

THE AFRICAN AMERICANS

MANY RIVERS TO CROSS



HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.
DONALD YACOVONE



THE AFRICAN AMERICANS

ALSO BY HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.

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HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR., AND DONALD YACOVONE



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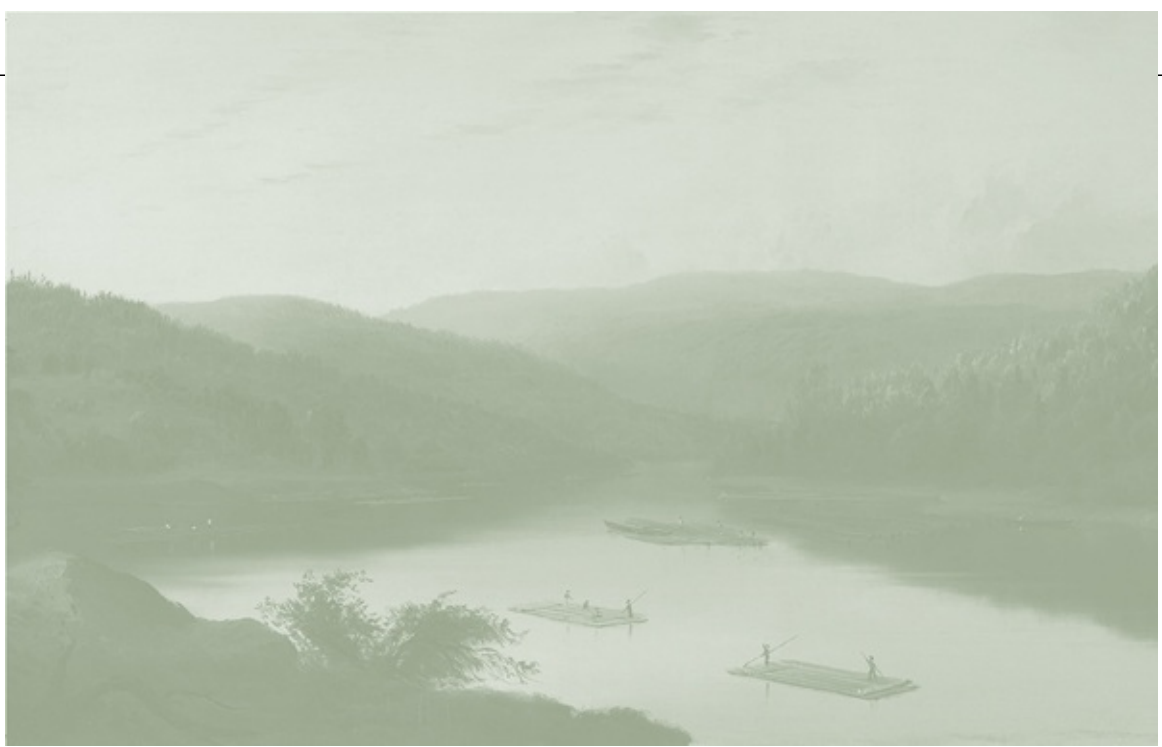
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INTRODUCTION

BY HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.



“THE MOST MAGNIFICENT DRAMA IN THE LAST THOUSAND YEARS OF HUMAN HISTORY is the transportation of ten million human beings out of the dark beauty of their mother continent into the new-found El Dorado of the West. They descended into Hell; and in the third century they arose from the dead, in the finest effort to achieve democracy for the working millions which this world has ever seen. It was a tragedy that beggared the Greek; it was an upheaval of humanity like the Reformation and the French Revolution.”

— W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880*

The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross is a companion book to the six-part, six-hour PBS series of the same title, airing for the first time on national, prime-time broadcast in the fall of 2015. This book is the basis of the series and presents in much greater detail the 500-year history of the African American people since the black Spanish conquistador, Juan Garrido, accompanied Ponce de León on his expedition into what is now the state of Florida. It is entirely fitting that the publication of this book and the airing of the television series coincide with this very important 500th anniversary of the presence of persons of African descent in what is today the continental United States.

The African Americans is the first documentary series—since the nine-part *History of the Negro People* aired on National Educational Television in 1965, and the one-hour documentary, *Black History: Lost, Stolen, or Strayed*, narrated by Bill Cosby and broadcast in 1968—to chronicle the full sweep of African American history from the origins of the transatlantic slave trade on the west and central coasts of sub-Saharan Africa through five centuries of remarkable historical events right up to today, when our country has a black president yet remains a nation deeply divided by race and class. Indeed, the series and this book end with accounts of the reelection and second inauguration of President Barack Hussein Obama.

One of the central themes of *The African Americans* is the exploration of the diversity of ethnic origins of the people from Africa and their descendants whose enslavement led to the creation of the African American people, as well as the multiplicity of cultural institutions, political strategies and beliefs, and religious and social institutions that the African American people have created since Juan Garrido and other Africans first explored these shores. All of these elements have defined black society and culture in its extraordinarily rich and compelling diversity over this half millennium: from slavery to freedom, from the plantation to the presidency, from Black Power to the White House. E

highlighting the complex internal debates and divisions within the Black Experience historically, *The African Americans* seeks to show, through fascinating stories about the lives of the people whose sacrifices and dreams made black history, the rich diversity and resilience of the African American community, which the black abolitionist Martin R. Delany perceptively described as early as the 1850s as “a nation within a nation.”

Black America, as we will see, has never been a truly uniform entity; in fact, its members have been expressing their differences of opinion from their very first days in this country. Even the road to freedom was not linear; rather, it flowed much like the course of a river, full of loops and eddies, slowing and occasionally reversing current, until ultimately finding its outlet. *The African Americans* also emphasizes the idea that African American history encompasses multiple continents and venues and must be viewed through a transnational perspective to be fully understood, even—or especially—in the earliest years of the history of the slave trade and the institution of slavery, revealing the connections among the experiences of black people in the United States, Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica, and Mexico, for example.

This book is composed of stories about black people who were both pioneering and innovative with the human endeavors of ordinary individuals, unsung heroes whose passions and beliefs changed their world or shaped the worlds that black people made and occupied. In other words, *The African Americans* is an account of emblematic people, individuals whose stories put a name and a face on a large and complex historical period.

But we also stress material history, especially technological developments and advances, the ways in which trade, industry, and inventions such as the sextant, the slave ship, the cotton gin, the printing press, chromolithography, radio, and the video camera shaped African American history. This is a story, in part, about how a commodity, cotton, was used to turn a group of human beings into commodities, and how those human beings continued to assert their agency, their subjectivity, until finally gaining their freedom. This is a book and a documentary series about how black people, interacting with other human beings in this country and abroad, built their world.

The African Americans foregrounds the marvelous internal worlds of culture and social institutions, both sacred and secular, that black people created in this country within their own spheres of existence, spheres at once self-contained yet reflecting, interacting, and deconstructing with the larger white world that surrounded them. Above all else, this book is concerned with showing that even in the midst of great political adversity and personal vulnerability, even under the harshest conditions, black people for 500 years have explored the fullest range of human emotions and actions: falling in and out of love, inventing novel ways to worship, stressing over the fate and fortunes of their children, and wondering about God’s purpose for their lives and their afterlives. In other words, the Black Experience is just one wondrous rendition of the larger experience of being a human being and collectively fashioning a civilization.



MY OWN FASCINATION WITH AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY BEGAN THE DAY IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL WHEN I SAW A PHOTOGRAPH OF W. E. B. DU BOIS. The caption under the picture told me he was the first black man to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard, but I wanted to know more. I wondered who this great man was, how he got there in the first place, and if I, too, might pursue a life of letters. But it would be Lerone Bennett’s columns in *Ebony* magazine in the mid-1960s that fired my imagination at the height of the civil rights movement and even more passionately as

grew up with the birth of the Black Power movement. I once wrote in longhand to Mr. Bennett and asked him if he would collect his columns into a book, not realizing that his book *Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America, 1619–1964* was in fact being published. No doubt this helps to explain why when I went to Yale as an undergraduate, I gravitated to the history major. I entered Yale in September 1969, as one of 96 black women and men in the class of 1973, the first fruits of the American academy's adventure in affirmative action. As an undergraduate, I was most interested in American political and cultural history, under the direction of John Morton Blum. But the first course that I took in the history department was called Introduction to Afro-American History. Like just about everybody black at Yale in 1969, I enrolled in this large lecture course taught by William S. McFeely, who counted among his teaching fellows a graduate student named Thomas Holt.

It was already a legendary course; it had been taught previously by Eugene Genovese. And it unfolded week by week in the increasingly volatile atmosphere of escalating protests against the Vietnam War and the simultaneous escalation of the persecution of the Black Panther Party, as well as the trial of Panther leader Bobby Seale, taking place just down the street from Calhoun College, near a Yale dormitory, in New Haven. The atmosphere in New Haven and on campus was extraordinarily explosive, and each of Professor McFeely's classes was something of an adventure as we waited for "the Revolution" to come pounding on our classroom door. Nobody missed any of those classes, first because of the quality of Professor McFeely's lectures, and second because the Panthers were likely to show up on any given day, demand "equal time" to espouse their "Ten Point Program" or attempt to intimidate us into giving donations for their meritorious "Free Breakfast Program."

Professor McFeely's lectures were vignettes about the black past that had an uncanny way of serving as allegories for what the black community was experiencing at that time. I well remember his "End of the Second Reconstruction" lecture, delivered just after President Richard M. Nixon, on January 19, 1970, nominated the conservative judge G. Harrold Carswell to replace Justice Abe Fortas on the Supreme Court. The auditorium was packed; you could have heard a pin drop. Threatening clouds of reaction were on the horizon, Professor McFeely warned, and unless we were vigilant, the very policies that had brought all of us black kids to Yale were going to be reversed by a conservative court. It was history teaching designed as an extended metaphor for those who would soon be history makers. Bill McFeely, who would go on to win a Pulitzer Prize in history for his biography of U. S. Grant, was our guide into the wonders of African American history.

But Professor McFeely also taught me something else, and that is, that you don't have to look like the academic subject that you are studying or teaching to be an expert on that subject. No one had a monopoly on academic inquiry simply because of their ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual preference. And despite the fact that the more militant among us had a most annoying habit of standing up during the question period to ask him what he, a white man, was doing teaching a black history course, he never lost his patience or his composure, never once admonished the student for his or her rudeness. And he did all that he could to ensure that a black historian, John W. Blassingame, would be hired the very next year to replace him as head of that class. I owe so much of my love for African American history to William S. McFeely, and it is for this reason that we have dedicated this book to him.

The documentary series of *The African Americans* is dedicated in memory of Henry Hampton. And so it is fitting that this book be dedicated in his memory as well, along with the dedication to William S. McFeely. Henry was born in 1940 and died all too soon, in 1998. He made 14 documentaries by my count, including the magnificent 14-episode series *Eyes on the Prize*, which was

broadcast in two parts, the first covering the crucial years 1954 to 1965 of the civil rights movement, the second exploring its post-1965 afterlife. *Eyes on the Prize* is the gold standard of the historical documentary. Henry won seven Emmys, among a legion of other justly deserved awards and honors.

When I moved to Harvard in 1991, Henry invited me to his offices at Blackside, his film company, in Boston's South End. We hardly knew one another. Patiently, as if he had all the time in the world, he walked me through his stunningly efficient and elegant building, introducing me to his associates and partners, but more important, introducing me to the way in which documentary films are put together, from concept to filming, editing, and broadcast. He also talked to me about how to fund a film, as well as how to use academic consultants to produce the richest and most nuanced (and most historically accurate) documentaries possible. I'm not sure why he invited me to his studios or took so much of his time walking me through the production process. But by the time I left Blackside at the end of the day, I was hooked. I wasn't sure how I was going to do so, but I was determined that one day, if at all humanly possible, I would become a documentary filmmaker myself. I owe my commitment to making documentaries about the African American experience to the inspiration of Henry Hampton.

HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.

Cambridge, Massachusetts

January 28, 2013

AFRICANS IN THE AMERICAS 1500–1540

FOR GENERATIONS, WE UNDERSTOOD THE HISTORY OF NEW WORLD EXPLORATION AND COLONIZATION PRIMARILY AS A SET OF EXPERIENCES OF CONQUEST AND PROGRESS, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT WITH the most dire consequences for the “primitive” native populations that the first European explorers and settlers encountered, and “justifiably” conquered and absorbed. And, the standard story continued, these ostensibly one-sided encounters, inevitable acts of human progress and “elevation,” laid the foundation for the creation of the modern Western world, the great civilization to which we in the West are heirs.

How can one measure all that was lost in the systematic destruction or dislocation of the civilization of the peoples whom we know today as the Native Americans?

How can one fully take the toll in human suffering and the irrecoverable losses to world civilization resulting from the four centuries of obliteration of the Native American people beginning with the conquest of the Taino on the island of Hispaniola and the Arawak and the Caribs of the Greater and Lesser Antilles, beginning in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, extending to the domination and subjection of the great Inca and Aztec civilizations in the 16th century, and culminating in the dreadful Trail of Tears in the decade of the 1830s?

But as Aristotle reports Agathon, the Athenian tragic poet, as saying, “Not even God can change the past.” And while we certainly cannot change what has already happened, we as scholars, however, are duty bound to preserve the past by recording it in all of its complexity. Part of that process is restoring to the historical record the actions and words of the human beings who, collectively, made that past. Restoring the role that persons of African descent have played in the creation of the saga of Western civilization has been the motivation for our creation of *The African Americans* documentary series, and the writing of this book.

The re-peopling of the Western Hemisphere, through a series of voluntary and involuntary migrations over the past 500 years, was never a one-sided process, and it was never solely a European experience. It may come as a surprise to many Americans to learn that African people played an essential part in this process from the very beginning. According to one source, Alonso Pietro, the pilot of Columbus’s ship the *Niña* in 1492, was a mulatto (a person of mixed black and white ancestry), and in 1502 the great Italian explorer was accompanied by a black cabin boy named Diego.

The year after Columbus returned from his final voyage to the Americas in 1504, groups of Africans began arriving in the Caribbean, and several Africans had arrived in 1502, brought to Hispaniola (the island composed of modern Haiti and the Dominican Republic) by the Spanish governor of the island. In 1508, Ponce de León, usually remembered for his explorations of Florida in search of the legendary king of Ethiopia, Prester John, and his fabled fountain of youth, took armed black men with him to conquer Puerto Rico. Diego Velázquez from 1511 to 1512 employed other Africans to help seize Cuba. In fact, Velázquez advised King Ferdinand that “many black slaves” had assisted him in his conquest of the island.

Ultimately, by 1867, according to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, approximately 12 million Africans had been sold into New World slavery. Of the 11 million or so Africans who survived

the Middle Passage, only about 388,000 were shipped directly to what became the United States.¹ The African slave trade to the New World, the largest forced migration in human history, shaped the course of colonization and spawned unique Afro-European societies and cultures stretching from North America to Tierra del Fuego. Without the African presence, the history of the hemisphere—and that of the rest of the modern world—would have been vastly different.



IF NOT ALL OF THE FIRST EXPLORERS AND CONQUERORS OF NEW SPAIN WERE EUROPEAN, IT IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT—and surprising to many of us—to note that not all of the first Africans who assisted the Spanish and Portuguese came as slaves. An untold number of free people of African descent—black conquistadors born in Africa or on the Iberian Peninsula—also accompanied Spanish conquistadors such as Hernán Cortés and Ponce de León, two of the famed explorers of the vast region that would become modern Mexico and the western and southern regions of the United States. And, as we might expect, their exploits were just as heroic and just as problematic as those of their fellow conquistadors. But far more Africans came with the Spanish and the Portuguese as slaves, servants with varying degrees of freedom, attendants, or armed adventurers.

While the number of African explorers is impossible to determine, they participated, in some way, in virtually all of the Spanish expeditions in the New World in the 16th century. These black conquistadors set an example for subsequent racial relations throughout the entire Spanish colonial experience, living their daily lives with degrees of complexity that rarely would be achieved by black men and women in the early English settlements in the Caribbean and in North America. Indeed, wherever Spain set its flag of conquest in the Americas, Africans helped hold the pennant. They participated in the exploration of the lands that would become modern-day Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, Venezuela, Peru, and Chile, as well as Florida, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Men such as Juan Garrido, Esteban, Jan Rodrigues, Gaspar Yanga, Juan Bardales, Juan García, and Juan Beltrán are just a few of the better-known people of African descent who helped transform the Western Hemisphere.²

Perhaps one of the best known and most colorful of the free black conquistadors was Juan Garrido. Born about 1480 in West Africa, Garrido either was sold to Portuguese slave traders or somehow traveled on his own to Lisbon, where about 10 percent of the city was of African descent. In about 1495, he moved to Seville. There, as a free man, perhaps in the employ of a Spaniard named Pedro Garrido, he joined the 1503 expedition of Governor Nicolás de Ovando to Hispaniola—the first of many adventures.³

In a 1538 petition to the Spanish Crown asking for financial support for his services and loyalty, Garrido described himself as a free black resident of Mexico City, who for the last 30 years or more had volunteered his services to Spain. “I was present at all the invasions and conquests and pacifications which were carried out ... all of which I did at my own expense....”⁴ Garrido, along with many other free and enslaved blacks, had, in fact, participated in some of the famed expeditions by Spain against Native American populations. For example, in 1508, he and another free black man, Juan González, joined Ponce de León’s expedition against Puerto Rico. A third black man, a mixed-race conquistador named Francisco Mejías, played a key role in establishing that island’s first ranches. At his untimely death at the hands of Carib Indians, Mejías possessed more than 200 pesos of gold.



Juan Garrido armed with a pike and attending to the horse of Hernán Cortés, who is receiving an honorific neckband from Aztec officials. Akg-images.

Immediately after his Puerto Rican adventure, Garrido engaged in gold mining and secured several black slaves to assist him. With native populations decimated by European-induced disease, labor shortages plagued Spanish efforts to mine, farm, and establish sugar plantations. With a keen eye to the main chance, Garrido joined Spaniards who raided the Caribbean islands of Guadalupe, Dominica, and Santa Cruz in search of Carib slaves, Native Americans with a reputation for fierceness and cannibalism. In 1513 (and again in 1521), Garrido rejoined Ponce de León as he explored and claimed the island of Bimini and all of Florida for Spain, thereby becoming the first known African to set foot on what was to become the United States. Because we know his name and the date of his landing in Florida, in a sense we can say that Juan Garrido was the first African American, and it is somehow fitting and a bit ironic that this book is being published in the 500th anniversary year of Garrido's arrival in what is now the continental United States.

Later, Garrido made his way to Cuba, where he joined forces with Hernán Cortés and took part along with other free Africans and slaves, in the 1519 invasion of Mexico and the subjugation of the Aztec empire. In a few extraordinary examples, images of Garrido survive showing him next to Cortés or holding the reins of the Spaniard's horse. In one image published in 1581, Garrido stands in military bearing, shouldering a pike, guarding Cortés as he encounters Aztec emissaries. Older historical accounts interpreted these images as proof that Garrido was a slave, but in fact he was free. Not only was he free but, despite his pleading of impoverishment to the king of Spain in 1538, he had been handsomely rewarded for his services to Cortés with land and paid positions, especially as the doorman or guard of the Mexico City government and a caretaker of one of the city's aqueducts.

During his time in Mexico City, he engaged in more gold mining and additional expeditions within New Spain, and in 1533 joined again with Cortés in one final journey, which took him all the way to Baja California and the Pacific. He returned to his home in Mexico City in 1536 and died sometime after writing his famed petition, leaving behind a wife, probably a woman of native ethnicity, a family, and an extraordinary legacy.⁵



GARRIDO'S STORY, THAT OF A FREE BLACK MAN AND A CONQUISTADOR, IS DIFFICULT

TO MATCH. However, for sheer drama, none of the recorded experiences of the first Africans in the New World can equal that of the Moroccan-born black explorer known as Esteban. While his early years remain something of a mystery, he began his career in the Americas in 1528 with a journey to Florida in the ill-fated expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez. He would not return to the Spanish colony of Mexico for another eight years, along with only three other survivors of the 300 men who originally began the expedition, and after walking through the virgin American wilderness, across the continent for a total of some 15,000 miles.⁶

In April 1528, five vessels under the command of Narváez, the designated governor of the uncolonized region of Florida, left Havana, Cuba, and arrived in the region of Tampa Bay the next month. Narváez divided his force, sending about 100 or more up the coast while he kept 300 others to march inland in search of legendary cities of gold. By July, having suffered numerous losses, the party reached the area around modern-day Tallahassee. Dogged by oppressive heat and skilled Apalachee archers, the expedition fled west to the Gulf of Mexico in search of their ships. The vessels, however, had long since given up on the mission and returned to Cuba. Stranded, the men constructed rafts and set out to reach Mexico. According to Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, the oddly named treasurer of the expedition:

The work on these was done by the only carpenter we had, and progressed so rapidly that by the beginning on the fourth day of August, on the twentieth day of the month of September, five barges of twenty-two elbow lengths each were ready, caulked with palmetto oakum and tarred with pitch, which a Greek called Don Teodoro made from certain pines. Of the husk of palmetto and of the tails and manes of the horses we made ropes and tackles, of our shirts sails, and of the junipers that grew there we made the oars....⁷

For a month and a half the survivors drifted along the coast, with men dying from starvation and drowning, others killed by local Native Americans, until they reached a sandbar, near present-day Galveston, Texas. About 16 men, including Esteban, his owner Andrés Dorantes, and Cabeza de Vaca, survived the winter, some resorting to cannibalism, only to be enslaved by Karankawa Indians and remain in bondage until 1534. Twelve of the men died, while the remaining four—Dorantes, Esteban, Cabeza de Vaca, and Alonso del Castillo Maldonado—escaped. They encountered friendlier Indians and “Estevanico” or “the negro”—as Cabeza de Vaca alternatively referred to Esteban in his narrative—lodged with the tribe’s medicine man, where, no doubt, he learned much that proved useful to his survival and subsequent renown.

They encountered other tribes and gained fame in the region as medicine men. While the first Indians had killed their companions and enslaved Esteban and the others, the newer tribes treated them as heroes and, according to Cabeza de Vaca, “They begged us on their knees not to go. But we went and left them in tears at our departure, as it pained them greatly.” The men learned several native languages and cultural practices, astounding the inhabitants with stories of their God’s power, claiming themselves to be “Sons of the Sun.”⁸

What they did during years of wandering in the Southwest is uncertain. Accounts are conflicting, but sources credit one of the men as laboring successfully as a merchant, brokering trade deals among the various tribes. The strongest evidence points toward Cabeza de Vaca, who claimed as much in his own account of the ordeal:

I could no longer stand the life I was compelled to lead. Among many other troubles I had to pull the eatable roots out of the water and from among the canes where they were buried in the

ground, and from this my fingers had become so tender that the mere touch of a straw caused them to bleed. The reeds would cut me in many places, because many were broken and I had to go in among them with the clothing I had on, of which I have told. This is why I went to work and joined the other Indians. Among these I improved my condition a little by becoming a trader, doing the best in it I could, and they gave me food and treated me well. They entreated me to go about from one part to another to get the things they needed, as on account of constant warfare there is neither travel nor barter in the land.⁹

Other members of their party served as slaves of the Native Americans they encountered—people whom, ironically, they would have enslaved had they had the opportunity. According to one survivor: “We were forced to travel up and down that coast barefoot and without clothing, in the burning summer sun. Our business was to carry loads of wood and drinking water and anything else the Indians wanted and we dragged their canoes through the swamps for them.”¹⁰

After three of their companions were murdered by their Indian captors, Esteban, Dorantes, and Alonso del Castillo conspired to escape—Cabeza de Vaca remained entirely isolated from the others. Esteban and his master Dorantes met up in the Texas backcountry. Esteban, however, decided that living with the Iguace Indians was preferable to his previous life under Spanish slavery. His work as a medicine man gave him a sense of security and importance that he had never known, while Dorantes, a white man, had remained largely enslaved. Although Esteban and Castillo managed to carve out a living among the Indians, in 1533 they began plotting their escape, which was only possible during the prickly-pear season since it was the one food available to them on the trail. Esteban led the effort and was informed by friendly Indians that another of their kind was nearby—who turned out to be Cabeza de Vaca. The four, by extraordinary luck, reunited and fled. Esteban, who had great facility with several Indian languages, won the assistance of many Native American tribes as they traveled, who gave the ragged band food without which they surely would have perished. As one historian wrote: “Esteban became the agent of the survivors’ constant movement, negotiating with the Indians, choosing the roads they would take, the byways they would explore, and the nations and tribes they would meet.”¹¹

They were taken in by the Coahuiltecan Indians and quickly earned reputations as wondrous healers, especially the dark-skinned Esteban. Word spread among many different tribes about the powers of these men who seemed to emerge from nowhere and could cure pains and make the lame walk. After three years, in July 1536, Esteban and one of his companions stumbled upon a Spanish slaving expedition. The Spaniards stared at the two men: one black and the other with long, almost white hair, both adorned with feather headdresses, and deer pelts, carrying the rattles of Indian shamans, and accompanied by about 600 Indian followers. When the white man—Cabeza de Vaca—spoke in perfect Spanish, demanding to be taken to the group’s commander, he left them stunned and unable to comprehend the scene before them. The two other survivors soon appeared, putting an end to the eight-year ordeal that saw the men travel about 15,000 miles through modern-day Mexico, New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas. Once back in Mexico City, Cabeza de Vaca and the other Spaniards claimed much credit for their survival, but Esteban’s daring resourcefulness was mostly responsible, and his nearly coal-black appearance made him, to the northern tribes, a healer of enormous standing.



THE REPORTS ESTEBAN AND HIS COMPANIONS PROVIDED regarding the lack of wealth found among those northern tribes did nothing to dampen enthusiasm among the Spanish for the Native

Americans' supposed storehouses of gold. In 1539, Spanish Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza purchased Esteban, after the other survivors manifested decidedly little interest in returning north to lead search for the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola. As a slave, Esteban could not formally head the expedition—although in fact the effort depended entirely upon him—so Mendoza assigned Franciscan friar Marcos de Niza to lead it. But why would Esteban return to such desolate country? Spanish slavery offered him little, and among the northern Indians he was respected, even worshipped.

By previous arrangement, Esteban set out ahead of the group, leaving crosses behind to mark the trail in New Mexico. He returned to his role as “Son of the Sun” and again gained an extraordinary following. As the Zuñi made preparations to appeal for rain in the windswept high desert, they noted the appearance of a black *katsina*, dressed in animal pelts and adorned with turquoise, bells, and feathers. The Zuñi considered a *katsina* to be a powerful rain spirit who expected reciprocity and stood for honor and respect for ancestors. Esteban had found his calling.

A long train of other Native Americans from various tribes followed him, treating him as a great medicine man, and in turn he spread the word that he could heal them and establish peace. At various stages of his route, Esteban sent Native American runners back to Marcos de Niza with crosses of varying sizes to indicate the significance of his various discoveries. He also set up crosses along his route and instructed his followers to worship them. But at long last, Esteban's luck ran out. He may have become too demanding, intervened too much in local rituals, been too taken with his own power, or simply not have heeded the warnings to leave that he received from Zuñi chiefs. Ultimately, they saw in him an unwanted harbinger of many more men just like him.¹²

He remained in either Hawikuh or Kiakima in New Mexico, situated beneath a stone outcropping known as Corn Mountain that towers over several Zuñi villages, an area thought by the Spanish to be prosperous. The specifics of Esteban's death are unknown; rumors circulated that the Zuñis murdered him or massacred him with many of his followers. Whatever the case, he was killed, a fact that the Spanish explorer Coronado confirmed the following year.

For the Zuñi, Esteban's story became translated into Chakwaina, a black spirit and iconic deity who came to symbolize the unfortunate aspects of European impact on native life. For us, Esteban's exploits, like those of his black compatriot, Juan Garrido—a slave and a free man—are emblematic of the complexity of the African presence in the New World, a complicated experience in evidence as early as the very first period of the European exploration and settlement of the lands that would become the United States. In a way, both men can be thought of as “founding fathers,” representative of the experiences of millions of Africans who would become through forced migration, as both slaves and freed persons, a New World, transatlantic African people, the African Americans.

¹ David Eltis and David Richardson, eds., *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 25–27; Matthew Restall, “Black Conquistadors: Armed Africans in Early Spanish America,” *The Americas* 57 (October 2000), 173, 176.

² Restall, “Black Conquistadors,” 179–81.

³ James H. Sweet, “African Identity and Slave Resistance in the Portuguese Atlantic,” in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550–1624*, ed. Peter Mancall (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 228.

⁴ Restall, “Black Conquistadors,” 171; Jane G. Landers, “Juan Garrido,” in vol. 3, *African American*

5 Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 11–12.

6 Perhaps the fullest account is Robert Goodwin, *Crossing the Continent, 1527–1540: The Story of the First African-American Explorer of the American South* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008).

7 A translation of Cabeza de Vaca’s narrative can be found at <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/one/cabeza.htm>.

8 Dedra McDonald Birzer, “Esteban,” *African American National Biography*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3: 198.

9 <http://www.pbs.org/weta/thewest/resources/archives/one/cabeza.htm>.

10 Quoted in Goodwin, *Crossing the Continent, 1527–1540*, 235.

11 Goodwin, *Crossing the Continent, 1527–1540*, 254.

12 Ramón A. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500–1846* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 10, 39.

THE WORLDS SLAVERY MADE 1526–1763

MANY OTHER AFRICANS BESIDES GARRIDO AND ESTEBAN, BOTH FREE AND ENSLAVED ASSISTED IN THE COLONIZATION OF NORTH AMERICA IN THE CENTURY OR SO BETWEEN THE LANDING OF COLUMBUS AND THE FOUNDING OF THE ENGLISH SETTLEMENT AT JAMESTOWN IN VIRGINIA IN 1607. And these black people played major, integral roles in an Atlantic world that saw a titanic clash of Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, and English cultures with indigenous Native American cultures, out of which came the United States and all the other countries of the Western Hemisphere.

The development of American history, especially during its earliest period, cannot be understood outside of the context of these rival colonial efforts, and the black role within them. Even as slaves—more accurately, *especially* because of their presence as slaves—people of African descent have profoundly and centrally helped to shape the course of our shared American history for the past 500 years.

Africans would prove essential to Spain's effort to establish hegemony over its claims from the Florida Keys and the Caribbean to the Pacific, and north to the then-unsettled region of Canada. In 1526, two years before the ill-fated expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez and five years after the death of Ponce de León, Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón and a large expedition left Hispaniola for Georgia, probably landing near Sapelo Sound (the heart of Gullah country in the following centuries) on the Atlantic coast. The settlement, known as San Miguel de Gualdape, included about 600 Spanish men, women, and children and an undetermined number of African slaves—the first large group of slaves to arrive in lands that would become the United States. These black slaves may have been Atlantic Creoles or *ladinos*, people of African descent from other Spanish or Portuguese colonies who had become Catholic—either from birth or descent, as were Africans taken to the New World from the kingdom of Kongo in west-central Africa (which willingly converted to Roman Catholicism in the late 15th century), or forcibly converted as a result of their enslavement. These would have been black people who spoke Spanish fluently, were comfortably bicultural, and who served as skilled tradesmen or domestics. Or they simply may have been unacculturated African slaves removed from their initial enslavement in mines or on plantations on the island of Hispaniola and taken to Georgia to perform the most undesirable labor for their owners.

The colony struggled from the start and suffered disease and starvation—as would befall Jamestown in the next century—along with a series of tragedies culminating in Ayllón's untimely death. Chaos ensued, soon followed by a mutiny of the survivors. As winter approached, some of the slaves set fire to the compound of the mutineers—not Ayllón's men—posing interesting questions about the cultural background and political alignment of the slaves the settlers had brought with them. Local Guale Indians took advantage of the colony's disarray and attacked, driving out the surviving Spanish settlers. In a fascinating move, the Africans allied with the Guales and became a Maroon or independent, exiled society, a phenomenon that also took place throughout the Caribbean and Mexico and would become an important feature of New World slavery.

San Lorenzo de los Negros, founded in the 1570s and located near modern Veracruz, Mexico, fo

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