

Sarah McConnell: On August 25th, all across the nation bells rang out in commemoration of the 400th anniversary of 1619. That was the year the first Africans arrived on a ship in British North America.

Terry Brown: We know that John Rolfe, he's capturing inventory when they're coming off the ship and he makes a note that there are 20 and odd Africans on this ship. That is historic, just that little line. That there are 20 and odd, 20 and odd and when we saw that, it was mind-blowing.

Sarah McConnell: From Virginia Humanities, this is With Good Reason. I'm Sarah McConnell. Today on the show, we remember 1619.

Terry Brown: Not a day goes by when I don't think about the experiences of those people and what they had to endure. It's kind of haunting. It's a haunting power source for me. I can always reach back and say, "Okay, this is what my ancestors endured. I'm really their dream personified."

Sarah McConnell: The ship with the first Africans landed at Point Comfort in Virginia, which is now known as Fort Monroe. Terry Brown is Park Superintendent at Fort Monroe and spoke with me about what this history means to him. Terry, you're Superintendent of the national park at Fort Monroe in Hampton, Virginia where the first Africans landed in North America. Their arrival has special meaning to you and your own family. Tell me what you learned.

Terry Brown: I learned that it's a very emotional process. Working in a space like this, sometimes I look out my office and I realize that I'm 200 yards away from the first landing of Africans in North America. Then on the other side of my office, there's a big open field where, the same place they were enslaved was the same place they gained their freedom through the Contraband Decision so it is quite emotional.

Sarah McConnell: There's a tree nearby that may be so old, it was witness to the docking of that ship and the disembarking of the 20 or so first Africans.

Terry Brown: Yes. It's called the Algernon Oak Tree and I call it the Witness Tree. When I first arrived here, a number of my partners gave me a tour of the park and when we stopped at that location and they mentioned that the tree was 500-plus years old, I had to pause for a second and think, "Wow. That is amazing." It witnessed the American Indians in this space-

Sarah McConnell: Right.

Terry Brown: ... on these shores. They saw them fishing and canoeing. They saw Captain John Smith and Christopher Newport. They saw the first Africans landing here. The largest stone fort in America, they saw enslaved people building that. They also witnessed the very first black president making it a national monument.

Sarah McConnell: Do you ever stop and try to picture what it looked like, what the experience was for those first Africans arriving on that ship?

Terry Brown: Well, it's interesting. I remember doing some research and there was an explorer in 1830. He made a notation that a squirrel could climb from one treetop to another for 1000 miles and never touch the ground. That's 1830, and we're talking about 1619 when they show up. You would have to imagine there were no roads, no street lights. It would have been a very, very different place. We know that these Africans were taken from their homeland in Angola. They were put on a slave ship and that ship went about 2000 miles until it landed in Veracruz, New Mexico. It was attacked by two privateer ships. One called the White Lion, the other the Treasurer. They discovered Africans on this ship and they sort of separated them out and the two ships made their way up the coast and they encountered a storm. The White Lion managed to make it through first. In late August, 1619 it anchored at Fort Comfort, Virginia which is Fort Monroe today.

Sarah McConnell: Who lived at Point Comfort? Who would have greeted this ship?

Terry Brown: Well, that's interesting because you know there were Kikotan Indians there. Captain William Tucker would have been there. John Rolfe would have been there. What's interesting about when they arrived is, two of the enslaved were taken into the home of Captain William Tucker. He was the commander of the fort. Their names were Anthony and Isabella. We know that they would get married and in 1624 they would have a child by the name of William Tucker. The crazy and most amazing part of this story is that there's a family in Hampton, Virginia that can trace their family line all the way to William Tucker.

Sarah McConnell: So much of the stories of enslaved Africans is not known because people became markers in ledger books. How do we know about William Tucker, this first baby born of the two Africans?

Terry Brown: There was a group by the name of Project 1619 that's been doing the research on this for 20-plus years. They have done an amazing amount of research on this topic. We know that John Rolfe makes a notation in his notes. He's capturing inventory when they're coming off the ship and he makes a note that there are 20 and odd Africans on this ship. That is historic, just that little line.

Sarah McConnell: 20 and odd.

Terry Brown: 20 and odd. 20 and odd. When we saw that, it was mind-blowing. John Rolfe is the secretary. He's making notes, reporting back to England. He was married to Pocahontas, if you remember that story. But he's making notes of all the things that are happening, daily logs and when he makes notes of 20 and odd Africans getting off the ship at Point Comfort, that is a game-changer.

Sarah McConnell: Other than the man and the woman who gave birth to William Tucker, do we know anything about the other 18 or so Africans who were brought to this area?

Terry Brown: It's one of the parts of history that's a little vague. I would imagine many of them would disperse out into the colony. They would go up to Jamestown. When the Treasurer arrives a couple of days later, it goes up to Jamestown. Jamestown has, they basically discovered a remain of one of the enslaved Africans, Angela. It's fascinating. It's definitely something folks should see. These stories are, they're rich and we have a lot to learn. I mean, this is just beginning.

Sarah McConnell: Jamestown is a settlement called the first permanent English settlement in the New World. That was settled by John Smith and these others in 1607, only 12 years before these first Africans arrive at Point Comfort. What can you tell us about this woman who's body was found at Jamestown?

Terry Brown: I'm still learning myself. I know she was in the home of William Pierce, one of the wealthy landowners up there. I think what's important to know is that, in the early days when these colonists are here, they're trying to figure out how to survive. They're trying to discover new resources. These Africans that are here, they knew how to cultivate rice, sugar and cotton. All those things are really important because in the early stages no one was really surviving. We know that. I believe it was in 1610 they had about 1000 colonists here. The next year they were down to 50. They had resorted to cannibalism and everything, but these African, they had already knew how to cultivate these things. It's not until they're here where you start to see progress. They knew how to cultivate the land. They knew how, they knew the religions, the laws. They knew how trade worked so they were critical to this early exploration.

Sarah McConnell: Something else momentous happened in this same spot of Fort Monroe, where the first 20 or so Africans were brought to the New World, and this happened in the Civil War when a few enslaved men escaped and asked for asylum from a northern general.

Terry Brown: Yes. In 1850 there was a fugitive slave law, which basically meant that if an enslaved person ran away then you had the authority to go and get them and bring them back. By the time we get to 1861 and the war breaks out, Virginia is across the waters, building fortifications and there's the three men by the names of Frank Baker, James Townsend, Shepard Mallory. They're told that they're going to be sold down south. Well, they get in a skiff in the middle of the night. They make their way over to Fort Monroe. Now, they don't know if they're going to be shot, they're going to be returned. We know that weeks before that, the Union soldiers are turning enslaved people back and returning them to the Confederates. There's this general by the name of Benjamin Butler who had sort of been a thorn in the South and the North, in Lincoln's side throughout the war.

Terry Brown: Lincoln's just trying to find a place to put him. Well, he shows up and he is notified that three men are at the gate. He accepts them in and the next day, a few people show up. By Monday, close to 100. By October, we're talking 10,000-plus enslaved people would make their way to Fort Monroe and over time they would be called Freedom's Fortress.

Sarah McConnell: That's mind-blowing to think three men who could have been shot were brought into this mighty fortress and did you say within days or weeks, thousands?

Terry Brown: Within days. We're talking hundreds and by October, thousands.

Sarah McConnell: Let me picture that. Where were these thousands coming from and how did they get there and not be shot by their masters?

Terry Brown: By boat, by train, the Underground Railroad. They were really, really just ... You know, you have to keep in mind, wherever the Union was located, just imagine a big light over that camp. So, Fort Monroe never changed hands. It was always in Union control. So if you were an enslaved person, you knew that was a place where opportunity existed. It was a perfect marriage. General Butler shows up and there's the Union over there. It's just a mind-blowing moment because that act right there would lead to Confiscation Act One, Two and the Emancipation Proclamation.

Sarah McConnell: Should these three men be celebrated as the Fathers of the Emancipation Proclamation in some ways?

Terry Brown: I absolutely think they should be honored and remembered for that. I don't think they were really thinking in that fashion. They just wanted freedom. They knew they were going to be sold down south. And that's how life is. You never know when you're going to make a change. That's all of us.

Sarah McConnell: You know, 1619 is exciting history but also very hard history. We want to celebrate the accomplishments of African-Americans in this country and these were the first. But also recognize the violence that they sustained over 400 years. What does it feel like for you personally to be working on these memorialization efforts and feel the weight of that history?

Terry Brown: It is so special to be able to bring this to the American people. I think there's a large segment of society that simply doesn't know about slavery or doesn't know what happened in the creation of our country. You can not talk about American history without including slavery. To be able to bring that in a way where people can listen to it, is where I want to go. Just think for this for example. If I pulled up to a gas station and you was on the other side of that and I peeked around and I said, "Hey, let's talk about slavery." You would probably look at me like I had three eyes. I couldn't talk to you about slavery in the grocery store. But when I'm in this National Parks Service uniform, there is an

opportunity, there's a trust. You understand the brand. You understand that we do our research. There's an opportunity for healthy dialogue and I take full advantage of that.

Terry Brown: I know that change can happen because I traveled across this country and I've met people from all walks of life. I hear people say all the time, "Well, the other side is never going to listen." That hasn't been my experience. I think people want to know about it. I just think they don't want to have fingers pointed at them. We have to create opportunities where listening and conversation can take place in the same space.

Sarah McConnell: You and Fort Monroe have recently commemorated the 400th anniversary of the survival in a big way. Tell me.

Terry Brown: August 25th, what we did was we had a healing day ceremony where we invited everyone into this space and we had a national bell-ringing. We had bells ring in California, New York, at the cathedral, in Alabama where the last slave ship arrived. It was so emotional and I thought to myself as we were putting that program on, "This is a great country because it remembered its history. It embraced all the complexities of its history." I think there's a bright future for us. We also had an archival photo taken of the entire audience. We brought in a drone and it captured everyone there. The reason why I wanted to do that was, so that in 399 years from now when they turn the page, they'll look and see who was there, who honored those ancestors. Who brought it all home and made America proud?

Sarah McConnell: Terry Brown, thank you for sharing this with me today on With Good Reason.

Terry Brown: Thank you. It was a pleasure. Take care.

Sarah McConnell: Terry mentioned William Tucker, the first African-American baby born on British-American soil. Today, William Tucker's descendants remember his legacy and are sharing their history with the world. Producer Melissa Gismondi from our sister podcast BackStory traveled to Hampton, Virginia to speak with members of the Tucker family.

Speaker 3: This is our birthplace. This is where we came, 1619. So we need to understand and respect all of the contributions that our ancestors made.

Speaker 4: So, do you mean the contributions of building America?

Speaker 3: Yeah. Yes.

Speaker 4: Without sweat and blood and tears.

Speaker 9: And it's starting off here, building the colonies that were getting started and then over the years what we've done. But this is the birthplace. This is the beginning and their contributions have started right here, and that's significant to me.

Speaker 4: This is a gateway to let people know that this piece of history is a very significant piece of history that needs to be recognized and the truth needs to be told.

Speaker 3: As the stories are shared, and as we continue to do research into our family there are a lot of branches to this tree. So, to hear different stories of what happened to our family, bits and pieces. It makes it real and it's not just us. We're all descendants from one family or one branch or another so to talk about those stories, to hear those stories, sometimes it will bring tears to your eyes because it's not just a story that you read in a book. It's your family and things that we endured over the years, of slavery and those who were free and the labor that was put into building America. It's a lot more there than chains and treated as savages or things of that nature. It's deep.

Speaker 4: And this is American history that we'd like the country to know. This is not just about us. This is American history. They need to know that wasn't talked about in school and is now, is needs to be reinforced or told. They need to put more emphasis on this piece of history because it's the beginning of the arrival. How significant can something like that be?

Speaker 9: It's inspiring. Not only did it inspire us but it's inspiring all African-Americans to look at their own roots and pasts and find out about the connections that are there and how much history they can uncover.

Sarah McConnell: That was Vincent and Verrandall Tucker and Walter Jones. To hear more from them, check out the full BackStory episode on 1619 at BackStoryRadio.org. For Synnika Lofton the story of 1619 and the stories of black history in general inspire his socially conscious musical poetry. He's a teacher and a lecturer at Norfolk State University. But in his spare time Synnika Lofton makes beats and performs spoken word as part of the hiphop group Black Lion and Surgeons. What has inspired you to use poetry and the spoken word to address social issues like racism?

Synnika L.: Yeah. Poetry for me has always been resistance. It's been a creative medium, for my resistance and my ability to interact with the world as an individual journeying through it. It's kind of like my blues or my jazz.

Sarah McConnell: There are two pieces in particular that I'd love you to play for us and introduce. One is called On This Road. The other is Chant For Charlottesville.

Synnika L.: Yeah. I composed On This Road definitely from a point of view of trying to track my journey within American society at large, I think it definitely portrays the

resistance and the brilliance of people who are just trying to struggle through a particular circumstance. Let's hear that now. (singing)

Synnika L.: Yeah, so On This Road was definitely a labor of love, a labor of passion and a labor of conviction. Chant for Charlottesville was really about identifying with the struggle of people that were protesting in Charlottesville, two years ago now, 2017. I'd already intended to write a poem about that but then it became something else once I found out that Heather Heyer had passed. So that's what Chant for Charlottesville was all about.

Sarah McConnell: You dedicated Chant for Charlottesville to Heather Heyer. She was the woman who was killed when she was trying to protest with many others. The armed men, carrying torches and chanting racist and Anti-Semetic slogans. Let's listen to Chant for Charlottesville. (singing)

Sarah McConnell: I love the lyrics you gave. She gave her breath to break stone, to crack patriarchy, to spark revolution, to uproot racism, to liberate justice from an American tomb.

Synnika L.: Wow. Wow. Just hearing it read back is definitely different.

Sarah McConnell: Yeah.

Synnika L.: I really just tried to capture what I believe her essence to be without necessarily knowing her. Poems have that ability. Sometimes you don't have poems from your personal perspective. Sometimes you embody somebody else's experience or someone else's story and that was ... Look, that poem was really about, so I tried to bring in all these different symbols and people.

Sarah McConnell: I understand that there is a press in Detroit, Broadside Lotus Press that is creating an anthology of the 400-year anniversary of 1619 when the first Africans came to North America. Caught, captured in Africa and dragged to North America. They've accepted a couple of your pieces to go into that anthology. Tell me about those pieces.

Synnika L.: The first one, I believe was called "For Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis and Those Who Will Die Tomorrow." That particular poem was really about young black males experiencing this really weird experiment, American experiment where they're experiencing not just violence and problems in their own communities. They have worry about vigilantism and things of that nature. So once again, I tried to embody those experiences, being a black male and knowing that I could go out into my day and have a problem with somebody, and that gun being the ultimate neutralizer. I really just tried to capture everything that has been happening with black folks especially in the last few years, when it's come to these senseless unarmed killings.

Sarah McConnell: Now that you are in Virginia, you are teaching at Norfolk State University which is just across the water from where those first 20 or so Africans were brought over in a slave ship, off the shore of Virginia. Do you feel their presence?

Synnika L.: Oh, absolutely. Not a day goes by when I don't think about the experiences of those people and what they had to endure and everything they had being encompassed in their minds. Their traditions, their spirituality, maybe some of the books they've read. Some of the people they've met along the way. So really they were like prisoners of war. They were coming over. So not a day goes by when I'm at Norfolk State or even where I'm at during the day, which is at Chesapeake Bay Academy, teaching literature. I'm going to overstate a bit later on. But the same time, any time I'm writing or any time I go into Norfolk, of course, that sentiment is there and that presence is there.

Synnika L.: It's kind of haunting. It's a haunting power source for me. I can always reach back and say, "Okay, this is what my ancestors endured." I'm really their dream personified. So where I'm at is probably what they were believing that generations maybe would experience as long as they endured. So you had people who fought back. You had people who ran away. You had people who just said ... Some would say, "You know, I'm going to raise these children and hopefully one of these children will be free. One of these generations will break the mold and break the cycle." But I think we have to have that awareness. We have to have that awareness about ourselves because we're in a political climate now and reparation for slavery is a talking point on the political stage.

Synnika L.: So that's got people thinking and questioning, "Have we really reconciled this? Have we really repaired the damage of American slavery especially when it comes to economics, things of that nature?" So definitely when I go to Norfolk State, that power is always there. I always feel it necessary to bring that into my classroom. I feel it's definitely my responsibility to teach that to, make them aware of it and where we are as a people going forward.

Sarah McConnell: Synnika Lofton, what a pleasure. Thank you for talking with me on With Good Reason.

Synnika L.: Absolutely. No problem. Thank you. (singing)

Sarah McConnell: That was poet, Synnika Lofton, also a teacher and lecturer at Norfolk State University. This is With Good Reason. We'll be right back. (singing)

Sarah McConnell: Welcome back to With Good Reason from Virginia Humanities. I'm Sarah McConnell. For the rest of the episode we're discussing the story of Gabriel, an enslaved blacksmith who organized an anti-slavery rebellion in Richmond, Virginia in 1800. Gabriel and his co-conspirators were not successful with their goal of ending slavery. Instead, they were found out and executed and the State of Virginia instituted a vicious crackdown on black people. But now Richmond's activists and historians are making sure Gabriel's legacy of freedom lives on.

One of those community leaders is Ana Edwards, a graduate student in history at Virginia Commonwealth University. Along with Free Egunfemi and the organization called Untold RVA, Edwards has helped bring the story of Gabriel into the public consciousness.

Sarah McConnell: Ana, you live in a city that had not just a central role in the American slave trade, maybe the central role. They say that 350,000 people were sold into slavery in a part of Richmond called Shockoe Bottom. Is that memorialized now?

Ana Edwards: I'd say, not yet and that's because it's in process. The story has been evolving for the last, I think, the last 15 to 20 years. I think what's happened is people have come to accept that the history is true and so now they are startled by the fact that there hasn't been memorialization. That fact that it's now underway makes people both hopeful and impatient at the same time.

Sarah McConnell: Tell me about Gabriel. When was he born? Who was he?

Ana Edwards: Gabriel lived in a time of revolution. He was born around 1776. He grew up on a plantation just north of the city of Richmond in Virginia and he grew up in a period when the rhetoric of both independence and equality of man was in the air, not only in what would become the United States but also, most timely, in Haiti. What was the island of Saint-Domingue in the Caribbean. This was a French colony that was one of the most wealthy, most profit-producing colonies in the New World. It was in complete rebellion led by a man most school children know as Toussaint Louverture. At that moment he was actively proclaiming that, not unlike the French Revolution, that this rhetoric of the equality of man and the right to liberty was a human right, that all people should claim.

Ana Edwards: The entire colony was in rebellion. It was a rebellion that lasted 14 years. For Gabriel specifically or for Virginians, the year 1800 was the year when the rebellion was at its height. Toussaint Louverture as general of this rebellion had control of the entire island of Saint-Domingue, which means the French and the Spanish-governed colonies. This is an incredible inspiration and because of that politicians, especially when they were running for office liked to throw around the fact that they were terrified that black people would take inspiration from Haiti.

Sarah McConnell: When was the Haiti uprising?

Ana Edwards: It began in 1791. It finished in 1804.

Sarah McConnell: So Gabriel was 24 years old when he planned an extensive uprising in Richmond. How extensive?

Ana Edwards: Many historians calculate the figures to be between 500 and 1000 in the Richmond and central Virginia area and that there were people who were in the

know that could have numbered as many as 2000 to 5000. Sometimes people take it all the way up to 10,000 but I think that's just people getting excited.

Sarah McConnell: Tell me about the rebellion itself. Gabriel wasn't just planning to get out of here. "Hey, guys. Here's my plan." It was a plan to end slavery.

Ana Edwards: That's right. That's right. It's really important to understand that. It's also important to understand that Gabriel actually wasn't the originator of the plot. There was another man and his name is not preserved in the same way and I think the point has been that there were several people who came together and decided this was the thing to do. Gabriel had a certain, he had certain advantages and a certain charisma, one that leaned towards leadership capacity. He was ultimately actually elected, according to the testimony. He was elected by his fellow conspirators to take that leadership role and from that point they referred to him as General Gabriel.

Sarah McConnell: Where they from his same plantation?

Ana Edwards: Many of them were. His two brothers were on the same plantation but there were adjacent plantations from where many of the others came. But in addition, Gabriel was someone who spent time in the city of Richmond, usually on hired contracts to work for other people. So that gave him both mobility and access. One of the most common ways to get access aside from just encountering people on the street was being able to hang out in taverns. There was a time in Shockoe Bottom when taverns of the working-classes were a little bit more permissive about having blacks and whites drinking together and talking together in the same space.

Ana Edwards: But also, if you think about it, the Haitian Revolution was the biggest news going at that time and it was the kind of thing that would be talked about casually. So the inspiration of that, but also what that represents in terms of the way people gathered is the fact that there's a network. It may be an informal network but people are accustomed to getting and passing information in these face-to-face encounters. So they're taking place for Gabriel and his conspirators in town but also in secret spaces where they might meet.

Sarah McConnell: Such as?

Ana Edwards: Brook Creek was one of those places. So secluded, along the waterway and a place where nobody would be bothered with eavesdropping.

Sarah McConnell: It's just had to imagine people getting word to 1000s of people on disparate plantations and coordinating a single day, and a single hour.

Ana Edwards: It's remarkable and apparently it took place over the course of about six months. The only thing you can do is try to understand how things worked on a daily basis in the 18th century and the fact that there's a lot of coming and going

between plantations. A lot of coming and going because that's the only way to get news, information and frankly, conduct business.

Sarah McConnell: Tell about the rebellion itself. What was the plan?

Ana Edwards: Yeah. The night of August 30th, the plan was that there would be basically three groups that would make their way to Richmond. One group would go off to the warehouse district and set a fire in order to draw the militia. Another group would head to the amoury which at that point was housed at the state capital, and they would collect arms. The third group would come in and they would meet up at a certain spot, now fully armed and with the militia fully distracted and head towards the governor's house. Take the governor, who was James Monroe at that time and take him captive and negotiate with him for the end of slavery.

Sarah McConnell: It's fascinating. They are mirroring the founders and their own revolution against England.

Ana Edwards: That's right. It's that simple, or should have been.

Sarah McConnell: What happened? What thwarted them?

Ana Edwards: A storm and betrayal.

Sarah McConnell: Huge storm.

Ana Edwards: Enormous storm. That kind of storm that just opens up and washes roadways and fills creeks and basically prevented them from moving. At the same time there were two in the inner circle who changed their mind and decided to tell their owner that this had happened. Basically, those who were going to regroup in order to carry out the rebellion when the storm subsided realized that they weren't going to be able to do that. So basically it dissipated. People either just didn't show up or began to leave the area because they knew that they were going to be identified.

Sarah McConnell: I've read that Governor Monroe ordered a terrifying crackdown on African-Americans in Virginia.

Ana Edwards: Yes. He ordered the militia and he also deputized more and more men into that militia. Yeah, it was devastating because not only for those who were actually arrested and then put on trial but also for those that would incidentally pay the price for simply being nearby, being enslaved, knowing the people who were accused of being involved or who simply didn't, were in the wrong place at the wrong time. The crackdown was really quite tremendous and I believe that they estimate that somewhere in the order of at least dozens of people may have lost their lives and certain suffered some consequences as a result of that, of

the wide-scale persecution in their attempt to find the people who they believed were responsible.

Ana Edwards: This is really the order of the day for enslaved black people of this time, this kind of tactic used to terrorize them into staying close to home and not participating in these things. Or into simply paying a price so that they could show white society that they were still in charge.

Sarah McConnell: What did Thomas Jefferson, who was running for president at the time write about or say about the thwarted uprising?

Ana Edwards: He indicated to the world that the executions that were taking place were beginning to be seen as revenge as opposed to justice and that he recommended that Governor Monroe put a stop to them.

Sarah McConnell: How many men were killed?

Ana Edwards: 26.

Sarah McConnell: I'm so struck that one of the men, before he was hanged, apparently drew a comparison between himself and George Washington. He said, "I have nothing more to offer than what General Washington would have had to offer, had he been taken by the British and put to trial." What a comparison to the cause of the revolutionaries.

Ana Edwards: It really reflects probably, in some way you could call it the original sin of our country. People were quite clear and quite aware of the rhetoric that was in the air, of the ideals that were being fought for and the very stark reality that it was intentionally not going to be applied to people in African descent. And it was not going to be applied to Indian either. This is the kind of realization that we have to face in order to understand precisely why the country is in the struggle that its in right now.

Sarah McConnell: You're talking about Jim Crow and the codification of this idea that African-Americans are inferior to whites. You would think that in a couple of generations though, the white people who felt that way or were brainwashed to believe it would have died off. And that now, only the people still alive who might be inclined to hold that view would be a problem. Yet, two years ago in Charlottesville it was mostly young men with rifles and assault weapons who came to assert white supremacy.

Ana Edwards: Racism has not gone away and our country's history has sustained it. One of the areas where it was most potently sustained was in our education system. So you have generations of people to this day who pass on what they understood to be the truth from their education so that even young people today have an interpretation of history that secures them in the identity that they were raised in.

- Sarah McConnell: What do you mean? Give me an example of the kind of schooling. I thought children nowadays were celebrating Black History month where honoring Martin Luther King and other legacies of more recent review of history.
- Ana Edwards: Sure. You can do that in February. But also, I think it's also important when we say nowadays or we say recently and we say young people, these are young people who were born of their parents and their parents were educated in an earlier time. People carry forward their beliefs especially if it sustains them again and their belief in who they are. To be very specific, one organization that very specifically affected education in particular in the South, but not exclusively, was the United Daughters of the Confederacy, who took it upon themselves very early in the 20th century to ensure that text books in schools told the narrative of the South in the way that they thought or they wanted to ensure people would adopt.
- Ana Edwards: It gave a very sanitized version of slavery and it spoke about black people as if they were children and spoke about the benevolence of whites as though they knew best in all circumstances. This is a very, these are actually very simple, a simple delivery of profound racism that was delivered to children in their most formative years. Then they grew up and raised their children. It's very difficult and whites who have gone through transformations of recognition about the way that they were educated will talk about how very profound that was for them to realize that they had been educated in that way and have had to experience real life and engagement with real people in order to find out that they had been miseducated.
- Ana Edwards: One of the things that I do talk about this a lot through a lot through different venues, through giving historical tours. I actually work at the American Civil War Museum and I give guided tours of the house that's known as the White House of the Confederacy. In the essence in that way, we're on the front lines of giving information to people who are coming to a place that they, many have traditionally seen as a shrine to that Southern narrative. We are telling more stories. We are giving more context to what happened there and we are speaking truths to that narrative.
- Sarah McConnell: Ana Edwards is a graduate student at Virginia Commonwealth University and chair of the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project in Richmond, Virginia.
- Sarah McConnell: The work of people like Ana Edwards has already made an impact in Richmond. One person who had a life-changing encounter with the Gabriel Memorial is the poet Joshua Poteat.
- Joshua Poteat: I learned about Gabriel from one of the state markers on Broad Street near Broad and 15th. Ana Edwards made sure that that was put up there. She was one of the main people that wanted that to be there to mark the area, which is pretty brilliant.

Sarah McConnell: Poteat was so moved he wrote a sequence of poems inspired by Gabriel's story. Here he is reading selections from "Letters to Gabriel, written in the Margins of Murder Ballads."

Joshua Poteat: This is called from Letters to Gabriel, written in the Margins of Murder Ballads and there's an epigraph from Gary Lutz. Here's the story in the worst way. I have no business being anywhere in it. It comes between me and the life I have coming. Blood of my abyss, illegible voice, was the morning kind? The cold dawn's here, steaming through. I imagine you in a field across the river, floodplain attic, lichen braided thin on the pump-house door. You are dead in the gallows and not dead. A rope cannot claim you. It is another century. Things are not better or worse. You came without a horse and left us human hair in the tulip tree, strange among the blossoms.

Joshua Poteat: For years we weren't terrified. We carried around your death, its severity. The terror lasts. Your grave a wide field now, but I never thought of it as something separate. There's no other way to say it. I was built by slaves, carved skin white-pined like sand and tobacco and the Poteat name that pulls me from you. Say the words the fields would speak. The bloodline stops here. All the sleeping Poteats. All their skin, impossible to see. All their land and gauzed light. All the asphalt and rain between us. All the kerosene on the carpet, kudzu weaving doors shut.

Joshua Poteat: All great-great-grandfathers gutting pigs. All great-grandmothers throwing sand on the blood. All industry siphoned. All selves creek-banked, collapsed. All plantations a coffin, a little vandalism. The whole family, haunted. I've played the slave narratives in abandoned places, among the candles and cinder blocks. Silo, dirt, house where the vultures live. All to bring you back. There's a shopping mall where your anvil stood. I bought socks, a button-down shirt, and sat in the parking lot listening to the corroded wax cylinders, disintegrating dialects, becoming a column of air anyone can pass through. I never deserved to hear them.

Joshua Poteat: When the highway came, the houses didn't know enough to be afraid. We weigh unease. Night comes through gutters, loose as fever. I don't believe there is an answer. Honeysuckle blooming the creek gut. There are tunnels leading up from the river, dug before the war. Torch ends greeting in their cups. History averting into the cellars of abolitionists. This is not what I mean to say to you. Everything is unfinished, momentary. It's not anyone's fault, I know. We're all strangers to the middle of the noise. There is only one year, and it repeats itself forever. Forfeit the dead grass, the rim of dandelion and mortgage.

Joshua Poteat: Forfeit the factory where the marrow is pulled. Forfeit taxonomy, the legalese of the law office windows at sunset, so many here-to-fores and to wits. Forfeit foreclosure, the vacant lots, stairs leading to white grass and sunlight, where houses were sewn together, now gone. Foundations, the absence of ruin is just as quiet. Non-being where was being, remains. I have never been hungry. You

invented hunger and handed it to the owl, 200-year-old crime-scene tape slung from the bridges. What should the new map look like? Help me, moonlight. Bring the granary to the sky, burnt yellow called down. The night that took you will take us too.

Sarah McConnell: Joshua Poteat is a poet based in Richmond. He spoke with former With Good Reason producer Kelley Libby. Virginia Humanities has partnered with the 2019 Commemoration, American Evolution to help mark this historic year. This program was made possible in part, by a grant by the WK Kellogg Foundation as part of its truth, racial healing and transformation initiative. Major support for With Good Reason is provided by the law firm of McGuireWoods and by the University of Virginia health system, connecting doctors and patients through telemedicine to deliver high-quality care throughout Virginia, the US and the world. UVAHealth.com.

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