students reach their piece’s finish line, allow substantial time for sharing. Linda Christensen’s book [*Reading, Writing, and Rising Up*](#) includes a chapter called “[The Read-Around: Raising Writers](#),” which serves as a wonderful foundation upon which to build



a classroom sharing practice. Christensen writes:

The read-around is the classroom equivalent to quilt making or barn raising. It is the public space — the zocalo or town square — of my room. During our read-arounds, we socialize together and create community, but we also teach and learn from each other. If I had to choose one strategy as the centerpiece of my teaching, it would be the read-around. It provides both the written text for my classroom and the social text, where our lives intersect and we deepen our connections and understandings across lines of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and age.

Besides providing a means to build classroom community and hone writing skills, a read-around of students’ “Echoes of Enslavement” pieces can also provide the foundation for a powerful follow-up discussion. You might tell students ahead of time to listen for the larger story of their collective findings and jot down some notes as they listen. Possible questions for after the read-around include:

- Which places or sites stand out to you? Why?
- What is something new you learned about slavery or where you live?
- Is slavery being remembered or forgotten here (in our school, town,

- city, state)?
- What do you think should be remembered about slavery? Did you hear any examples of places that reflected that kind of remembering?
- Are there changes you'd like to see to the way our places and spaces recall and acknowledge slavery?
- Smith says that slavery is “a crime that is still unfolding.” Perhaps one factor in its perpetuation is that the United States has never reckoned with and attempted to repair the devastating harm of slavery. Surface and examine the fight for reparations in two Zinn Education Project lessons, [How to Make Amends](#) and [Repair: Students Design a Reparations Bill](#).

Where from Here?

This lesson can lead in a number of different directions.

- Adam Sanchez’s lesson, “[Poetry of Defiance](#),” helps students deepen their understanding of the ways enslaved people resisted and might sharpen their thinking about how our sites of memory should memorialize that resistance.
- This lesson is one of a suite of lessons and teaching ideas put together by the Zinn Education Project team inspired by Clint Smith’s *How the Word Is Passed*. [You can find all of those here](#).

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How the Word Is Passed: Prologue

“The whole city is a memorial to slavery”

BY CLINT SMITH

The sky above the Mississippi River stretched out like a song. The river was still in the windless afternoon, its water a yellowish-brown from the sediment it carried across thousands of miles of farmland, cities, and suburbs on its way south. At dusk, the lights of the Crescent City Connection, a pair of steel cantilever bridges that cross the river and connect the east and west banks of New Orleans, flickered on. Luminous bulbs ornamented the bridges’ steel beams like a congregation of fireflies settling onto the backs of two massive, unbothered creatures. A tugboat made its way downriver, pulling an enormous ship in its wake. The sounds of the French Quarter, just behind me, pulsed through the brick sidewalk underfoot. A pop-up brass band blared into the early-evening air, its trumpets, tubas, and trombones commingling with the delight of a congregating crowd; a young man drummed on a pair of upturned plastic buckets, the drumsticks in his hands moving with speed and dexterity; people gathered for photos along the river’s edge, hoping to capture an image of themselves surrounded by a recognizable piece of quintessential New Orleans iconography.

After the transatlantic slave trade was outlawed in 1808, about a million people were transported from the upper South to the lower South. More than one hundred thousand of them were brought down the Mississippi River and sold in New Orleans.

Leon A. Waters came and stood next to me on the riverfront, hands in pockets, lips compressed, overlooking the Mississippi’s slow bend between the two shores of the city. I had been introduced to Waters by a group of young Black activists in New Orleans who were part of the organization Take ‘Em Down NOLA, whose self-espoused mission is “the removal of ALL symbols of white supremacy in New Orleans as part of a broader push for racial & economic justice.” Waters has served as a mentor to many members of the group — they see him as an elder statesman of their movement and credit him for being a central part of their political education.

Waters — in his late sixties with a greying mustache sitting over his lips — wore a black sports coat over a grey-and-white-striped shirt with the top button undone. A navy-blue tie hung loosely below his unfastened collar and swung over the waistband of his faded blue jeans. A pair of thin-framed, rectangular-shaped glasses sat high on the bridge of his nose, the left lens with a slight smudge in its bottom corner. His voice was low and unvarying in its tone. Waters might be mistaken for surly, but his disposition is simply a reflection of the seriousness with which he takes the subject matter he often is discussing, the subject of slavery.

We were standing in front of a plaque, recently put up by the New Orleans Committee to Erect Markers on the Slave Trade, outlining Louisiana’s relationship to the transatlantic slave trade. “It’s doing its job,” Waters said of the plaque. “All through the day people come in, they stop, they read, take pictures . . . It’s another way of educating people to this.”

In recent years, markers like this began to go up throughout the city, each documenting a specific area’s relationship to enslavement — part of a broader reckoning. After years of Black people being killed by police and having their deaths broadcast in videos streamed across the world, after a white supremacist

went into a Black church in Charleston, South Carolina, and killed nine people as they prayed, after neo-Nazis marched in Charlottesville, Virginia, to protect a Confederate statue and reclaim a history born of a lie, after George Floyd was killed by a police officer's knee on his neck, cities across the country have begun to more fully reckon with the history that made such moments possible — a history that many had previously been unwilling to acknowledge. Waters, who identified as a local historian and revolutionary, was not new to this. He and others like him have, for years, been working to illuminate the city's legacy — and by extension the country's legacy — of oppression.

Only recently, after decades of pushing by activists, amid the larger groundswell of national pressure, have city officials begun to listen, or perhaps feel like they finally have the political capital to act. In 2017, New Orleans removed four statues and monuments that, it had determined, paid tribute to the legacy of white supremacy. The city removed memories to Robert E. Lee, the general who led the Confederacy's most successful army during the Civil War, a slaveholder; Jefferson Davis, the first and only president of the Confederacy, a slaveholder; P.G.T. Beauregard, a general in the Confederate Army who ordered the first shots of the Civil War, a slaveholder; and a monument dedicated to the Battle of Liberty Place, an 1874 insurrection in which white supremacists attempted to overthrow the integrated Reconstruction-era state government of Louisiana. These monuments are gone now, but at least a hundred streets, statues, parks, and schools named after Confederate figures, slaveholders, and defenders of slavery remain. On a cool February afternoon, Waters, the founder of Hidden History Tours of New Orleans, promised to show me where some of these vestiges of the past remain.

Waters drove me past two schools named after John McDonogh, a wealthy slave-owning merchant after whom dozens of schools, filled largely with Black children, were named until the 1990s; we drove past shops and restaurants and hotels where there once had been the offices, showrooms, and slave pens of more than a dozen slave-trading firms that made New Orleans the largest slave market in antebellum America — like the Omni Royal Orleans Hotel, built on the site of the St. Louis Hotel, where men, women, and children were bought, sold and separated from one another; we drove past Jackson Square, in the heart of the tourist-filled French Quarter, where rebellious enslaved people were executed.

Even the street on which Waters dropped me off at the end of our tour, where my parents now live, is named after Bernard de Marigny, a man who owned more than 150 enslaved people over the course of his lifetime. The echo of enslavement is everywhere. It is in the levees, originally built by enslaved labor. It is in the detailed architecture of some of the city's oldest buildings, sculpted by enslaved hands. It is in the road, first paved by enslaved people. As historian Walter Johnson has said about New Orleans, "The whole city is a memorial to slavery."

New Orleans is my home. It is where I was born and raised. It is a part of me in ways I continue to discover. But I came to realize that I knew relatively little about my hometown's relationship to the centuries of bondage rooted in the city's soft earth, in the statues I had walked past daily, the names of the streets I had lived on, the schools I had attended, and the buildings that had once been nothing more to me than the remnants of colonial architecture. It was all right in front of me, even when I didn't know to look for it.

It was in May 2017 — after the statue of Robert E. Lee near downtown New Orleans had been taken down from its sixty-foot pedestal — that I became obsessed with how slavery is remembered and reckoned with, with teaching myself all of the things I wish someone had taught me long ago. Our country is in a moment, at an inflection point, in which there is a willingness to more fully grapple with the legacy of slavery and how it shaped the world we live in today. But it seems that the more purposefully some places have attempted to tell the truth about their proximity to slavery and its aftermath, the more staunchly other places have refused. I wanted to visit some of these places — those telling the truth, those running from it, and those doing something in between — in order to understand this reckoning.

This excerpt from the pages 3-6 of the prologue to How the Word Is Passed by Clint Smith is reprinted with permission of the publisher.

How the Word Is Passed: Excerpts

Prologue

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In *How the Word Is Passed* I travel to eight places in the United States as well as one abroad to understand how each reckons with its relationship to the history of American slavery. I visit a mix of plantations, prisons, cemeteries, museums, houses, historical landmarks, and cities. The majority of these sites are in the South, as this is where slavery was most saturated over the course of its nearly two-hundred-fifty-year existence on these shores, but I also travel to New York City and Dakar, Senegal. Each chapter is a portrait of a place but also of the people in that place — those who live there, work there, and are the descendants of the land and of the families who once lived on it. They are people who have tasked themselves with telling the story of that place outside of traditional classrooms and beyond the pages of textbooks. They are, formally or informally, public historians who carry with them a piece of this country’s collective memory. They have dedicated their lives to sharing this history with others. And for this book, many of them have generously shared that history with me.

Monticello Plantation

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Although Monticello has been open to the public since the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation purchased the property in 1923, the plantation’s public wrestling with Jefferson’s relationship to slavery began in 1993 and, as part of the foundation’s Getting Word oral history project, in which the foundation interviewed the descendants of enslaved people from Monticello in an effort to preserve those histories. These oral histories represented an attempt to get the descendants to share stories their elders might have shared with them. The stories that arose from Getting Word became part of the tours Monticello created based on the lives of the enslaved population there. “This is how the word is passed down,” remarked one of the descendants in an interview for the project.

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To get to Jefferson’s grave you walk for about a third of a mile through a winding uphill path. The gravel, a thin membrane scattered atop the red clay of this Virginia mountainside, crunches under your feet with each step.

As you walk along the serpentine path to the cemetery, the bending branches and thick pockets of leaves provide shadowy respite from the midsummer heat. Splashes of light sneak through the leaves and onto the forest floor, their branches reaching up to slice open the sky. Lining the auburn road is a constellation of mulberry and red cedar trees that sit among the white oaks. In the Monticello graveyard,

Jefferson is buried alongside his descendants. At the center of the graveyard sits a large tulip poplar tree, its thick trunk a discolored medley of browns.

The grave site — its iron gates, majestic tombstones, and gold ornamentation — stands in stark contrast to the grave site farther down the hill, where forty of Thomas Jefferson’s enslaved workers are buried. That space is enclosed by wooden fencing that has weathered over time. Dull emerald algae grows along much of the unevenly cut timber. The ground is an unremarkable coalescence of soil and wood chips and indiscriminate patches of foliage dotting the graveyard with small streaks of green. While the Jefferson cemetery is filled with tombstones heralding the names of nearly two hundred of Jefferson’s descendants and their spouses, the burial ground of the enslaved has no ornamentation or personal designation. There are a few scattered headstones, though no visible names or inscriptions. The trees around the graves hold court for a congregation of unmarked ruins. No one knows the names of the people buried here.

In the moments just before Jefferson died, when no one else could understand his mumbled, near lifeless words, it was another of his enslaved attendants who, knowing that he was asking to have his pillow repositioned, raised Jefferson’s head. Only a short time after, Jefferson passed away. Throughout his life, Jefferson valued the company of cosmopolitan guests, the time to read and write and think, the elegance of fine architecture, the flavor of savory food, and the fragrance of the natural world — a life in which he could nurture his mind and satisfy his tastes. This life was only possible because of the enslaved men and women he held, sold, and separated; because of the people he allowed to be threatened, manipulated, flogged, assaulted, deceived, and terrorized. Jefferson’s vacillation from moral repugnance to hollow justification reflects how he largely succumbed to that which he knew was indefensible. He still held hostage the men and women and children enslaved on his plantation, he still separated them, he still refused to provide freedom to more than a handful of people.

But Monticello is not singularly defined by Jefferson. It could not have existed without the enslaved people who lived there, who had families there, who built a community there that spanned generations. As a public servant, Jefferson spent more than half his life away from his plantation, while many of the hundreds of people enslaved at Monticello stayed on that land for the entirety of their lives. As much as this land illuminates the contradictions of Jefferson’s legacy, it also serves as a reminder of the hundreds of Black people who made a home there. Their lives are also worthy of remembrance and commemoration.

One of the last things David said before I left my second tour at Monticello spoke to this duality: “You’re here. [Sally’s brother James] Hemings got beat here. Not in a book, right? Right here is where that happened.” When one hundred enslaved people at Monticello were auctioned after Jefferson’s death, it was “right there in the west lawn behind us,” David continued. “It happened right there. And Jefferson’s ideas about the Declaration of Independence, even though he wrote that document in Philadelphia, his whole idea of where he was going, was formulated right here on this mountaintop.”

Blandford Cemetery

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The cemetery was as still as its cloudless sky. The soft din of lawnmowers buzzed in the distance, their vibrating bodies held by Black men steering them in between tombstones draped in Confederate flags. The scent of freshly cut grass — a commingling of green and dry earth — swept across the field. The oldest marked grave at Blandford Cemetery dates back to 1702, but what this land is best known for took place more than a century and a half later. Buried here in Petersburg, Virginia, are the bodies of thirty thousand Confederate soldiers, one of the largest mass graves of Confederate servicemen in the South.

I walked through this field and observed the names carved into each ashen tablet. JAMES. WRIGHT.

COTMAN. I did not know if they were first names or last names, soldiers of those who fought in the Civil War or their descendants. It was a cemetery full of bodies that have long watched over this land, and of newly buried bodies just becoming acquainted with the earth.

The entrance to the cemetery was marked by a large stone archway ornamented with the words OUR CONFEDERATE HEROES and two smaller archways on either side of it. Two Confederate flags sat at the bottom of the columns framing the main archway and flapped gently in the wind. The first dragonflies of spring whipped through the light breeze, their translucent wings pulsing against the warm air, their unbridled bodies somersaulting past one another. I watched them dance through the air, land atop a headstone, and pause. I watched and, somewhat mystically, wondered whether these might have been descendants of the dragonflies that flew over this land during the war, more than a century and a half ago. I imagined them zipping past the bullets that turned men into ghosts, their wings warm with beads of blood. I imagined them landing on top of bodies that were strewn on top of bodies, circling the smoke billowing from burning soil.

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It is not simply that statues of Lee and other Confederates stand as monuments to a traitorous army predicated on maintaining and expanding the institution of slavery, it is also that we, U.S. taxpayers, are paying for their maintenance and preservation. A 2018 report by Smithsonian magazine and the Nation Institute's Investigative Fund (now Type Investigation) found that over the previous ten years, U.S. taxpayers had directed at least forty million dollars to Confederate monuments, including statues, homes, museums, and cemeteries, as well as Confederate heritage groups. And in Virginia, the subsidizing of Confederate iconography is a more than century-long project.

In 1902, as Jim Crow continued to expand as a violent and politically repressive force, the state's all-white legislature created an annual allocation of the state's funds for the care of Confederate graves. Smithsonian's investigation found that in total, the state had spent approximately \$9 million in today's dollars. Much of that funding goes directly to the United Daughters of the Confederacy, which received over \$1.6 million in funds for Confederate cemeteries from the State of Virginia between 1996 and 2018.

Cemeteries filled with Black and formerly enslaved people have never received commensurate financial support. The Virginia legislature passed the Historical African American Cemeteries and Graves Act in 2017, to demonstrate its commitment to making amends for this injustice, but at the time of the Smithsonian investigation less than a thousand dollars had been used. (Virginia has increased its level of support since then, and established a fund specifically for nineteenth-century African American cemeteries in 2020, a step to make up for over a century's worth of neglect.)

Across the street from Blandford cemetery, a smaller, more understated burial ground stood.

The People's Memorial Cemetery was purchased by twenty-eight members of Petersburg's free Black community in 1840. Buried on this land are enslaved people, an anti-slavery writer whose burial site is recorded among the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom sites, Black veterans of the Civil War, World War I, and World War II; as well as hundreds of other Black Petersburg residents.

The contrast between the two is conspicuous in ways not dissimilar to that between the two cemeteries at Monticello. There were far fewer tombstones at the People's Memorial Cemetery than at Blandford, and those there were indiscriminately scattered across the brown grass. There were no flags ornamenting the graves. There were no hourly tours available for people to remember the dead. There was history, but also silence.

New York City

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Damaras stopped at the corner of Water and Wall Streets, just in front of a small plaque. Its text was too small to decipher from afar. She told us to take our time, take a look, and after we were done to meet her on the corner a few yards away. I let a few people go before me. When the others had finished, I stepped up to the green marker and its white texts. It read:

On Wall Street, between Pearl and Water Streets, a market that auctioned enslaved people of African ancestry was established by a Common Council law on November 30, 1711. This slave market was in use until 1762. Slave owners wanting to hire out enslaved workers, which included people of Native American ancestry, as day laborers also had to do so at that location. In 1726 the structure was renamed the Meal Market because corn, grain and meal — crucial ingredients to the Colonial diet — were also exclusively traded there.

Slavery was introduced to Manhattan in 1626. By the mid-18th century approximately one in five people living in New York City was enslaved and almost half of Manhattan households included at least one slave. Although New York State abolished slavery in 1827, complete abolition came only in 1841 when the State of New York abolished the right of non-residents to have slaves in the state for up to nine months. However, the use of slave labor elsewhere for the production of raw materials such as sugar and cotton was essential to the economy of New York both before and after the Civil War. Slaves also cleared forest land for the construction of Broadway and were among the workers that built the wall that Wall Street is named for and helped build the first Trinity Church. Within months of the market's construction, New York's first slave uprising occurred a few blocks away on Maiden Lane, led by enslaved people from the Coromantee and Pawpaw peoples of Ghana.

Next to the text was a drawing of the slave market in the early 1700s. Ships were in the foreground, their sails still in the windless rendering of the day. Buildings fanned out into the distance, with what looked like the steeple of a church jutting into the air, the centerpiece of an otherwise shallow skyline. About a dozen people were on the shore, and at its center sat a small pavilion where — looking closely — it appeared as if someone was standing over an enslaved person on his knees.

The marker was conceived by Chris Cobb, an artist and writer who began researching the site in 2011 during the Occupy Wall Street movement. Cobb spent years looking for documentation to prove what many had known. Cobb found a 1716 map by William Burgis in the New York Public Library on which the slave market was depicted; he found what he was looking for. “It was an amazing moment,” Cobb said in a 2015 interview. “There it was. The invisible suddenly became visible again. So I photographed it and in Photoshop removed the ship that obstructed the market. That clear view of the market, unobstructed, is what is on the marker.”

I did a slow 360-degree turn to get a sense of the setting. About a block in front of me to my right was a Citibank, its trademark red arc sitting over white letters on a sky-blue background.^[1] To my direct right, Bank of America, its red neon banner gleaming behind its windows. Struck by the presence of these banks and their proximity to the former slave market, I could not help but think of slavery's relationship to some of the country's largest banking institutions.

Two of Bank of America's predecessors, Southern Bank of St. Louis and Boatmen's Savings Institution, listed enslaved people as potential collateral for a debt in 1863. Citibank also had ties to chattel slavery.

Moses Taylor, a nineteenth-century banker who was the director of the City Bank of New York, Citibank's predecessor, managed the capital coming from Southern sugar plantations and was intimately involved in illegally trafficking enslaved people to Cuba.

The country's largest bank, JPMorgan Chase, was the most deeply entwined in the slave trade. A 2005 statement from the company read as follows: "JPMorgan Chase completed extensive research examining our company's history for any links to slavery...we are reporting that this research found that between 1831 and 1865 two of our predecessor banks — Citizens Bank and Canal Bank in Louisiana — accepted approximately 13,000 enslaved individuals as collateral on loans and took ownership of approximately 1,250 of them when the plantation owners defaulted on the loans."

By the early nineteenth century, the New York financial industry became even more deeply entrenched in chattel slavery. Money from New York bankers went on to finance every facet of the slave trade: New York businessmen built the ships, shipped the cotton, and produced the clothes that enslaved people wore. The financial capital in the North allowed slavery in the South to flourish. As the cotton trade expanded, New York City became the central port for shipments of raw cotton moving between the American South and Europe. By 1822, more than half of the goods shipped out of New York's harbor were produced in Southern states. Cotton alone was responsible for more than 40 percent of the city's exported goods.

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^[1] Citibank moved out of the 690-office building in December 2019, though the sign remained when I was there in January 2020.