EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

HONORING THE LIFE OF SANFORD MORRIS "SANDY" TREAT, JR.

HON. JOE NEGUSE

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. NEGUSE. Madam Speaker, I wish to express my sincere sorrow for the loss of Sanford Morris "Sandy" Treat, Jr., a veteran of World War II, serving with the 10th Mountain Division and a longtime resident in the Vail Valley and pillar of the community there.

Sandy was one of the first soldiers at Camp Hale, which was established during the Second World War to train soldiers for winter and mountain warfare. The skills he honed there and exposure to the Mountain West would stay with him through war, future business endeavors and raising a family. He returned to Colorado years later as a master skier, historian of the 10th Mountain Division, and beloved resident.

Sandy's loss will be felt by so many across the state of Colorado, military, and snowsports communities. An avid ski racer, he helped to facilitate world renowned races in Vail and the surrounding areas. He was inducted into the Colorado Snowsports Hall of Fame—an honor recognizing Sandy's passion and dedication to the outdoors as well as the service of those at Camp Hale. His advocacy to enact policy that protected public lands are still having an impact; in the large public lands bill worked on by many members of Colorado's Congressional delegation, Camp Hale is recognized as protected public lands and would be designated as the first ever National Historical Landscape.

It was my honor to meet Sandy before his passing and I will hold that memory close to my heart as we press forward on the proposals for which he spent so much of his life advocating. My wife Andrea and I are holding Sandy's loved ones and all those who knew him in our prayers, and hope the nation will join us in mourning the loss of this tremendously passionate, brave, and skilled individual.

ON THE OCCASION OF U.S. ARMY MAJOR MILES MILLER'S COMPLETION OF SERVICE IN DECEMBER 2019

HON. MAC THORNBERRY

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. THORNBERRY. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize Major Miles Miller, U.S. Army, to honor his completion of military service. Major Miller is departing the Army after serving our country for more than a dozen years helping to defend our great nation.

Inspired by his family's history of military service and by the attacks of September 11, Major Miller enlisted in the Army in 2006 to help fight the Global War on Terrorism. After completing his Basic Combat Training and Officer Candidate School, Major Miller joined the historic 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. During his time as a "Screaming Eagle," he deployed first to Baghdad, Iraq, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and later to Kandahar, Afghanistan, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

While in Iraq, Major Miller commanded a 55-Soldier Distribution Platoon and planned, coordinated, and led more than 350 ground-based throughout resupply operations to forward combat outposts. These successful missions delivered over one million gallons of fuel and water and two million tons of ammunition and supplies supporting uninterrupted life support sustainment and operations for nearly 1,000 U.S. and Iraqi security force personnel.

In Afghanistan, Major Miller was a key planner and logistical operations manager for an 800-Soldier deployment to Afghanistan. He led a 12-Soldier cross-functional team that coordinated the construction and improvements of six new and existing combat outposts while simultaneously procuring nearly ten million dollars of life support and base security contracts and commodities, which increased logistical capabilities and operational limits for U.S. and Afghan security forces.

Following his deployments, Major Miller held a broad and diverse series of leadership positions, including commanding the Army's only Active Duty Heavy Boat Company, the 97th Transportation Company, at Fort Eustis, Virginia. As a result of his exceptional performance with increasing rank and responsibilities, Major Miller was selected for the prestigious Army Congressional Fellowship Program where he served as a Defense Fellow in my office and in the Army's House Liaison Division.

During his time as my Defense Fellow, Major Miller was an invaluable member of my team. He routinely advised me and my staff on national defense and veterans' affairs issues and priorities for the 2016 National Defense Authorization Act. Additionally, he collaborated with my district staff and multiple federal agencies to resolve dozens of veteran and military-related casework issues while drafting hundreds of official responses to constituent inquiries.

While serving in the House Liaison Division, Major Miller helped advance Army interests as the intermediary for legislative correspondence, policy, and constituent issues between the Army and 58 offices of the U.S. House of Representatives. He also facilitated U.S. diplomacy abroad and congressional oversight as the lead planner and escort for over 400 Members of Congress and staff during nearly 40 worldwide fact-finding and investigative missions. Major Miller escorted me on several overseas visits to military installations that aided my decision making and priorities as Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

Throughout his distinguished military career, Major Miller was recognized and rewarded for his exceptional performance, including his selection as the Basic Combat Training "Soldier of the Cycle" in 2007 and his early promotion to the rank of Major in 2016. He also received 27 individual and unit awards and badges for military service, including two Bronze Star Medals awarded for meritorious achievement and service for combat leadership during both Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom and the U.S. Army Transportation Corps Honorable Order of Saint Christopher Medal.

Madam Speaker, I am honored to recognize Major Miller for these outstanding achievements, thank him for his service, and wish him and his family well with their future endeavors.

CONGRATULATING PLYMOUTH, INDIANA, ON BEING NAMED INDIANA COMMUNITY OF THE YEAR 2019

HON. JACKIE WALORSKI

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mrs. WALORSKI. Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the City of Plymouth on being named the 2019 Community of the Year by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce, and to thank Mayor Mark Senter for his leadership and service to his community.

Plymouth, Indiana, has not only gained impressive economic momentum and helped attract businesses that want to grow and hire more workers, the city has also shown its commitment to improving the quality of life for residents. Hoosiers in Plymouth love their city and their neighbors, a fact that can be seen clearly in their spirit, compassion, and active involvement in community events—including my favorite, the annual Marshall County Blueberry Festival.

This accomplishment is a well-deserved recognition for northern Indiana, a true celebration of Mayor Senter's tremendous leadership, and a result of the hard work of all the public servants who help make Plymouth a great place to live. The strong Hoosier values of commonsense and togetherness help all ships rise in this community, and it's a model for cities and towns across the country.

Madam Speaker, it is an honor to represent communities like Plymouth in Congress. On behalf of 2nd District Hoosiers, I want to congratulate the City of Plymouth and Mayor Senter on the hard work and dedication that have helped this community thrive.

RECOGNIZING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF ROBERT S. THURMAN AMERICAN LEGION POST 13

HON. BILLY LONG

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. LONG. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the 100th anniversary of the founding of

the Robert S. Thurman American Legion Post 13.

In 1919, 100 years ago and shortly after the conclusion of the first World War, members of the U.S. Army's American Expeditionary Forces founded the American Legion. Over the past century, the American Legion has brought veterans in their local communities together and has been a strong advocate for veterans issues on Capitol Hill. In its infancy, only a few posts across the United States were formed, one of those posts was the Robert S. Thurman American Legion Post 13 located in Joplin, Missouri.

Today, Joplin Post 13 celebrates its 100th anniversary. It has the honor of being one of only a handful of American Legion posts to turn 100. Its 100-year history hasn't been without its ups and downs. At its peak in the '50s, the post had upwards of 500 members. Just a few years ago, the post's membership dropped to fewer than 30 members. Today, the post is experiencing a resurgence of membership and currently has about 250 members.

With this resurgence in membership, funds going to Post 13's activities have increased. The post is now able to hold an annual veterans expo, operate an honor guard to attend the funerals of local veterans, has created an endowment for nursing students at Missouri Southern State University and sponsors the Missouri Boys State program and the Missouri Cadet Patrol Academy. For 100 years, Post 13 has brought veterans in the Joplin area together in service to their fellow veterans and their local community.

Madam Speaker, I ask that you and the rest of this body join me in congratulating the Robert S. Thurman American Legion Post 13 on 100 years of fraternity and service to the veterans of southwest Missouri.

HONORING ROWAN LITTLE LEAGUE'S VICTORY IN THE LITTLE LEAGUE SOFTBALL WORLD SERIES CHAMPIONSHIP

HON. RICHARD HUDSON

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. HUDSON. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Rowan Little League's victory in the Little League Softball World Series Championship. Rowan Little League is based out of the City of Salisbury, located in North Carolina's 8th Congressional District.

Rowan Little League defeated Eastbank Little League 4–1 on August 14, 2019 in the championship game at Alenrose Stadium in Portland, Oregon. This marks Rowan's fourth trip to the World Series in the past five seasons and is their second title, an extraordinary accomplishment for the perennially successful program.

Under the direction of Coach Steve Yang, the program has exemplified the very best of North Carolina through tenacity and perseverance. Rowan far exceeded expectations this summer and enjoyed a perfect 17–0 record, including 7–0 in World Series play.

I know I speak for our entire community in offering my most heartfelt congratulations to the exemplary young women of Rowan Little League. These young leaders are the heart and soul of our community and I couldn't be more proud.

Madam Speaker, please join me today in celebrating Rowan Little League's victory in the Little League Softball World Series Championship.

CONGRATULATING BEACON COLLEGE FOR 30 YEARS OF SERVICE

HON. DANIEL WEBSTER

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. WEBSTER of Florida. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to congratulate Beacon College for 30 years of service to students. A quality education can change a life. It unlocks the door of opportunity and success and equips children to achieve their dream.

For thirty years, Beacon College has been a pioneer in providing students with learning differences and disabilities with a high-quality college experience. It is committed to student success and provides accredited Associate in Arts and Bachelor of Arts degree programs to its students.

Their results are clear with 70 percent on-time graduation rates and a 1-year average for students completing their degrees in four years. This is almost double the 10-year national average for all students.

Beacon College is the only institution of higher education nationwide to serve with this exclusive mission. Under College President, George Hagerty's leadership, the faculty and teachers at Beacon College are passionate and committed to providing every student with the specialized attention they need to cultivate success. Recently, Beacon College was ranked as Number One on the prestigious Peterson ranking of the top 20 colleges for students with learning disabilities.

Beacon College not only equips students with academic knowledge, they also are dedicated to coaching students in the skills necessary to find and retain employment. It is my honor to congratulate Beacon College, Dr. Hagerty and the faculty and staff on reaching this service milestone. May you continue to serve these special students and equip them with the knowledge and skills to achieve their dreams.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ADRIAN SMITH

OF NEBRASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. SMITH of Nebraska. Madam Speaker, I was unavoidably detained. Had I been present, I would have voted NAY on Roll Call No. 525.

HONORING THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF EMMA BRUTON TERRY

HON. BRIAN HIGGINS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. HIGGINS of New York. Madam Speaker, today I rise to honor the extraordinary life and legacy of Emma Bruton Terry, who passed away on September 8, 2019 at the age of 92.

After spending her formative years in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Emma moved to Buffalo in 1952, and graduated from Bryant and Stratton College.

Emma then met and married her first love, the late Isiah Terry. From this union came five beautiful children, the keystone of her legacy. She was both a loving spouse and a caring mother.

No stranger to hard work, Emma was employed at many local small businesses including New York Lerner Shops, the Medical Records Department at Children's Hospital, Saturn Ring Company, and lastly the Buffalo China Company from which she retired in 1992.

Emma was the epitome of a dedicated mother, and a true steward of her community. Throughout her life she garnered many awards in honor of this yearning penchant to help.

To those that knew her best, her family and loved ones, Emma will always be memorialized as a committed parent and a loving friend. In their hearts she will be remembered as a Jazzy Stepper, and simply a kind soul.

Madam Speaker, thank you for allowing me a few moments to honor a woman who was beloved in my hometown of Buffalo, New York. May Emma's memory live on in the hearts of all who knew and loved her.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Ms. NORTON. Madam Speaker, on September 11, 2019, I was unable to attend a vote because I was attending to official business. Had I been present, I would have voted NAY on Roll Call No. 523.

RECOGNIZING JIM BYRUM FOR HIS SERVICE AS PRESIDENT OF THE MICHIGAN AGRI-BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

HON. JACK BERGMAN

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. BERGMAN. Madam Speaker, it's my honor to recognize Jim Byrum for his service as President the Michigan Agri-Business Association. Through his exceptional leadership and steadfast devotion to educational excellence, Jim has become an indispensable part of the state of Michigan.

Jim grew up on his family's farm near Onondaga and was raised in the same house where his grandfather was born in 1889. Throughout his career he stayed close to his agricultural roots, serving as Executive Director of the Michigan Bean Commission and the State Executive Director of Michigan's Farm Service Agency before eventually becoming the President of the Michigan Agri-Business Association (MABA)—a nonprofit organization of approximately 500 members from every part of the agricultural sector in Michigan.

In its 24 years under Jim's leadership, MABA has consistently and exceptionally represented the interests of the agricultural industry in Michigan, offering important resources to businesses while working proactively to keep the industry ahead in the global marketplace. For instance, MABA's "2025" project has encouraged industry leaders to think about long-term needs and how Michigan agriculture will grow in the coming years. Jim has excelled as a leader and communicator, and his expertise has made him well-respected by those across the political spectrum.

Agriculture is the second-largest sector of Michigan's economy, contributing more than $71 billion to the economy annually and supporting one out of every four jobs in the state. With today's ever-evolving world, the work of industry leaders like Jim has been critical in making Michigan the agricultural hub it is. His impact on the state of Michigan cannot be overstated.

Madam Speaker, it's my honor to congratulate Jim Byrum for his decades of service as President of the Michigan Agri-Business Association. Michiganders can take great pride in knowing the First District is home to such a dedicated leader. On behalf of my constituents, I wish Jim all the best in his future endeavors.

HONORING THE SALEM OREGON ROTARY ON THEIR 100TH ANNIVERSARY

HON. KURT SCHRADER

OF OREGON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. SCHRADER. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor and congratulate the Rotary Club of Salem, Oregon as they celebrate their 100th year of service to the Salem community. With nearly 200 members, the Rotary Club of Salem has established itself as one of the most distinguished community service organizations in my district.

The Rotary Club of Salem was organized on September 16, 1919. Over the last 100 years, the Rotary has strengthened their community through their mission of providing service to others, promoting integrity, and advancing world understanding, goodwill, and peace through fellowship of business, professional, and community leaders.

The Rotary Club of Salem gives back to the community by sponsoring inbound and outbound exchange students, distributing dictionaries to 4th graders in the Salem/Keizer school district, giving grants to local non-profits and by participating in international projects annually. To celebrate their 100 years of service, the Rotary will be building the Gerry Frank Amphitheater, a multipurpose amphitheater at Salem's Riverfront Park to inspire culture and encourage community togetherness.

I would like to extend my congratulations to the Rotary Club of Salem as they celebrate their 100th anniversary and thank them for their service to the community of Salem.

REMEMBERING THE LIFE OF KAREN WILLIAMS CONNELLY

HON. TIM RYAN

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. RYAN. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of Karen Williams Connelly, 68, of Niles, Ohio, who passed away peacefully at home, Thursday Sept. 5, 2019, surrounded by family after a long illness.

Karen was born April 7, 1951, in Warren, the daughter of her proud parents, Tom and Luella Knai Williams.

After graduating from Niles McKinley in 1969, Karen attended the Ohio State University and eventually graduated from Youngstown State University. Karen earned a bachelor's degree in social work and later a master's degree in counseling. Karen worked in the mental health field in the Mahoning Valley until her retirement, helping hundreds of people with mental illnesses. She loved her work and her love for people could be seen in all aspects of her life.

On Nov. 29, 1980, she married the love of her life, Tom Connelly, and together they made a life in Niles. Karen loved to laugh and enjoyed hosting parties, picnics and events in her home. Christmas Eve and Memorial Day were her favorite events and her parties became traditions among family and friends. Karen loved to cook and bake and was constantly trying new recipes.

She will be dearly missed by her devoted husband, Thomas R. Connelly; her loving children, Thomas and Laura Connelly and Megan and Brian Gibson; her grandchildren, Lucy Gibson, Max Gibson and Lily Jones; a sister, Patty Williams; a brother Bryan (Lisa) Williams; and many nieces, nephews and friends. Karen was preceded in death by her parents, Tom and Luella Williams.

The family would like to extend their heartfelt gratitude to Karen's physician, Dr. Zul Mangalji, and the nurses at Trumbull Memorial Hospital for their exceptional care and compassion during her illness.

I am very blessed to have worked with and befriended Karen's husband, Tom, who was the president of AFSCME Local 2026, which represents hundreds of nurses at Trumbull Regional Medical Center. Karen will most certainly be missed by all the lives she touched.

HONORING "FOOTSTEPS TO YOU: CHATTEL SLAVERY" EXHIBIT

HON. NORMA J. TORRES

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mrs. TORRES of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the Footsteps to You: Chattel Slavery exhibit. This exhibit opened in San Bernardino in 2018 and featured original artifacts and documents from the 19th century to showcase how the institution of slavery has shaped the United States.

Originally from historian Jerry Gore's estate, the collection gives visitors greater insight into the daily abuses inflicted on the millions enslaved in America, and the courage that African women, men, and children demonstrated while fighting for their freedom. Guests can immerse themselves in newspapers, first-person accounts, and objects of the slave trade. I had the chance to examine up close some of these documents and was reminded that slavery was not just an unspoken evil, but one out in the open, written, and debated in our country. These slave narratives help spark questions about how visitors themselves would have participated in slavery during this time in history.

The exhibit was one of the San Bernardino County programs named as part of the 2019 Achievement Awards from the National Association of Counties.

It is my honor to recognize the Footsteps to You: Chattel Slavery exhibit on the House floor today. This exhibit provides necessary insights and education into the experience of a slave in America and has made important contributions to the 35th District that are worthy of admiration.

HONORING ERIC LARSON ON THE EVENT OF HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY FARM BUREAU

HON. MIKE LEVIN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. LEVIN of California. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Eric Larson on the event of his retirement as Executive Director of the San Diego County Farm Bureau.

Eric has spent his career dedicated to the agricultural industry in San Diego County. During his forty-eight-year career, he worked in cut flower and nursery crop production, was the General Manager of the California Floriculture Growers Association and served as a board member of the Living Plant Growers Association, the San Diego County Farm Bureau, and the San Diego County Flower & Plant Association.

In 1996, Eric became Executive Director of the San Diego County Farm Bureau, where he helped the Bureau launch San Diego Grown magazine, establish the San Diego Farm & Nursery Expo, and advocated for the needs of local farmers. During Eric's tenure as Executive Director, the San Diego County Farm Bureau was selected as "County of the Year" three times by the California Farm Bureau.

The San Diego County Farm Bureau would not be the organization it is today without the hard work and dedication of Eric Larson. I thank Eric for his dedication to the farmers of San Diego County and congratulate him on his retirement.

REMEMBERING DON RODMAN

HON. JOSEPH P. KENNEDY III

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. KENNEDY. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the memory of a good friend, a leader in business and a titan of philanthropy, Don Rodman.

Growing up in a single parent household in Dorchester during the Great Depression, Don

knew struggle and he knew sacrifice. He understood the power of empathy for a neighbor in need and he felt deeply that you are judged not by what you create or build, but what you give back to your community and your neighbors.

A love of automobiles led Don to drop out of high school and enlist in the U.S. Army as a mechanic. Upon completion of his service, he married the love of his life, Marilyn, and began a career in the auto industry.

His talents, intuition and vision didn't go unnoticed for long, as Ford offered him a small dealership in Foxboro, Massachusetts. Working closely with his brother Gerry on this new business, he didn't let that dealership stay small for long and quickly grew it to one of the largest in our Commonwealth.

But if you asked him what he cared about most in life beyond his family, he wouldn't have given it a second thought: it was always philanthropy and giving back.

As he often said, "You can give your time. You can give your shoulder. You can give your heart."

And that's exactly what Don has done for decades. After supporting the Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps, he founded the Rodman Ride for Kids which has raised nearly $150 million for at-risk children. Even on the day he passed away, 150 kids were enjoying an all-expenses paid trip to Disney World sponsored by his charitable organizations.

You didn't have to know Don to know the impact he had on our Commonwealth and our country, but knowing him was simply inspiring and I was lucky to have grown close to him over the years.

To Don's five sons, Brett, Gene, Bart, Curtis and Craig, I thank them for sharing their dad with us for all of these years. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

RECOGNIZING SHERIFF DAVE CROMELL FOR RECEIVING THE "HUB" PERREAULT CITIZENSHIP AWARD

HON. JACK BERGMAN

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. BERGMAN. Madam Speaker, it's my honor to recognize Sheriff Dave Cromell for receiving the "Hub" Perreault Citizenship Award from American Legion Post 131 in Munising, Michigan. Through his exceptional leadership and steadfast devotion to his community, Dave has become an indispensable part of Michigan's First District.

Born and raised in Munising, Sheriff Cromell has dedicated decades of his life to the people of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Dave first joined the Alger County Sheriff's Office in 1975 as a Deputy Sheriff/Animal Control Officer. After revamping Alger County's animal control system, Dave attended Northern Michigan University's Police Academy, where he graduated as a Certified Police Officer. Following the retirement of Sheriff Malone in 1980, Dave was appointed interim Sheriff and was elected by the people of Alger County later that year. Sheriff Cromell would eventually be elected eight consecutive times. Over the course of his extensive career, Dave improved the county's EMT and 9–1–1 emergency response services, oversaw the repair and improvement of the Alger County Jail, and ensured the continuation of the DARE program in area schools—to only name some of his accomplishments. Sheriff Cromell's unwavering dedication to the public good is commendable, and the impact of his work for the people of the Upper Peninsula cannot be overstated.

Madam Speaker, it's my honor to recognize Sheriff Cromell for his decades of service to the people of our state and for receiving the "Hub" Perreault Citizenship Award from American Legion Post 131. Michiganders can take great pride in knowing the First District is home to such a selfless individual. On behalf of my constituents, I wish Dave all the best in his future endeavors.

RECOGNIZING ANDREW CONTON FOR RECEIVING THE MENTEE OF THE YEAR AWARD FROM THE 100 BLACK MEN IN AMERICA ORGANIZATON

HON. CHERI BUSTOS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mrs. BUSTOS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize Andrew Conton for receiving the Mentee of the Year Award from the 100 Black Men in America organization.

Mr. Conton is a member of the Mentor for Life Program, Central Illinois Chapter. He has been a member since 2016, when the Central Illinois Chapter expanded to Peoria. He is the second individual from Illinois to win this prestigious award. Mr. Conton earned a 3.8 GPA from Peoria High School and has been involved in a variety of extracurricular programs, such as the Peoria High marching and concert bands, the Peoria Jazz All-Stars, the Bradley University and Eastern Illinois University Honors Bands, the Solo Ensemble and the Illinois Music Education Association. Mr. Conton has a strong passion for science, art, politics and music. He further plans to use his strengths to reignite the Peoria community. His determination and drive have earned him a full ride scholarship to attend Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina. I am proud there is such young dedication in our community.

It is because of remarkable leaders like Andrew Conton that I am especially proud to serve Illinois' 17th Congressional District. Madam Speaker, I would like to again formally congratulate Andrew Conton for receiving the Mentee of the Year Award from the 100 Black Men in America organization.

RECOGNIZING THE JESSE CLIPPER AMERICAN LEGION POST NO. 430

HON. BRIAN HIGGINS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. HIGGINS of New York. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 100-year anniversary of the Jesse Clipper American Legion Post No. 430 in Buffalo, NY.

The Jesse Clipper American Legion Post No. 430 was founded by 15 African American World War I veterans on September 16, 1919 to honor Corporal Jesse Clipper who was the first African American soldier from our region to die during World War I. While fighting on the front lines in France, he was badly injured, hospitalized, and unfortunately passed away in February of 1919 before he could return home from the war.

Corporal Jesse Clipper and many other brave African American soldiers who fought for our country have helped to plant the seeds for greater equality and respect for African American soldiers. Their bravery eventually led to the desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces and the Civil Rights Movement. Corporal Jesse Clipper's willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice proved he was an American patriot worthy of honor and respect.

In honor of this trailblazer, members of the Jesse Clipper Post dedicated the corner of Michigan and William Streets in the City of Buffalo as Jesse Clipper Square in honor of all wars fought by African Americans. This was the same area that Jesse Clipper lived during his formative years that helped shape him into a dedicated and honorable soldier. Later, members of the Jesse Clipper American Legion Post No. 430 petitioned the Buffalo Common Council to establish a memorial to Clipper and all African American soldiers. Since the initial dedication of the monument, the dates of other wars in which African American soldiers fought have been added to the memorial.

As time goes on, we have a duty to remember and honor all those who fought for our country regardless of race and we must never forget the contributions they have made to protecting the security of our nation. We must promise to never forget the burden they carried both on the battlefield, and in their hearts when they returned to a country that did not treat them like the heroes they were and are, solely because of the color of their skin.

Thank you to all the members of the Jesse Clipper Post over the past 100 years who have helped to ensure that all veterans receive the honor, respect and benefits that they deserve.

IN HONOR OF THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF LEGAL SERVICES ALABAMA

HON. TERRI A. SEWELL

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Ms. SEWELL of Alabama. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Legal Services Alabama on their 15th Anniversary Award Dinner. Legal Services Alabama provides quality legal services to low-income residents of Alabama, filling a gaping need in a state that does not offer a statewide public defense program.

So often our legal system, whose creation and purpose is to maintain equal justice under the law, regardless of economic factors, connections or other indicators, fails to do so. The reality is that under-resourced individuals are provided decreased access to quality legal counsel, while those who can afford it are granted superior services. This fundamentally contradicts the intent of our court system and undermines the very framework of our country. The work of Legal Services Alabama is to

right that imbalance, restoring justice not only to the economically disenfranchised, but to every Alabamian and American.

Founded on February 1, 2004, Legal Services Alabama began as three separate Legal Services programs, Legal Services Corporation of Alabama (founded 1977), Legal Services of Metro Birmingham (founded 1977) and Legal Services of North-Central Alabama (founded 1969). The three regional offices merged resources to become the statewide entity Legal Services Alabama which provides free legal services to low-income Alabamians across all of the state's 67 counties. The merger reflected a nationwide imperative, initiated by the Legal Services Corporation, which encouraged consolidation in order to provide improved and more efficient services to those in need.

Alabama has long been a bastion of grassroots activism in pursuit of civil rights and economic justice. Alabama is the birthplace of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and played a prominent role in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign. Economic inequalities are inextricably tied to racial inequalities and Alabama has, since our nation's birth, been ground zero for some of the worst racial and economic injustices and the greatest moments of uprising and activism. Along these lines, it is impossible to consider the work of the Legal Services Alabama on behalf of low-income Alabamians without pointing out the systems of racial hierarchy that our current justice system tacitly endorses through its passivity.

The reality is that the vast majority of those unable to afford adequate legal representation in Alabama are African American. It is essential that organizations like the Legal Services Alabama do the important work of uplifting those who have been historically marginalized and disenfranchised, despite the fact that our current system is not set up to do so. Just as we, as a nation, must reflect openly and honestly on the ills of a criminal justice system that disproportionately jails people of color, we must commend those organizations like LSA that have stepped in and addressed an urgent need.

Legal Services Alabama has eight offices across the state as well as a centralized call center in order to provide the best possible service and access to Alabamians in need. LSA's offices are located in Anniston/Gadsden, Birmingham, Dothan, Huntsville, Mobile, Montgomery, Selma and Tuscaloosa. Each of those offices is staffed and equipped to serve low income people with legal matters and to promote collaboration in support of providing solutions to the myriad issues associated with living in poverty. Currently, Legal Services Alabama is the only non-profit law firm in the state of Alabama that provides free civil legal assistance to economically disenfranchised Alabamians.

In addition to providing free, quality legal representation to those in need, Legal Services Alabama also provides mediation services to clients, in the hope that they might avoid the court system entirely. Mediation can often be prohibitively expensive and many people may not even know that it is an option available to them prior to engaging the courts. By offering mediation, LSA encourages Alabamians, when possible, to seek an alternative that may ultimately be more beneficial.

Further, Legal Services Alabama practices "preventative law," working within the community to educate members on their rights and responsibilities in the hope of avoiding potentially devastating legal issues. Legal Services Alabama develops and distributes informative literature, legal self-help materials and forms throughout the community to help educate and engage those in need. This holistic approach to providing legal services shows an intrinsic understanding of the ways in which not only the criminal justice system but also community and social situations contribute to cycles of crime and prosecution and thoughtfully applies that understanding to a better and more comprehensive solution.

I am pleased to be granted this opportunity to recognize Legal Services Alabama for the important work they do for those Alabamians most in need. We as legislators must continue to work toward correcting our criminal justice system, but as that work is done, I am grateful to LSA for doing the important and necessary work of filling in the missing gaps.

RECOGNIZING DAN MUSSER III, HIS FAMILY, AND THE GRAND HOTEL

HON. JACK BERGMAN

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. BERGMAN. Madam Speaker, it is my honor to recognize Dan Musser III and his family for their work as owners and stewards of the Grand Hotel. Through their unwavering commitment to excellence, the Musser family and the Grand Hotel have become indispensable parts of Michigan's First District.

First opened in 1887, the Grand Hotel was created to serve as a retreat for vacationers looking to enjoy summer on the Straits of Mackinac and Lake Huron. Since 1933, the hotel has been owned and operated by the Musser family. Under the Mussers' stewardship, the Grand Hotel would grow to become not only a beloved part of Michigan, but a prominent feature in popular culture and premier destination for visitors from around the world. Its unique design has been widely acclaimed, and its world's-largest 660-foot porch has been enjoyed by the likes of John F. Kennedy, Gerald Ford, George H.W. Bush, and Thomas Edison.

In 1989, the National Park Service designated the hotel as a National Historic Landmark, citing its historic architecture and representation of the American dream of a "summer place." Today, its role as a summer place remains stronger than ever for the thousands of guests to Mackinac Island every year.

Dan Musser III started working at the Grand Hotel while in high school, raking sand traps on the hotel's golf course, The Jewel. He would go on to work as a bellhop, bartender, front desk clerk, front desk manager, reservations manager, and Vice President, before finally being named President in 1989. Just like his family predecessors, Dan has served as a hands-on President—present to greet guests and happy to handle the day-to-day details. Outside of his own hotel, Dan has served as the Chairman of the Michigan Hotel, Motel, and Resort Association, Chairman of the Resort Committee of the American Hotel and Lodging Association, and was twice appointed to the Michigan Travel Commission by the Governor. The impact of his leadership on Mackinac Island and the state of Michigan cannot be overstated. While the Musser family may be passing along the ownership of the Grand Hotel, the impact of their work will be felt by Michiganders for generations to come.

Madam Speaker, I ask you to join me in recognizing the Musser family and honoring the unique history and cultural significance of the Grand Hotel. Michiganders can take immense pride in knowing that the First District is home to such an important landmark and such a devoted group of leaders. On behalf of my constituents, I wish Dan and the Grand Hotel all the best in their future endeavors.

IN HONOR OF OAK RIDGE BAPTIST CHURCH 50TH ANNIVERSARY

HON. KEVIN BRADY

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. BRADY. Madam Speaker, today I rise in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Oak Ridge Baptist Church in the Eighth Congressional District of Texas.

Five families came to Oak Ridge, Texas from First Baptist Church in Conroe with the mission of building a sister church. The Suggs, Greer, Atherton, Pringle, and Allbrights families founded their church in the Tamina Community Hall on Robinson Road on October 22, 1967, with only 50 members in attendance.

In just two years, Oak Ridge Baptist Church grew to 253 members, and in 1969 a building off I–45 was dedicated to being their new home. After many wonderful years in that building, they finally settled into a more-permanent church facility on May 6, 2007. The congregation celebrated this move by marching from their temporary residence at Vogel Intermediate School to their new home on Hanna Road.

Fifty years have passed since the opening of their first building, but Senior Pastor Dr. Galen Cooper continues to keep the mission of the original five families alive, by connecting individuals throughout Oak Ridge, Spring, and The Woodlands through faith and community. He works to not only bond families, but to also create a truly supportive fellowship within the church.

For the congregation of Oak Ridge Baptist Church, worship extends well beyond the walls of their church building. Members are taught to bring their faith into every aspect of their lives. Through programs including Fellowship of Christian Athletes, The Gideon's International, Operation Christmas Card, and more, the congregation strives to better serve and improve their community based through their strong faith and welcoming values.

These churchgoers not only support their brothers and sisters in Christ in Texas, but around the world. In fact, Oak Ridge Baptist Church has partnered with the Eastern Baptist Convention in Cuba to establish churches and a School of Music. Missionaries are also laying down Christian roots in Lithuania and Mexico.

This year, Oak Ridge Baptist Church celebrates half a century of worship and fellowship, and I am proud to join their congregation in celebration of their Anniversary. Congratulations on 50 years, and I hope the next 50 will be just as fruitful.

HONORING CONSTITUTION WEEK

HON. H. MORGAN GRIFFITH

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. GRIFFITH. Madam Speaker, I rise in honor of Constitution Week, which is commemorated from September 17–23 annually. The observance of Constitution Week was established by law in 1956 after the Daughters of the American Revolution petitioned Congress to set aside these days to celebrate the document which established the framework of our government and maintained our liberties.

Author Catherine Drinker Bowen called it the ''Miracle at Philadelphia.'' In May of 1787, delegates from several of the thirteen states met in what we now call Independence Hall. The representatives included some of the new country's greatest luminaries, names we still know and honor today. Among others, Virginia sent James Madison, George Mason, George Wythe, and George Washington, who was elected as the convention's president unanimously.

Their goal was to revise the Articles of Confederation then governing the Union, but soon a new charter took shape. They met through the hot Philadelphia summer, thinking, debating, and compromising about the nature and particular forms of the government that would serve the people of the United States. The Constitution emerged from their months of deliberations and was signed on September 17, 1787. Madison and John Blair signed for Virginia, while Washington signed as the convention's president. Mason refrained from signing it without a Bill of Rights.

Virginia ratified the Constitution in the following year, calling for the Bill of Rights in exchange for the Commonwealth's consent. In 1789 it took effect with Washington as the first president of the United States under the new Constitution. With Virginia's ratification of the Bill of Rights in 1791, ten amendments were adopted, and more followed in the centuries since, but the Constitution endures to this day as our great charter.

Constitution Week recognizes the anniversary of this document, the ideals that inspired it, and the men who wrote it. I ask my fellow Virginians and Americans to join me in observing this occasion and reaffirm the timeless principles represented by the Constitution.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. DAVID ROUZER

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. ROUZER. Madam Speaker, I missed votes on September 9, 2019 because I had an obligation in the state of North Carolina. Had I been present, I would have voted NAY on Roll Call No. 516 and YEA on Roll Call No. 515.

PROCLAIMING NOVEMBER 2, 2019 AS SCIENCE EDUCATION AWARENESS DAY IN NEW YORK STATE

HON. BRIAN HIGGINS

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. HIGGINS of New York. Madam Speaker, I rise today to proclaim November 2, 2019 Science Education Awareness Day in New York State. The recognition of this day serves as a reminder of the importance of science education, at all levels, in the State of New York.

The Science Teachers Association of New York State (STANYS) is New York's first science teacher organization. Under the leadership of Kenneth Huff, President of STANYS and a Middle School Teacher at Williamsville Central School District in the 26th Congressional District, the association is dedicated to promoting excellence in science education. Its mission is to work with educators, school districts, and communities to provide opportunities for students to actively participate in science education. STANYS is a leading voice in legislative affairs that affect science teachers and the teaching of science. This vital organization brings the collective concerns and suggestions of science educators to NYSED and state government officials. This organization also acts as a multi-purpose network for science educators of many levels and disciplines.

Science Education Awareness Day 2019 on November 2nd will fall during STANYS's Annual Conference. This event draws a large community of Pre-K to University and Informal Science educators from across the state. The conference offers workshops for all teaching levels, information on the newest tools and technology, and prominent keynote speakers from the field. The theme for the 2019 conference is Transforming Innovations into Reality in Science. The conference offers 2.5 days of workshops for all science teaching levels and disciplines, renowned panelists, subject area institutes, receptions and socials, and vendors with new materials and technologies. The celebration of Science Education Awareness Day will add to the inspiring and energizing atmosphere of the event.

Madam Speaker, thank you for allowing me a few moments to proclaim November 2, 2019 Science Education Awareness Day in New York State. This celebration is a fantastic way to increase public appreciation for science education and to showcase its importance in our schools and communities.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JOHN KATKO

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. KATKO. Madam Speaker, on Roll Call No. 525, I mistakenly voted and would like to correct my vote to a YEA. Had I been present, I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 525.

CONGRATULATING BILL HAMMES OF SHERRARD, ILLINOIS, WHO WAS NAMED CONSERVATION TEACHER OF THE YEAR

HON. CHERI BUSTOS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mrs. BUSTOS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Bill Hammes of Sherrard, Illinois, who was recently named the ''Conservation Teacher of the Year'' by the Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois Audubon Society.

Bill Hammes is an agriculture teacher at Sherrard High School where he has dedicated the last couple decades of his life to agricultural education. Hammes' work has not gone unnoticed as his class received the ''Environmental Youth Group Award'' in the 1980s and ''Iowater Award'' in the 2000s. Hammes has supported his students inside and outside of the classroom, teaching them essential agricultural skills and helping them coordinate a Cover Crop Tour in 2017. As an FFA mentor, his students went on to positively impact the community from cultivating crops, serving local food pantries and more. Additionally, he has enriched the local community by developing an outdoor learning campus which includes a garden, greenhouse and cropland for Sherrard students. It makes me immensely proud to see such dedication to our environment and community.

Madam Speaker, I want to again formally congratulate Bill Hammes for being recognized for his great work. I am hopeful that communities across the state can learn from Hammes' leadership and agricultural success.

RECOGNIZING NORMAN R. VELIQUETTE FOR HIS INDUCTION INTO THE MICHIGAN FARMERS HALL OF FAME

HON. JACK BERGMAN

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. BERGMAN. Madam Speaker, it's my honor to recognize Norman R. Veliquette for his induction into the Michigan Farmers Hall of Fame. Through his unparalleled leadership and devotion to excellence, Norm has become an indispensable part of Northern Michigan.

The Michigan Farmer's Hall of Fame was created to promote excellence in farming and recognize those in Michigan who have made an extraordinary impact on the industry and their communities. None are more deserving of this honor than Norm. Over his nearly 50 years of farming, Norm has served as an active member of the Michigan Farm Bureau, Charter President of the Lowell Area Jaycees, and a founder of CherryKe, Inc., Great Lakes Packing Company, Cherry Bay Orchards, and CherrCo, Inc.—to name only some of his endeavors. In his long and successful career, Norm has tackled the challenges of an ever-evolving industry head-on and proven himself to be a leader in Michigan's cherry sector.

In addition to his work for Michigan's agricultural industry, Norm has a long history of

serving his community through the Elk Rapids School Board, Sacred Heart Church, Rotary Club, Northwestern Michigan College, and as the founder and long-time chairman of the Meadow Brook Foundation in Antrim County. He has also participated in multiple Agricultural People-to-People missions in Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, and has performed comedic monologues for the Elk Rapids Rotary Show for the past 35 years. Additionally, Norm has dedicated himself to public health through fundraising for the Rotary Foundation and the World Health Organization's Global Polio Eradication Initiative. He has also participated in multiple missions for India's polio National Immunization Day, and has published five books recounting his experiences.

Agriculture is the second-largest sector of Michigan's economy, and the cherry industry serves a vital role for the people and communities of Northern Michigan. With today's ever-evolving world, the work of industry and community leaders like Norm has been critical in shaping Michigan's agricultural industry to the success story it is today. His impact on the people of Michigan cannot be overstated.

Madam Speaker, it's my honor to congratulate Norman Veliquette for his decades of service and his induction into the Michigan Farmers Hall of Fame. Michiganders can take great pride in knowing the First District is home to such a dedicated leader. On behalf of my constituents, I wish Norm all the best in his future endeavors.

HONORING LILI MARSH AS THE BAKERSFIELD POLICE ACTIVITIES LEAGUE HOMETOWN HERO

HON. KEVIN McCARTHY

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 12, 2019

Mr. MCCARTHY. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Lili Marsh, a constituent and community leader from Bakersfield, California. Today, Lili is being recognized as the 2019 Bakersfield Police Activities League Hometown Hero for exemplary service and leadership to the people of Kern County, which I represent.

Lili earned her Bachelor of Arts from Wooster College and has been a longtime leader in the Bakersfield community. While she has committed herself to an impressive number of civic organizations, her most passionate work has been in service to Kern County's veterans. As Executive Director of Honor Flight Kern County, a chapter of the national organization she helped start, Lili organizes travel and accommodations in Washington for Kern County's heroes so that they can see the monuments built in their honor. Many times, Honor Flight marks the first visit to our nation's capital for these veterans, and Lili has been instrumental in giving these men and women the hero's welcome they deserve upon reaching their nation's capital.

However, Lili's involvement with our veterans does not end with Honor Flight. Her most recent community improvement project has been the Portrait of a Warrior Gallery. This moving gallery is filled with portraits of today's generation of men and women in the Armed Forces who have lost their lives following the 9/11 attacks. The Portrait of a Warrior Gallery is a project born of passion, love, and admiration of those who defend America and her ideals. Having worked with Lili on Honor Flight and numerous other veterans issues, she has the uncanny ability to identify the needs of our veteran community and the determination to see those needs met.

Along with being a businesswoman and an entrepreneur, Lili is many things to our community. But her passion and determination have enriched the lives of Kern County's veterans and helped ensure our community continues to recognize these heroes among us.

I rise today to recognize Lili Marsh as a Hometown Hero award recipient who continues to positively influence our county through her character and leadership. A true signature of leadership is the generosity of time and talents that one gives on behalf to their neighbors and community. Lili exemplifies this time-honored tradition, and I would like to thank her and her husband, Troy, for their life-changing work. On behalf of a grateful community and the 23rd Congressional district, I recognize Lili Marsh's achievements and look forward to her many future successes.

400TH ANNIVERSARY OF FIRST ENSLAVED AFRICANS BROUGHT TO AMERICA

SPEECH OF

HON. BARBARA LEE

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, September 9, 2019

Ms. LEE of California. Madam Speaker, I include in the RECORD the following article from "The 1619 Project" published in The New York Times Magazine.

[From The New York Times Magazine, Aug. 14, 2019]

THE 1619 PROJECT

(By Nikole Hanna-Jones)

My dad always flew an American flag in our front yard. The blue paint on our two-story house was perennially chipping; the fence, or the rail by the stairs, or the front door, existed in a perpetual state of disrepair, but that flag always flew pristine. Our corner lot, which had been redlined by the federal government, was along the river that divided the black side from the white side of our Iowa town. At the edge of our lawn, high on an aluminum pole, soared the flag, which my dad would replace as soon as it showed the slightest tatter.

My dad was born into a family of sharecroppers on a white plantation in Greenwood, Miss., where black people bent over cotton from can't-see-in-the-morning to can't-see-at-night, just as their enslaved ancestors had done not long before. The Mississippi of my dad's youth was an apartheid state that subjugated its near-majority black population through breathtaking acts of violence. White residents in Mississippi lynched more black people than those in any other state in the country, and the white people in my dad's home county lynched more black residents than those in any other county in Mississippi, often for such "crimes" as entering a room occupied by white women, bumping into a white girl or trying to start a sharecroppers union. My dad's mother, like all the black people in Greenwood, could not vote, use the public library or find work other than toiling in the cotton fields or toiling in white people's houses. So in the 1940s, she packed up her few belongings and her three small children and joined the flood of black Southerners fleeing North. She got off the Illinois Central Railroad in Waterloo, Iowa, only to have her hopes of the mythical Promised Land shattered when she learned that Jim Crow did not end at the Mason-Dixon line.

Grandmama, as we called her, found a house in a segregated black neighborhood on the city's east side and then found the work that was considered black women's work no matter where black women lived—cleaning white people's houses. Dad, too, struggled to find promise in this land. In 1962, at age 17, he signed up for the Army. Like many young men, he joined in hopes of escaping poverty. But he went into the military for another reason as well, a reason common to black men: Dad hoped that if he served his country, his country might finally treat him as an American.

The 1619 Project is a major initiative from The New York Times observing the 400th anniversary of the beginning of American slavery. It aims to reframe the country's history, understanding 1619 as our true founding, and placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of black Americans at the very center of the story we tell ourselves about who we are. Read all the stories.

The Army did not end up being his way out. He was passed over for opportunities, his ambition stunted. He would be discharged under murky circumstances and then labor in a series of service jobs for the rest of his life. Like all the black men and women in my family, he believed in hard work, but like all the black men and women in my family, no matter how hard he worked, he never got ahead.

So when I was young, that flag outside our home never made sense to me. How could this black man, having seen firsthand the way his country abused black Americans, how it refused to treat us as full citizens, proudly fly its banner? I didn't understand his patriotism. It deeply embarrassed me.

I had been taught, in school, through cultural osmosis, that the flag wasn't really ours, that our history as a people began with enslavement and that we had contributed little to this great nation. It seemed that the closest thing black Americans could have to cultural pride was to be found in our vague connection to Africa, a place we had never been. That my dad felt so much honor in being an American felt like a marker of his degradation, his acceptance of our subordination.

Like most young people, I thought I understood so much, when in fact I understood so little. My father knew exactly what he was doing when he raised that flag. He knew that our people's contributions to building the richest and most powerful nation in the world were indelible, that the United States simply would not exist without us.

In August 1619, just 12 years after the English settled Jamestown, Va., one year before the Puritans landed at Plymouth Rock and some 157 years before the English colonists even decided they wanted to form their own country, the Jamestown colonists bought 20 to 30 enslaved Africans from English pirates. The pirates had stolen them from a Portuguese slave ship that had forcibly taken them from what is now the country of Angola. Those men and women who came ashore on that August day were the beginning of American slavery. They were among the 12.5 million Africans who would be kidnapped from their homes and brought in chains across the Atlantic Ocean in the largest forced migration in human history until the Second World War. Almost two million did not survive the grueling journey, known as the Middle Passage.

Before the abolishment of the international slave trade, 400,000 enslaved Africans would be sold into America. Those individuals and their descendants transformed the lands to which they'd been brought into some of the most successful colonies in the British Empire. Through backbreaking labor, they cleared the land across the Southeast. They taught the colonists to grow rice. They grew and picked the cotton that at the height of slavery was the nation's most valuable commodity, accounting for half of all American exports and 66 percent of the world's supply. They built the plantations of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, sprawling properties that today attract thousands of visitors from across the globe captivated by the history of the world's greatest democracy. They laid the foundations of the White House and the Capitol, even placing with their unfree hands the Statue of Freedom atop the Capitol dome. They lugged the heavy wooden tracks of the railroads that crisscrossed the South and that helped take the cotton they picked to the Northern textile mills, fueling the Industrial Revolution. They built vast fortunes for white people North and South—at one time, the second-richest man in the nation was a Rhode Island ''slave trader.'' Profits from black people's stolen labor helped the young nation pay off its war debts and financed some of our most prestigious universities. It was the relentless buying, selling, insuring and financing of their bodies and the products of their labor that made Wall Street a thriving banking, insurance and trading sector and New York City the financial capital of the world.

But it would be historically inaccurate to reduce the contributions of black people to the vast material wealth created by our bondage. Black Americans have also been, and continue to be, foundational to the idea of American freedom. More than any other group in this country's history, we have served, generation after generation, in an overlooked but vital role: It is we who have been the perfecters of this democracy.

The United States is a nation founded on both an ideal and a lie. Our Declaration of Independence, approved on July 4, 1776, proclaims that ''all men are created equal'' and ''endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.'' But the white men who drafted those words did not believe them to be true for the hundreds of thousands of black people in their midst. ''Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness'' did not apply to fully one-fifth of the country. Yet despite being violently denied the freedom and justice promised to all, black Americans believed fervently in the American creed. Through centuries of black resistance and protest, we have helped the country live up to its founding ideals. And not only for ourselves—black rights struggles paved the way for evely other rights struggle, including women's and gay rights, immigrant and disability rights.

Without the idealistic, strenuous and patriotic efforts of black Americans, our democracy today would most likely look very different—it might not be a democracy at all.

The very first person to die for this country in the American Revolution was a black man who himself was not free. Crispus Attucks was a fugitive from slavery, yet he gave his life for a new nation in which his own people would not enjoy the liberties laid out in the Declaration for another century. In every war this nation has waged since that first one, black Americans have fought—today we are the most likely of all racial groups to serve in the United States military.

My father, one of those many black Americans who answered the call, knew what it would take me years to understand: that the year 1619 is as important to the American story as 1776. That black Americans, as much as those men cast in alabaster in the nation's capital, are this nation's true ''founding fathers.'' And that no people has a greater claim to that flag than us.

In June 1776, Thomas Jefferson sat at his portable writing desk in a rented room in Philadelphia and penned these words: ''We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.'' For the last 243 years, this fierce assertion of the fundamental and natural rights of humankind to freedom and self-governance has defined our global reputation as a land of liberty. As Jefferson composed his inspiring words, however, a teenage boy who would enjoy none of those rights and liberties waited nearby to serve at his master's beck and call. His name was Robert Hemings, and he was the half brother of Jefferson's wife, born to Martha Jefferson's father and a woman he owned. It was common for white enslavers to keep their half-black children in slavery. Jefferson had chosen Hemings, from among about 130 enslaved people that worked on the forced-labor camp he called Monticello, to accompany him to Philadelphia and ensure his every comfort as he drafted the text making the case for a new democratic republic based on the individual rights of men.

At the time, one-fifth of the population within the 13 colonies struggled under a brutal system of slavery unlike anything that had existed in the world before. Chattel slavery was not conditional but racial. It was heritable and permanent, not temporary, meaning generations of black people were born into it and passed their enslaved status onto their children. Enslaved people were not recognized as human beings but as property that could be mortgaged, traded, bought, sold, used as collateral, given as a gift and disposed of violently. Jefferson's fellow white colonists knew that black people were human beings, but they created a network of laws and customs, astounding for both their precision and cruelty, that ensured that enslaved people would never be treated as such. As the abolitionist William Goodell wrote in 1853, ''If any thing founded on falsehood might be called a science, we might add the system of American slavery to the list of the strict sciences.''

[Listen to a new podcast with Nikole Hannah-Jones that tells the story of slavery and its legacy like you've never heard it before.]

Enslaved people could not legally marry. They were barred from learning to read and restricted from meeting privately in groups. They had no claim to their own children, who could be bought, sold and traded away from them on auction blocks alongside furniture and cattle or behind storefronts that advertised ''Negroes for Sale.'' Enslavers and the courts did not honor kinship ties to mothers, siblings, cousins. In most courts, they had no legal standing. Enslavers could rape or murder their property without legal consequence. Enslaved people could own nothing, will nothing and inherit nothing. They were legally tortured, including by those working for Jefferson himself. They could be worked to death, and often were, in order to produce the highest profits for the white people who owned them.

Yet in making the argument against Britain's tyranny, one of the colonists' favorite rhetorical devices was to claim that they were the slaves—to Britain. For this duplicity, they faced burning criticism both at home and abroad. As Samuel Johnson, an English writer and Tory opposed to American independence, quipped, ''How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes?''

Conveniently left out of our founding mythology is the fact that one of the primary reasons the colonists decided to declare their independence from Britain was because they wanted to protect the institution of slavery. By 1776, Britain had grown deeply conflicted over its role in the barbaric institution that had reshaped the Western Hemisphere. In London, there were growing calls to abolish the slave trade. This would have upended the economy of the colonies, in both the North and the South. The wealth and prominence that allowed Jefferson, at just 33, and the other founding fathers to believe they could successfully break off from one of the mightiest empires in the world came from the dizzying profits generated by chattel slavery. In other words, we may never have revolted against Britain if the founders had not understood that slavery empowered them to do so; nor if they had not believed that independence was required in order to ensure that slavery would continue. It is not incidental that 10 of this nation's first 12 presidents were enslavers, and some might argue that this nation was founded not as a democracy but as a slavocracy.

Jefferson and the other founders were keenly aware of this hypocrisy. And so in Jefferson's original draft of the Declaration of Independence, he tried to argue that it wasn't the colonists' fault. Instead, he blamed the king of England for forcing the institution of slavery on the unwilling colonists and called the trafficking in human beings a crime. Yet neither Jefferson nor most of the founders intended to abolish slavery, and in the end, they struck the passage.

There is no mention of slavery in the final Declaration of Independence. Similarly, 11 years later, when it came time to draft the Constitution, the framers carefully constructed a document that preserved and protected slavery without ever using the word. In the texts in which they were making the case for freedom to the world, they did not want to explicitly enshrine their hypocrisy, so they sought to hide it. The Constitution contains 84 clauses. Six deal directly with the enslaved and their enslavement, as the historian David Waldstreicher has written, and five more hold implications for slavery. The Constitution protected the ''property'' of those who enslaved black people, prohibited the federal government from intervening to end the importation of enslaved Africans for a term of 20 years, allowed Congress to mobilize the militia to put down insurrections by the enslaved and forced states that had outlawed slavery to turn over enslaved people who had run away seeking refuge. Like many others, the writer and abolitionist Samuel Bryan called out the deceit, saying of the Constitution, ''The words are dark and ambiguous; such as no plain man of common sense would have used, [and] are evidently chosen to conceal from Europe, that in this enlightened country, the practice of slavery has its advocates among men in the highest stations.''

With independence, the founding fathers could no longer blame slavery on Britain. The sin became this nation's own, and so, too, the need to cleanse it. The shameful paradox of continuing chattel slavery in a nation founded on individual freedom, scholars today assert, led to a hardening of the racial caste system. This ideology, reinforced not just by laws but by racist science and literature, maintained that black people were subhuman, a belief that allowed white Americans to live with their betrayal. By the early 1800s, according to the legal historians Leland B. Ware, Robert J. Cottrol and Raymond T. Diamond, white Americans, whether

they engaged in slavery or not, ''had a considerable psychological as well as economic investment in the doctrine of black inferiority.'' While liberty was the inalienable right of the people who would be considered white, enslavement and subjugation became the natural station of people who had any discernible drop of ''black'' blood.

The Supreme Court enshrined this thinking in the law in its 1857 Dred Scott decision, ruling that black people, whether enslaved or free, came from a ''slave'' race. This made them inferior to white people and, therefore, incompatible with American democracy. Democracy was for citizens, and the ''Negro race,'' the court ruled, was ''a separate class of persons,'' which the founders had ''not regarded as a portion of the people or citizens of the Government'' and had ''no rights which a white man was bound to respect.'' This belief, that black people were not merely enslaved but were a slave race, became the root of the endemic racism that we still cannot purge from this nation to this day. If black people could not ever be citizens, if they were a caste apart from all other humans, then they did not require the rights bestowed by the Constitution, and the ''we'' in the ''We the People'' was not a lie.

On Aug. 14, 1862, a mere five years after the nation's highest courts declared that no black person could be an American citizen, President Abraham Lincoln called a group of five esteemed free black men to the White House for a meeting. It was one of the few times that black people had ever been invited to the White House as guests. The Civil War had been raging for more than a year, and black abolitionists, who had been increasingly pressuring Lincoln to end slavery, must have felt a sense of great anticipation and pride.

The war was not going well for Lincoln. Britain was contemplating whether to intervene on the Confederacy's behalf, and Lincoln, unable to draw enough new white volunteers for the war, was forced to reconsider his opposition to allowing black Americans to fight for their own liberation. The president was weighing a proclamation that threatened to emancipate all enslaved people in the states that had seceded from the Union if the states did not end the rebellion. The proclamation would also allow the formerly enslaved to join the Union army and fight against their former ''masters.'' But Lincoln worried about what the consequences of this radical step would be. Like many white Americans, he opposed slavery as a cruel system at odds with American ideals, but he also opposed black equality. He believed that free black people were a ''troublesome presence'' incompatible with a democracy intended only for white people. ''Free them, and make them politically and socially our equals?'' he had said four years earlier. ''My own feelings will not admit of this; and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of white people will not.''

That August day, as the men arrived at the White House, they were greeted by the towering Lincoln and a man named James Mitchell, who eight days before had been given the title of a newly created position called the commissioner of emigration. This was to be his first assignment. After exchanging a few niceties, Lincoln got right to it. He informed his guests that he had gotten Congress to appropriate funds to ship black people, once freed, to another country.

''Why should they leave this country? This is, perhaps, the first question for proper consideration,'' Lincoln told them. ''You and we are different races. . . . Your race suffer very greatly, many of them, by living among us, while ours suffer from your presence. In a word, we suffer on each side.''

You can imagine the heavy silence in that room, as the weight of what the president said momentarily stole the breath of these five black men. It was 243 years to the month since the first of their ancestors had arrived on these shores, before Lincoln's family, long before most of the white people insisting that this was not their country. The Union had not entered the war to end slavery but to keep the South from splitting off, yet black men had signed up to fight. Enslaved people were fleeing their forced-labor camps, which we like to call plantations, trying to join the effort, serving as spies, sabotaging confederates, taking up arms for his cause as well as their own. And now Lincoln was blaming them for the war. ''Although many men engaged on either side do not care for you one way or the other . . . without the institution of slavery and the colored race as a basis, the war could not have an existence,'' the president told them. ''It is better for us both, therefore, to be separated.''

As Lincoln closed the remarks, Edward Thomas, the delegation's chairman, informed the president, perhaps curtly, that they would consult on his proposition. ''Take your full time,'' Lincoln said. ''No hurry at all.''

Nearly three years after that White House meeting, Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox. By summer, the Civil War was over, and four million black Americans were suddenly free. Contrary to Lincoln's view, most were not inclined to leave, agreeing with the sentiment of a resolution against black colonization put forward at a convention of black leaders in New York some decades before: ''This is our home, and this our country. Beneath its sod lie the bones of our fathers . . . . Here we were born, and here we will die.''

That the formerly enslaved did not take up Lincoln's offer to abandon these lands is an astounding testament to their belief in this nation's founding ideals. As W.E.B. Du Bois wrote, ''Few men ever worshiped Freedom with half such unquestioning faith as did the American Negro for two centuries.'' Black Americans had long called for universal equality and believed, as the abolitionist Martin Delany said, ''that God has made of one blood all the nations that dwell on the face of the earth.'' Liberated by war, then, they did not seek vengeance on their oppressors as Lincoln and so many other white Americans feared. They did the opposite. During this nation's brief period of Reconstruction, from 1865 to 1877, formerly enslaved people zealously engaged with the democratic process. With federal troops tempering widespread white violence, black Southerners stalted branches of the Equal Rights League—one of the nation's first human rights organizations—to fight discrimination and organize voters; they headed in droves to the polls, where they placed other formerly enslaved people into seats that their enslavers had once held. The South, for the first time in the history of this country, began to resemble a democracy, with black Americans elected to local, state and federal offices. Some 16 black men served in Congress—including Hiram Revels of Mississippi, who became the first black man elected to the Senate. (Demonstrating just how brief this period would be, Revels, along with Blanche Bruce, would go from being the first black man elected to the last for nearly a hundred years, until Edward Brooke of Massachusetts took office in 1967.) More than 600 black men served in Southern state legislatures and hundreds more in local positions.

These black officials joined with white Republicans, some of whom came down from the North, to write the most egalitarian state constitutions the South had ever seen. They helped pass more equitable tax legislation and laws that prohibited discrimination in public transportation, accommodation and housing. Perhaps their biggest achievement was the establishment of that most democratic of American institutions: the public school. Public education effectively did not exist in the South before Reconstruction. The white elite sent their children to private schools, while poor white children went without an education. But newly freed black people, who had been prohibited from learning to read and write during slavery, were desperate for an education. So black legislators successfully pushed for a universal, state-funded system of schools—not just for their own children but for white children, too. Black legislators also helped pass the first compulsory education laws in the region. Southern children, black and white, were now required to attend schools like their Northern counterparts. Just five years into Reconstruction, every Southern state had enshrined the right to a public education for all children into its constitution. In some states, like Louisiana and South Carolina, small numbers of black and white children, briefly, attended schools together.

Led by black activists and a Republican Party pushed left by the blatant recalcitrance of white Southerners, the years directly after slavery saw the greatest expansion of human and civil rights this nation would ever see. In 1865, Congress passed the 13th Amendment, making the United States one of the last nations in the Americas to outlaw slavery. The following year, black Americans, exerting their new political power, pushed white legislators to pass the Civil Rights Act, the nation's first such law and one of the most expansive pieces of civil rights legislation Congress has ever passed. It codified black American citizenship for the first time, prohibited housing discrimination and gave all Americans the right to buy and inherit property, make and enforce contracts and seek redress from courts. In 1868, Congress ratified the 14th Amendment, ensuring citizenship to any person born in the United States. Today, thanks to this amendment, every child born here to a European, Asian, African, Latin American or Middle Eastern immigrant gains automatic citizenship. The 14th Amendment also, for the first time, constitutionally guaranteed equal protection under the law. Ever since, nearly all other marginalized groups have used the 14th Amendment in their fights for equality (including the recent successful arguments before the Supreme Court on behalf of same-sex marriage). Finally, in 1870, Congress passed the 15th Amendment, guaranteeing the most critical aspect of democracy and citizenship—the right to vote—to all men regardless of ''race, color, or previous condition of servitude.''

For this fleeting moment known as Reconstruction, the majority in Congress seemed to embrace the idea that out of the ashes of the Civil War, we could create the multiracial democracy that black Americans envisioned even if our founding fathers did not.

But it would not last.

Anti-black racism runs in the very DNA of this country, as does the belief, so well articulated by Lincoln, that black people are the obstacle to national unity. The many gains of Reconstruction were met with fierce white resistance throughout the South, including unthinkable violence against the formerly enslaved, wide-scale voter suppression, electoral fraud and even, in some extreme cases, the overthrow of democratically elected biracial governments. Faced with this unrest, the federal government decided that black people were the cause of the problem and that for unity's sake, it would leave the white South to its own devices. In

1877, President Rutherford B. Hayes, in order to secure a compromise with Southern Democrats that would grant him the presidency in a contested election, agreed to pull federal troops from the South. With the troops gone, white Southerners quickly went about eradicating the gains of Reconstruction. The systemic white suppression of black life was so severe that this period between the 1880s and the 1920 and '30s became known as the Great Nadir, or the second slavery. Democracy would not return to the South for nearly a century.

White Southerners of all economic classes, on the other hand, thanks in significant part to the progressive policies and laws black people had championed, experienced substantial improvement in their lives even as they forced black people back into a quasi slavery. As Waters McIntosh, who had been enslaved in South Carolina, lamented, ''It was the poor white man who was freed by the war, not the Negroes.''

Georgia pines flew past the windows of the Greyhound bus carrying Isaac Woodard home to Winnsboro, S.C. After serving four years in the Army in World War II, where Woodard had earned a battle star, he was given an honorable discharge earlier that day at Camp Gordon and was headed home to meet his wife. When the bus stopped at a small drugstore an hour outside Atlanta, Woodard got into a brief argument with the white driver after asking if he could use the restroom. About half an hour later, the driver stopped again and told Woodard to get off the bus. Crisp in his uniform, Woodard stepped from the stairs and saw the police waiting for him. Before he could speak, one of the officers struck him in his head with a billy club, beating him so badly that he fell unconscious. The blows to Woodard's head were so severe that when he woke in a jail cell the next day, he could not see. The beating occurred just 4½ hours after his military discharge. At 26, Woodard would never see again.

There was nothing unusual about Woodard's horrific maiming. It was part of a wave of systemic violence deployed against black Americans after Reconstruction, in both the North and the South. As the egalitarian spirit of post-Civil War America evaporated under the desire for national reunification, black Americans, simply by existing, served as a problematic reminder of this nation's failings. White America dealt with this inconvenience by constructing a savagely enforced system of racial apartheid that excluded black people almost entirely from mainstream American life—a system so grotesque that Nazi Germany would later take inspiration from it for its own racist policies.

Despite the guarantees of equality in the 14th Amendment, the Supreme Court's landmark Plessy v. Ferguson decision in 1896 declared that the racial segregation of black Americans was constitutional. With the blessing of the nation's highest court and no federal will to vindicate black rights, starting in the late 1800s, Southern states passed a series of laws and codes meant to make slavery's racial caste system permanent by denying black people political power, social equality and basic dignity. They passed literacy tests to keep black people from voting and created all-white primaries for elections. Black people were prohibited from serving on juries or testifying in court against a white person. South Carolina prohibited white and black textile workers from using the same doors. Oklahoma forced phone companies to segregate phone booths.

Memphis had separate parking spaces for black and white drivers. Baltimore passed an ordinance outlawing black people from moving onto a block more than half white and white people from moving onto a block more than half black. Georgia made it illegal for black and white people to be buried next to one another in the same cemetery. Alabama barred black people from using public libraries that their own tax dollars were paying for. Black people were expected to jump off the sidewalk to let white people pass and call all white people by an honorific, though they received none no matter how old they were. In the North, white politicians implemented policies that segregated black people into slum neighborhoods and into inferior all-black schools, operated whites-only public pools and held white and ''colored'' days at the country fair, and white businesses regularly denied black people service, placing ''Whites Only'' signs in their windows. States like California joined Southern states in barring black people from marrying white people, while local school boards in Illinois and New Jersey mandated segregated schools for black and white children.

This caste system was maintained through wanton racial terrorism. And black veterans like Woodard, especially those with the audacity to wear their uniform, had since the Civil War been the target of a particular violence. This intensified during the two world wars because white people understood that once black men had gone abroad and experienced life outside the suffocating racial oppression of America, they were unlikely to quietly return to their subjugation at home. As Senator James K. Vardaman of Mississippi said on the Senate floor during World War I, black servicemen returning to the South would ''inevitably lead to disaster.'' Giving a black man ''military airs'' and sending him to defend the flag would bring him ''to the conclusion that his political rights must be respected.''

Many white Americans saw black men in the uniforms of America's armed services not as patriotic but as exhibiting a dangerous pride. Hundreds of black veterans were beaten, maimed, shot and lynched. We like to call those who lived during World War II the Greatest Generation, but that allows us to ignore the fact that many of this generation fought for democracy abroad while brutally suppressing democracy for millions of American citizens. During the height of racial terror in this country, black Americans were not merely killed but castrated, burned alive and dismembered with their body parts displayed in storefronts. This violence was meant to terrify and control black people, but perhaps just as important, it served as a psychological balm for white supremacy: You would not treat human beings this way. The extremity of the violence was a symptom of the psychological mechanism necessary to absolve white Americans of their country's original sin. To answer the question of how they could prize liberty abroad while simultaneously denying liberty to an entire race back home, white Americans resorted to the same racist ideology that Jefferson and the framers had used at the nation's founding.

This ideology—that black people belonged to an inferior, subhuman race—did not simply disappear once slavery ended. If the formerly enslaved and their descendants became educated, if we thrived in the jobs white people did, if we excelled in the sciences and arts, then the entire justification for how this nation allowed slavery would collapse. Free black people posed a danger to the country's idea of itself as exceptional; we held up the mirror in which the nation preferred not to peer. And so the inhumanity visited on black people by every generation of white America justified the inhumanity of the past.

Just as white Americans feared, World War II ignited what became black Americans' second sustained effort to make democracy real. As the editorial board of the black newspaper The Pittsburgh Courier wrote, ''We wage a two-pronged attack against our enslavers at home and those abroad who will enslave us.'' Woodard's blinding is largely seen as one of the catalysts for the decades-long rebellion we have come to call the civil rights movement. But it is useful to pause and remember that this was the second mass movement for black civil rights, the first being Reconstruction. As the centennial of slavery's end neared, black people were still seeking the rights they had fought for and won after the Civil War: the right to be treated equally by public institutions, which was guaranteed in 1866 with the Civil Rights Act; the right to be treated as full citizens before the law, which was guaranteed in 1868 by the 14th Amendment; and the right to vote, which was guaranteed in 1870 by the 15th Amendment. In response to black demands for these rights, white Americans strung them from trees, beat them and dumped their bodies in muddy rivers, assassinated them in their front yards, firebombed them on buses, mauled them with dogs, peeled back their skin with fire hoses and murdered their children with explosives set off inside a church.

For the most part, black Americans fought back alone. Yet we never fought only for ourselves. The bloody freedom struggles of the civil rights movement laid the foundation for every other modern rights struggle. This nation's white founders set up a decidedly undemocratic Constitution that excluded women, Native Americans and black people, and did not provide the vote or equality for most Americans. But the laws born out of black resistance guarantee the franchise for all and ban discrimination based not just on race but on gender, nationality, religion and ability. It was the civil rights movement that led to the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which upended the racist immigration quota system intended to keep this country white. Because of black Americans, black and brown immigrants from across the globe are able to come to the United States and live in a country in which legal discrimination is no longer allowed. It is a truly American irony that some Asian-Americans, among the groups able to immigrate to the United States because of the black civil rights struggle, are now suing universities to end programs designed to help the descendants of the enslaved.

No one cherishes freedom more than those who have not had it. And to this day, black Americans, more than any other group, embrace the democratic ideals of a common good. We are the most likely to support programs like universal health care and a higher minimum wage, and to oppose programs that harm the most vulnerable. For instance, black Americans suffer the most from violent crime, yet we are the most opposed to capital punishment. Our unemployment rate is nearly twice that of white Americans, yet we are still the most likely of all groups to say this nation should take in refugees.

The truth is that as much democracy as this nation has today, it has been borne on the backs of black resistance. Our founding fathers may not have actually believed in the ideals they espoused, but black people did. As one scholar, Joe R. Feagin, put it, ''Enslaved African-Americans have been among the foremost freedom-fighters this country has produced.'' For generations, we have believed in this country with a faith it did not deserve. Black people have seen the worst of America, yet, somehow, we still believe in its best.

They say our people were born on the water.

When it occurred, no one can say for certain. Perhaps it was in the second week, or the third, but surely by the fourth, when they had not seen their land or any land for so many days that they lost count. It was after fear had turned to despair, and despair to resignation, and resignation to an abiding understanding. The teal eternity of the Atlantic Ocean had severed them so completely from what had once been their home that it was as if nothing had ever existed before, as if everything and everyone they cherished had simply vanished from the earth. They were no longer Mbundu or Akan or Fulani. These men and women from many different nations, all shackled together in the suffocating hull of the ship, they were one people now.

Just a few months earlier, they had families, and farms, and lives and dreams. They were free. They had names, of course, but their enslavers did not bother to record them. They had been made black by those people who believed that they were white, and where they were heading, black equaled ''slave,'' and slavery in America required turning human beings into property by stripping them of every element that made them individuals. This process was called seasoning, in which people stolen from western and central Africa were forced, often through torture, to stop speaking their native tongues and practicing their native religions.

But as the sociologist Glenn Bracey wrote, ''Out of the ashes of white denigration, we gave birth to ourselves.'' For as much as white people tried to pretend, black people were not chattel. And so the process of seasoning, instead of erasing identity, served an opposite purpose: In the void, we forged a new culture all our own.

Today, our very manner of speaking recalls the Creole languages that enslaved people innovated in order to communicate both with Africans speaking various dialects and the English-speaking people who enslaved them. Our style of dress, the extra flair, stems back to the desires of enslaved people—shorn of all individuality—to exert their own identity. Enslaved people would wear their hat in a jaunty manner or knot their head scarves intricately. Today's avant-garde nature of black hairstyles and fashion displays a vibrant reflection of enslaved people's determination to feel fully human through self-expression. The improvisational quality of black art and music comes from a culture that because of constant disruption could not cling to convention. Black naming practices, so often impugned by mainstream society, are themselves an act of resistance. Our last names belong to the white people who once owned us. That is why the insistence of many black Americans, particularly those most marginalized, to give our children names that we create, that are neither European nor from Africa, a place we have never been, is an act of self-determination. When the world listens to quintessential American music, it is our voice they hear. The sorrow songs we sang in the fields to soothe our physical pain and find hope in a freedom we did not expect to know until we died became American gospel. Amid the devastating violence and poverty of the Mississippi Delta, we birthed jazz and blues. And it was in the deeply impoverished and segregated neighborhoods where white Americans forced the descendants of the enslaved to live that teenagers too poor to buy instruments used old records to create a new music known as hip-hop.

Our speech and fashion and the drum of our music echoes Africa but is not African. Out of our unique isolation, both from our native cultures and from white America, we forged this nation's most significant original culture. In turn, ''mainstream'' society has coveted our style, our slang and our song, seeking to appropriate the one truly American culture as its own. As Langston Hughes wrote in 1926, ''They'll see how beautiful I am/And be ashamed—/I, too, am America.''

For centuries, white Americans have been trying to solve the ''Negro problem.'' They have dedicated thousands of pages to this endeavor. It is common, still, to point to rates of black poverty, out-of-wedlock births, crime and college attendance, as if these conditions in a country built on a racial caste system are not utterly predictable. But crucially, you cannot view those statistics while ignoring another: that black people were enslaved here longer than we have been free.

At 43, I am part ofthe first generation of black Americans in the history of the United States to be born into a society in which black people had full rights of citizenship. Black people suffered under slavery for 250 years; we have been legally ''free'' for just 50. Yet in that briefest of spans, despite continuing to face rampant discrimination, and despite there never having been a genuine effort to redress the wrongs of slavery and the century of racial apartheid that followed, black Americans have made astounding progress, not only for ourselves but also for all Americans.

What if America understood, finally, in this 400th year, that we have never been the problem but the solution?

When I was a child—I must have been in fifth or sixth grade—a teacher gave our class an assignment intended to celebrate the diversity of the great American melting pot. She instructed each of us to write a short report on our ancestral land and then draw that nation's flag. As she turned to write the assignment on the board, the other black girl in class locked eyes with me. Slavery had erased any connection we had to an African country, and even if we tried to claim the whole continent, there was no ''African'' flag. It was hard enough being one of two black kids in the class, and this assignment would just be another reminder of the distance between the white kids and us. In the end, I walked over to the globe near my teacher's desk, picked a random African country and claimed it as my own.

I wish, now, that I could go back to the younger me and tell her that her people's ancestry started here, on these lands, and to boldly, proudly, draw the stars and those stripes of the American flag.

We were told once, by virtue of our bondage, that we could never be American. But it was by virtue of our bondage that we became the most American of all.