

The Enduring Legacy of Black Disenfranchisement: A Call-in for Envisioning a Blacker Future

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Columbia University & Slavery Course

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History does not belong only to its narrators, professional or amateur. While some of us debate what history is or was, others take it in their own hands.[1]

The paradox of education is precisely this: that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated.[2]

Introduction

As a queer, multi-ethnic, first-generation low-income student, born and raised in New York City, I have always found myself looking to understand myself and the world around me. In particular, my interest in how power and identity are created and negotiated, throughout time, motivates me to work to empower those of marginalized and minoritized identities to take hold of their own narratives and refuse the Western canon as much as possible.

The ways in which individuals relate to one another—particularly the ways in which individuals distance themselves from a perceived ‘other’—is influenced by a nation’s

ideological founding, institutions, and interpersonal connections. Ideologies, institutions, and interpersonal relations all articulate dynamics that trickle down and are internalized on an intrapersonal level. It is throughout these 'four modes of relating' or 'connecting' to the world that our sense of self is conceived and continually adapted, likewise affecting and changing the external forces. The ways in which these dynamics and understandings manifest are nuanced and innumerable, however, throughout time, certain patterns emerge in any given society. It is for this reason that we create systems of knowledge and explore what it means to be ourselves. History, for example, claims to be a process of unearthing narratives of events and processes that have occurred so as to show 'truth'. History is the sense made of patterns that are visible to a given historian.

Ideologies – fundamental beliefs – help to drive human action. However, without institutions, actions seem to be without sense, or pattern. The creation of institutions serves to provide support to the ideologies. They provide the basis for social norms and expectations, which can be better regarded as the interpersonal level in which ideologies manifest themselves. Beliefs and interpretations of patterns and occurrences are filtered through the valuation an institution has placed on it, demonstrating its proximity – or distance – to the prevailing ideologies. Finally, because these interpersonal experiences reaffirm the belief systems – the fundamental ideology in identity, the expectation is that they become internalized as 'true' on an individual level.

At the root of racism, anti-blackness, "negrophobia,"[3] and white supremacy – depending on whatever term you prefer – is the belief-made-axiom that there is some fundamental difference between humans— namely a biological one.[4] Being the ideological backdrop to our outlook and all our experiences in the world, we subsequently devise and contrive methods of trying to interpret and understand the world. Thus, what we perceive to be an unfamiliarity or novelty in our life experience necessitates support and validation. The prolonged (ab)use of African people for most of the development of the modern world needed such forms of justification.

The fundamental ideology underlying the driving forces of race-based conquest is that there is a fundamental difference between the potential in humans. When this is taken in on an individual level, the result is a world that is driven by a power struggle centered

on identity— specifically the right to one's own life. 300 years of colonization and conquest by European civilizations – 300 years of intentional systems and justifications for the Maafa[5] of Africans, the genocide of American indigenous people, and the abuse of Asian diasporic people – have created generations of white Americans that have never had to challenge the fundamental ideologies that outline the United States. Columbia is a part of this human legacy, and, existing at a site with a large population with a vast array of experiences and identities, it ought to better use the viewpoints of those current at the institution to better reorganize and shape itself. It is not enough for the physical makeup of the student body to look different.

I repeat: It is not enough for our physical bodies to exist here.

This paper –illustrative rather than comprehensive – is organized around two interconnected theses. First, that the existing histories of Columbia University fail to give visibility and voice to those in non-dominant positions in society. As a result, the existing constructed narratives do not critically examine the events and processes by which the University was established. A second, but related, point this paper attempts to address is that *history* as a discipline, without the utmost intention, simply upholds the narrative white supremacy. This affects us in two ways: one being the creation and affirmation of some kind of 'distance' from 'the past'; another being the ideological inferences that suggest how power ought to be distributed in academia, and the world.

Ultimately this paper calls for more integrated and interdisciplinary scholarship surrounding the production of power and identity, as well as how they interact in socio-cultural and political sectors of life. However, in continuing to produce semi-historical narratives, Michel-Rolph Trouillot offers warning against focusing on 'the past', as it can divert "us from the present injustices for which previous generations only set the foundations." [6] Trouillot helps us to envision what researchers need to focus on in order to bring light to current day issues as they relate to past legacies. Using his personal proximity of experience to subject also helps us recognize the advantages – and reality – that subjectively informed viewpoints have in challenging increasingly outdated modes of academia.

Institutionalized racism goes beyond the attitudes or beliefs that there exist superior and inferior races—it is behavior and institutions that provide material support ('facts') to such attitudes and beliefs by the discursive suppression of minority and marginalized groups. Academic racism can be best understood as the process by which educational institutions – such as colleges and universities – develop and maintain institutional power by producing standards and patterns that, using the pretense of objectivity, are historically racist in ideology and remain today, de facto, as a parasitic prescription.

I contend that understanding racism, both in ideology and institutions, are keys to perceiving why social, cultural, and political ideologies emerging from non-white Americans are rarely afforded consideration and often silenced among the professional history establishment. Furthermore, institutionalized racism and political ideology are deeply intertwined with the evolution of scholarship in this country. Politics are best understood as the exercise of power, and in the case of the development of the United States and the modern world, that means money. The valuation of scholarship is entwined with the bourgeois necessitation to produce a means of establishing who could be considered an 'expert', and thus provided authority to speak on political matters, or certified with degrees of mastery in a given field of specialized knowledge.

What is History?

“Human beings participate in history both as actors and as narrators.”[7]

“History is not the past.

It is the present.

We carry our history with us.

We are our history.

If we pretend otherwise, we literally are criminals.”[8]

I have an ongoing interest in negotiations of power between identity and language. Who is afforded power and credibility? Who gets to tell a story? History, not unlike other

disciplines we hide behind in ivy towers, is firmly rooted in an institutionalized form of academic racism — one that, to this day, is used to justify ongoing disenfranchisement of African Americans and other people of color, as well as poor and working class white people. Most of the history that has been written has come from those in dominant positions in society. It has been noted that merchant and elite families used their wealth to fund (and inform) the development of branches of knowledge, so too does their underlying rationale — to retain their individual power — get encoded into their valuation systems. Similarly, history has often been written — and funded — by members of the same class of people of who participate in the active side of the production of history— working to inform the present moment.

History is the *human* narration of one's reality as seen by a historian, and as a result, is subject to unfairly representing narratives in favor or opposition of held beliefs. Trouillot calls these points of negotiation — in which one narration becomes accepted over another — 'silences'. He points to 4 kinds of 'silences' that occur within the production of history. The first is a silencing in the production of 'historical' sources. Which events get described or recalled in a manner which allows them to be communicated outside of the present in which they occurred? Not everything gets remembered or recorded. Every day, parts of our reality are silenced, intentionally or not. The second silencing occurs in the creation of archives — that is, the repositories of historical records. Here too information is subject to the treatment of humans: decisions are made, accidents occur, ideologies cloud interpretation, and some of the recorded past is silenced and inaccurately captures the range of experiences. This kind of archival silencing is usually permanent because the records do not get preserved — such as in the case of Columbia's missing records from multiple moves; other times the silencing manifests as competition for narration.

Third, silencing occurs when the narrator decides to write a history. Because archives are massive — as any and all fragments might be considered 'evidence' in the right (or wrong) hands — choices, selections, and valuation must be done. Though a historian will try, there is no hope for total objectivity here— they have to consciously and intentionally silence portions of an experience and conversation. Finally, the last kind of

'silencing' occurs because of the existing canon, institutions, and dominant ideologies generally accepted. This canon is different for historians, critical readers, the general public and so on, but only a handful of narrations become part of an accepted "history." [9] This 'history', as a result of multiple layers of silencing, presents itself as true, unless it leaves itself open to critiques.

Trouillot explains history, as a discipline, and its production as an articulation of power that encodes itself within the narrative. He calls it the "fruit of power," but notes that it also retains an ability to render itself invisible— "the ultimate mark" of its power. In order to challenge the dominant ideologies, its roots need be exposed. He also notes that the vernacular use of the word offers a semantic ambiguity contributing to the varied sources; the world implies "an irreducible distinction and yet an equally irreducible overlap between what happened and that which is said to have happened. Yet it suggests also the importance of context," suggesting the overlap and perceived distance of two sides of historicity are difficult to reconcile with the present tradition. [10] History, as a discipline, does not do well with competing narratives. Because power is being articulated through narratives, one eventually trumps the others and shape a relatively linear narrative.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot's choice to focus on Haiti – his native home – serves well in his argument regarding selective memory of dominating forces. Although Haiti would be the first free republic following the wave of Enlightenment ideals, during its fight for independence, the whites of Europe and the Americas found it inconceivable that slaves would be able to carry out a revolution. To acknowledge that there was a trend of slave resistance is to acknowledge the humanity of slaves, and thus accept them as capable of thinking of themselves as humans deserving better treatment. To acknowledge resistance as a mass phenomenon is to acknowledge the possibility that something is wrong with the system. [11] Similarly, it does not serve to the benefit the ideology of white superiority to have competing narratives from non-white voices. Over time, their voices – their experiences and interpretations of them – are often unvalued by the dominant groups, unless supportive of their ideology.

Similarly, the existing histories on Columbia University do little to mention the existence and organization of students of color around their social questions. Of four histories that are amongst the 'official' narrative of Columbia, there are only two indexed references to slavery—in reference to John Jay's sentiments against the system. This brings up Columbia's modern tradition of boasting a trend of liberal ideologies and progressivism – suggesting Columbia is a moral leader of the world – while rarely taking the time to reflect upon the ways in which it is accountable for shaping the experiences of students of minority and marginalized identities here. Without a serious attempt to understand how the experiences of today are reflective of, and related to, those of our ancestors, only miniscule amounts of understanding, and progress, will be made.

The closest we get to a theorization surrounding why black students begin to organize around their own identity politics is in *Stand, Columbia*, which provides a dubious image of black students, suggesting that following the 1968 protests, any and all demonstrations that came from students of marginalized identities was solely to test the limits of the university.[12] Foner's report on Columbia University's ties to slavery ends with the assumption that there is no more work that needs to be done on campus today. He writes, "It would take a social revolution in the country and an unprecedented crisis on the campus itself for Columbia finally to move beyond the long history of involvement with slavery and racism, and toward becoming the more diverse, more inclusive institution it is today." [13]

The Infusion of Academia with Racism

The history of the United States – and the development of its institutions – is one about the anxieties surrounding emerging differences amongst peoples, especially during periods when nationalism and social homogenization were becoming normalized. The American college and American slavery grew up together and in mutually reinforcing ways. The students of King's College, for example, found themselves immersed in world with the physical, economic, intellectual and moral manifestations of slavery; in fact, the students of Columbia University today do too.

As Wilder shows, in the era of slavery, universities helped match people to their places in a slave labor system: elite white men were, in effect, being taught to rule society through gaining status of 'expertise' and mastery, in turn helping nurture the structures and ideas that kept people of African descent enslaved. Even following the abolition of chattel slavery, for blacks to remain in a white society required it to institutionalize not only their status as laborers but, also, their peculiarity as persons. They were doubly ostracized, cut off from all other laborers and from all other persons.[14] As social questions surrounding the positionality of black people in American identity and socio-political life emerge, ongoing colonization of the Americas helped to provide "the most potent impetus for the transformation of European ethnocentrism into scientific racism." [15]

Columbia's most explicit relationship to slavery is the economic system through which elite families accrued wealth and influenced their cities on socio-cultural and institutional levels. By the mid-eighteenth century, New York held the largest number of slaves of any colony north of Maryland, and Manhattan held the third largest concentration of slaves in a North American city, after Charleston and New Orleans.[16]

When King's College was originally conceived as a theological institution, John Livingston – the patriarch of the family – had an increasing concern that the Church of England would fully establish itself in New York and Anglicans would dominate political and economic life. This fear was well founded on the actions of the Church in England and Ireland, enforcing religion. He worried that if an established church were to found an educational institution, 'nonconformists' would be prohibited from attaining an education and thus barred from public and military office, just as was the case in the British colonies. Such an exclusion would diminish the Livingston family's agency and, more importantly, their prestige in society.[17]

King's College, in addition to having sixteen merchant trustees, enrolled eighty-nine sons of Atlantic traders, more than *any* other college in British North America. In comparison, Yale and Princeton each enrolled ten. The Livingstons were one of many merchant families who patronized the college. Historians who compiled rankings of the most prolific New York City slave traders in the 18th century listed Philip Livingston,

Robert's son, as third. Philip Livingston imported 219 people from the West Indies and owned shares on at least 15 ships that traveled to Africa and the West Indies.

Three Livingston men became founding trustees of King's College in 1754, and before 1800, six additional Livingstons became trustees, and one served as treasurer. In addition, six Livingston boys were students before the Revolution. Before King's College was chartered in 1749, William Livingston anonymously published a pamphlet advocating that New York should construct a college. He described education and the improvement of our reason as the glory of human nature, that which constitutes the difference between the polite nations of Europe and the rude savages of Africa. In the inception of the college, white supremacy was already the norm; it just had not yet been institutionalized or memorialized. [18]

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a valuation on 'expertise' and evolving fields for the creation of knowledge likewise contributed to the preservation or normalization of the white perspective upon the world. Once religion was divorced from shaping dominant narrative of American society, the opinions and beliefs of white Americans could now be explored, and justified, through disciplines of inquiry; *truth* could be 'proved' using 'facts'. This is a complicated story to tell because these disciplines tended to evolve out of a history that has been necessitated by the decentralization of religion from the ideological and infrastructural backbones of the United States (and a majority of the Western world).

An example of that progression: whereas religion, particularly Catholicism, was used both as a tool and justification for colonization and imperialism, later, Darwin's system of classification, and by extension the biological sciences as a whole, would be used to justify the cruelty that white settlers has enacted upon the world. Ideological racism was becoming institutionalized through science. It persists, and it's not too far different from its origin. For example, in 2014, Nicholas Wade, a long-time staff writer for the Science Times section of the New York Times, published *A Troublesome Inheritance: Genes, Race and Human History*, in which he rearticulates a history of using genetics to explain social inequalities.

Craig Wilder further traces the institutionalization of racism within science:

The institutionalization of medicine—the organization of science faculties and medical colleges in the colonies—happened as slave owners, planters, land speculators, and Atlantic merchants began sponsoring scientific research. The families who paid for the establishment of medical schools and science faculties also oversaw those developments.[19]

The institutionalization of racism is also reflected throughout the evolution of rhetoric in the United States. For instance, ‘Negro’ and ‘slave’ become, at times, interchangeable amongst interpersonal interactions, as well as institutionalized through legislature. As opinions become seen as ‘truth’ in light of ‘facts’, white Americans not only begin to dominate the way history is being told, but the way that future experiences (for whites and non-whites) would be shaped, as well the ways in which they would be interpreted by mainstream society.

The Trouble of History

While Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s *Silencing the Past* humbly presents itself as just another iteration of the history of Haiti, he quickly delves into a critically analytical philosophy of history, as a discipline. Reality – what we individually perceive to be as ‘what is’ – is shaped by events and processes. History, however, is the human narration of a reality as seen by the historian. Trouillot somewhat applauds serious and honest historians who try to tell stories as accurately as possible from the various records left throughout time. However, a central part of Trouillot’s thesis is that much of the past, even that which is preserved in records, gets silenced, looked over, or pushed to the background, often to the benefit of the dominant narrative of a place. His book illustrates the story of how histories are produced and how this selective silencing occurs. The flip side is there too: history is not just the story of what is silenced, but also what is not silenced. That which is broadcasted and disseminated throughout public opinion is what generally becomes accepted as ‘history’.

Trouillot points out human participation in history as both actors and narrators. Events and processes leave indicators of themselves, usually records or texts. It is from these pieces of 'evidence' that history is narrated. However, because no historian or narrator – of the past or present – can have access to all sources, not equally values them in producing a narrative. To that end, we might consider all historical narratives a work of fiction, but with the potential for changing ideologies. Because history is not regarded as 'fiction' by most who consume it, it shapes our view of the past – which now seems like distant there rather than an ongoing now – as well as tries to explain our present, and dictate our future. Historians, then, run the risk of simply rearticulating the same ideologies, just in more codified ways; any of these things are 'inauthentic' narratives and positions. Regarding this subject Trouillot says that

no amount of historical research about the Holocaust and no amount of guilt about Germany's past can serve as a substitute for marching in the streets against German skinheads today [...] Authenticity implies a relation with what is known that duplicates the two sides of historicity: it engages us both as actors and narrators. Thus, authenticity cannot reside in attitudes toward a discrete past kept alive through narratives.[20]

If we fail to maintain criticism of past events and of our present, we subscribe ourselves to producing stories that uphold ideological status quos. 'History' makes sense to us because it has so often been told from different angles of the same axiom. As more historians do work without critiquing themselves, each other, and methodologies, a culture of ignorance emerges.

Looking to Other Disciplines

There is an absence of an accurate historical accounting of the illusive quest for equality and freedom for all of the citizens of the United States, especially those of color. Looking to other lenses of analysis and understanding aid in revealing the deep-seated impact this legacy of slavery and racism has on our modern day world. A report by Dēmos, which means 'the people', and the Institute on Assets and Social Policy (IASP)

at the start of 2017 determines that structural racism and inequality are far more responsible for the 'racial wealth gap' than personal effort. Differences in wealth accumulation are particularly important to examine because so much of the development of institutions – namely those pertaining to higher education – are inextricably linked to the evolution of status and wealth. Wealth generates the potential for opportunity. An excerpt states:

Although 77 percent of respondents [to a survey] also identified “racial discrimination” as a reason that black Americans might have a harder time economically, 66 percent asserted that “discrimination that is based on the prejudice of individual people” was a greater problem than “discrimination that is built into our laws and institutions.”

Racial inequality in wealth is rooted in historic discrimination and perpetuated by policy: our analyses show that individual behavior is not the driving force behind racial wealth disparities. [21]

Building a more equitable society will require a shift in focus away from individual behavior towards addressing structural and institutional racism. In particular, we need more interdisciplinary scholarship to better understand and address the complex interactions that occur within an individual and amongst societies. Fortunately, Joy DeGruy, Ph.D. provides an example of what such scholarship has to offer existing disciplines.

In *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, Dr. DeGruy's essential thesis is that slavery, is an area that requires more rigorous study and research. This is essential for us to better understand and master the facts surrounding slavery as a multifaceted institution that both shapes and is shaped by ideology. She believes that only through an acceptance and recognition of the full reality of American slavery will black Americans understand both enormity of the crime of bondage – literal or psychological – and, secondly, that as descendants of the dominated, we have nothing to be ashamed of. Her book also holds stakes for non-black readers in being able to recognize ourselves as humans continuing the story of America. It is up to those alive today to challenge the dominant narratives being told about our communities.

American slavery was the economic cornerstone on which American wealth and power were built – wealth and power which lasts to this day, as do the psycho-social consequences of American slavery, both for the descendants of the enslaved as well as the descendants of the enslavers. Dr. DeGruy helps readers to understand the multifaceted impact of slavery on black life – how black Americans relate to the world, as well as how they relate to each other. From research conducted on other social groups, such as descendants of Jewish people who survived the Holocaust, we know that the experiences of oppression and trauma are pervasive in developing second and third generations. She posits then, that African Americans, suffering at least 5 generations of slavery and abuse, should have a well substantiated basis for understanding trauma.[22] Her deeply personally work calls for more emphatic approaches to understanding the persisting social problems in the world, particularly those centered around the black experience. She calls for more scholarship to come directly from people of the African American experience to contribute to the growing scholarship, so as to help challenge the status quo.

However, even the way history is memorialized and viewed is affected by racism. A 1997 study provides some empirically based theorizing about patterns of distortion in collective memories. [23] Baumeister and Hastings argue that the goal of mainstream sources is to deliver a somewhat flattering portrayal of White America intended to shape opinion and truth. Students from kindergarten to the twelfth grade are being presented with fictional histories complete with omission of wrongdoings to the underprivileged by the government, and subsequent critical analyses of the past and contemporary moment, in order to foster a sense of American nationalism.

By contrast, studies Stevenson in 1993 purport that African Americans have more exposure to informal *and* formal teaching of historical accounts of racism in the United States than descendants of American settlers; specifically, African Americans are more likely to receive socialization from parents on the existence of racism.[24]

Experiences—trauma in particular—are shared across generations of minority and marginalized peoples. Experiences shape our perceptions of our world and the ways in which we choose to engage with it. For people born of marginalized and minoritized

identities, it is impossible to divorce our past from our present, experience from a present moment. And they're not wrong to.

In Leslie M. Harris' book, *In the Shadow of Slavery* – a historical overview of African American agency in New York City – she spends a great deal of time noting how for people in minority and marginalized positions in society, their professions were inherently politicized engagements with changing the course of history. However, despite the increasing number of black professionals using their positions to engage in interpersonal politics, the lack of folks who have relevant personal experiences on the institutional side of these systems made it difficult for drastic changes to be made:

To be a [black] teacher in a black public school was almost by definition to be politically engaged, not only because of the high value and hope placed on education itself, but also, more directly, because of the conflicts over funding with white politicians, especially since education was valued so highly by blacks [...] teachers were given a degree of independence to solve these day-to-day issues, but whites controlled the school boards and city councils and thus the budget for education. This power over monies directly linked teaching and politics, an issue that brought many black women, who were an active force in the teaching profession, into politics.[25]

We can't just look at historical events from a distance. The University exists as a nexus where identity, power, and history intersect and interact to produce experiences and questions that we, as individuals and as a society, have never faced before. However, our basic denial of the experiences shared *and vocalized* by non-white folk throughout history, as informed and forced by white society, makes it impossible for us to reconcile our past. Why is it that, today, people are able to empathize with figures like Anne Frank and John Gunther, but incapable of connecting with or understanding me?

Looking Forward

“To watch the TV screen for any length of time

is to learn some really frightening things

about the American sense of reality.

We are cruelly trapped between

what we would like to be and what we actually are.

And we cannot possibly become

what we would like to be until we are willing

to ask ourselves just why the lives we lead

on this continent are mainly so empty, so tame,

and so ugly.

These images are designed not to trouble,

but to reassure.

They also weaken our ability to deal

with the world as it is, ourselves as we are.”[26]

Columbia is and always will be an institution founded in white supremacy. It cannot ever expect to rid itself of its connection to slavery. With the increasing body of work from the *Columbia University and Slavery* course, we can have (somewhat) a more illustrative account of the ways in which specific occurrences and people participated in shaping their histories. Historians, too, contribute to shaping current history by demonstrating the values we hold and the stories we look to tell. But with such a long legacy of ideological and institutionalized racism in academia, we need to reframe the way in which we engage with ‘the Past’.

We have to be honest with recognizing that this institution, in neither its foundation nor contemporary, has been for students of marginalized and minority identities. There are few infrastructures in place that: (a) didn’t come to fruition off the backs of students of these identities and; (b) sufficiently represent or support our efforts on this campus.

Organizations that have traditionally fallen underneath the Activities Board of Columbia

are misrepresented in ideological framing. Our identities and our struggles are not activities that can be opted in and out of. We need a real system in which we are given more autonomy, as well as connectivity to administration. The Student's Governing Board of Columbia, in conjunction with the University's Office of the Chaplain is closer to this ideal, yet desperately needs restructuring if it genuinely seeks to be an avenue through which students can actively voice their concerns and participate in changing the campus. We need an infrastructure that serves to unify and provide a channel of access to institutional bodies between all student organizations and committees in the University Network whose purpose is to work on questions of Intra-Community, Inter-Community, and Community Advancement for identity groups historically oppressed by society or underserved by the University. The University needs to recognize its complicity in producing dynamics that continue to oppress and overlook the voices and concerns of different segments of our community.

Reading Trouillot provides historians and readers with the realization – if they have not come to it upon their own experiences – that narratives are made of silences. Not all of which are deliberate or even perceived as a silencing, these 'silences', in addition to whatever actually gets articulated, produce images of the present that are neither wholly accurate nor clear[27]. Throughout this process of learning how to go through the process similar to that of historians, it is extremely troubling that there is not the tendency to perceive the information in light of the vast range of experiences of today's world. However, I exist at someone who has had a significant number of experiences and interactions that have both informed and been informed by my identity. As a result, any engagement with information is an attempt to both understand others and myself. That the discipline of history does not seem to inspire that of most is questionable. What obligation does history as a discipline present to those who do the work of producing its tales? In an interview about the lessons learned while conducting his research, Craig Wilder notes that

[...] we [historians] get promoted and applauded and awarded and rewarded for writing the history of slavery and the churches. We write about slavery in Quakers. We write about slavery and the presidency. Thomas Jefferson and his slaves. Washington and

his slaves [...] We have as much moral obligation to write about slavery within *our own* histories and to be as *brutally honest* as that as we can. Because, in fact, that's the foundation for an honest tackling of the great social questions of hour, too.[28]

Wilder's reflections support Trouillet's idea that the more authentic engagements with history are those that most directly relate their work to the social problems of their era. However, studies that center around applying history to understanding the progression of identity and social problems throughout time do not get counted in 'history'. They often parts of new departments and branches of learning — such as African American Studies and Comparative Ethnic Studies, for example. Why? Do these disciplines not engage with history both as a narrative and as an ever-informing force on the present? The development of such departments in higher education seek to understand and directly challenge the status quo— it is in the ideological framework of such disciplines to be critical.

As the world changes, societies are becoming more diverse and connected. Likewise, it is important that our methods for exploring and understanding ourselves evolve with us. Single-lens analyses are useful for the specificity and focus they provide, but limiting in producing knowledge that is reflective of the way experiences are formed. We need more interdisciplinary approaches to investigating in order to better address the ever-evolving social questions of today.

Furthermore, from the level of an individual, how might we understand the ways in which history informs an experience? With each new generation, how history is remembered gets changed based on the ways in which ideological, institutional and interpersonal forces transform. Well first, we need to capture that experience in some way. People have become increasingly aware of the need for individual experiences to be presented amongst patterns of observation; we have been moving towards an arguably more empathic understanding of history. How historical events affected people on the individual level matters.

Endnotes

[1] Michel-Rolph Trouillet, *Silencing the Past*.

[2] James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers," 1963

[3] McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia*, 168

[4] Race is a concept of society that insist there is a genetic significance behind human variations in skin color that transcends outward appearance. However, race has no scientific merit outside of sociological classifications. There are no significant genetic variations within the human species to justify the division of "races." For further reading on the development of biology as it pertains to race, see: King, James. *The Biology of Race*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981. p. 118)

[5] The Trans-Atlantic slave trade, referred to as the "middle passage" in the Western canon, is now increasingly being referred to as the "Maafa, which in the Swahili language means "disaster, calamity, or catastrophe" (DeGruy, 73).

[6] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 99

[7] Ibid, 14

[8] Baldwin, James. "I Am Not Your Negro," *Velvet Films, Inc.*

[9] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 86

[10] Ibid, 12-14

[11] Ibid, 84

[12] McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia*, 272

[13] Foner, "Columbia and Slavery," 60

[14] Davis, Thomas Joseph. "Slavery in Colonial New York City," *Rare Book and Manuscript Library*, Columbia University.

[15] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 69

[16] Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 29

[17] Lustig, *Privilege and Prerogative*, 86

[18] Liao, Sharon. "A Merchants' College:" King's College (1754-1784) and Slavery, *Columbia University and Slavery*, Spring 2016.

[19] Wilder, *Ebony and Ivy*, 268.

Also see 265 for mention of Felix Pascalis, an example of a scientist who did not need to abandon his faith of racial inferiority to support his faith in a shared genesis. Sitting in an elite intellectual company, he uses his position to support race-driven science.

[20] Trouillet, *Silencing the Past*, 99

[21] See Traub et al., "The Asset Value of Whiteness: Understanding the Racial Wealth Gap."

[22] DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, 120

[23] Baumeister, Roy F., and Stephen Pennebacker Hastings. "Distortions of collective memory: How groups flatter and deceive themselves," *Collective memory of political events: Social psychological perspectives*, (pp. 277-293). Hillsdale, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc, xi, 303 pp.

[24] See Stevenson, H. C. (1993a, b).

[25] Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 52

[26] Baldwin, James. "I Am Not Your Negro," *Velvet Films, Inc.*

[27] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 100

[28] Wilder, Craig Steven. Interview by Diane Rehm.