Celebrating Black History in America – Black History & You – by Ashook Ramsaran

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Everyone. Esteemed moderator and panelists.

Thanks to Dr. Dhanpaul Narine for inviting me to share my thoughts at this forum. These are important lecture series. We are grateful to Dr. Narine for initiating and organizing them to educate, inform and encourage our young people. I thank him for including me and others in sharing our knowledge, ideas and suggestions

I am not a historian but a student of history because it is import to me to know history to understand the world in which I live - in which we all live. To understand ourselves and to understand others, to collaborate and co-exist with others in peaceful and supportive ways. To have strength through partnerships.

Ever since I was a little boy back in Guyana, I wanted to read – everything I could find – newspapers, magazines, books, rates receipts – and there were very little available. I have continued that yearning to read, accumulating many books, sharing with others.

I have also written chapters in several books, notably "Coping in America", "The Gadar Heroes of India", "The Return of Latchmini" (The Kolkata Memorial Story), and several others.

I am in the process of writing 2 books:

- NO ORDINARY JOURNEY: The trials, triumphs and the tragedies. My own story of "been there, done that".
- OUR GERRY – an unfinished journey. The son we lost.

I have also written hundreds of articles, commentaries and critiques which are posted on line in Indian Diaspora Council and Ashook Ramsaran.com.

I am also writing my critique of Dr. Dhanpaul Narine's book about life in Guyana, an extensive record of village life in Guyana.

It is important to understand history to know what preceded us, the current situation of our city, state, country and the world.

Knowing history makes us understand who we are, where we are in our city/state/country and in the world. It gives us the ability to maneuver our lives in a more informed and educated manner that makes us more progressive and successful.

It makes us more confident and respectful of those who came before us and made it possible for us to live the lives we live – both good and not so good.

Because I believe that knowing history makes us better citizens who can participate in the process of community activities, school boards, community boards, advocacy groups, influencing change to better our lives and those who are needy.

I also try to couple history with my actions for betterment:
Using history and its lessons to do practical things to make a difference. Landmarks of our journey; Civic engagement;
Kolkata Memorial; Guyana, Trinidad, Martinique, Grenada, NYC.

Supporting causes to enhance neighborhoods and living in NYC.

BLACK HISTORY

What is Black History?
Black history is American History.
The history of America cannot be told without Black History. It is inextricably intertwined and cannot be separate. It's the body, heart and soul of America regardless of some who want to disregard or dent it.

In late August 1619, a ship arrived in the British colony of near Point Comfort, a coastal port in the English colony of Virginia, bearing a cargo of twenty to thirty enslaved people from Africa who were sold to the colonists. Their arrival led to the barbaric and unprecedented system of American chattel slavery that would last for the next 250 years.

This is sometimes referred to as the country's original sin, but it is more than that: It is the source of so much that still defines the United States

No aspect of the country that would be formed here has been untouched by the years of slavery that followed. In the 400th anniversary of this fateful moment, it is finally time to tell our story truthfully.

MILESTONES
1619 – 1st arrival of slaves in USA
1776 – Declaration of Independence (all men are created equal)
1861 – Civil War starts to end slavery
1865 – Emancipation – end of slavery
1965 – Civic Rights Act

Over the 400+ years, forced missing during slavery and voluntary racial mixing by marriage have led to over 70% of blacks in America having Caucasian and/or Native American ancestry.
Some people ask what Black History is given 1 month? Isn't it worth more since American history is defined by Black history? And others ask why February, the shortest month of the year?

ACHIEVEMENTS
Blacks in America have made significant achievements in all segments of society: From days of slavery, emancipation, civil rights struggle (Martin Luther King Jr) to President of the USA. Entertainment; Music; Space, Sports; Legal & Professional; Political; Businesses; Media; Judiciary (Ketanji Brown); a high number of people of color in the Biden administration, contesting elections, and that's very good progress.

In general, people of color are progressing but have a slower rate to reach social justice and equity.

Yet there is racism, injustice, incarceration, discrimination and police killings while being black. Even banning books on race.
America needs a sober assessment of itself, by itself, to ask the hard questions and change of heart to bring about social justice.

There is inherent discrimination in America. There was an incident where a high ranking elected federal official told the hospital that no people of color to attend to his ailing mother – and the hospital complied. That's outrageous. But little did he know that the transfusion his mother was receiving was from a blood pool with no discrimination.

We have come a long way but so much more to be done.
United Negro College: A mind is a terrible thing to waste.
A famous American Rodney King: Why can't we all get along?

Acknowledgement, acceptance and equity. That's necessary.

BLACK HISTORY & YOU (& ME)

What does Black History mean to me – and to you and others?

GUYANA
For me it goes back to my childhood days in Guyana and living among the descendants of African slaves brought during British colonial times and were freed at the time of Emancipation in 1834.

Most of my teachers were of African origin, several school mates, one of my headmasters and several co-workers during my brief civic service tenure in Georgetown - as well as co-workers, magistrates and attorneys while I worked as a court clerk in New Amsterdam and Whim courts.
It was peaceful co-existence with shared interests. We were friends and neighbors working and living together – although separate but sharing in cultural and religious activities, always respectful and understanding.

It was later after I had left Guyana for studies in USA that racial tensions developed and is still evident with the racial divide that still exists in that country.

USA
I am fortunate. My home is here in USA and had been for 55 years. In one of my earliest journals, I wrote that my life is "North of Key West", and that defines where and how I think and live.

So I focus my efforts on living, giving back and contributing to the betterment of life in Queens, New York and some national issues.

There are opportunities for me as a person of color and I am grateful & have embraced those opportunities as a Person of color.
There is discrimination but I don't let it stop me from participating in education, business and civic matters:
Education at NY Polytechnic School of Engineering
Business: President of Ramex, an electronic manufacturing co.
Executive Vice President of Queens Civic Congress
Chair of NY Presbyterian Hospital Community Advisory Council
President of Indian Diaspora Council
Member of St John's University Caribbean & Latin American studies
Secretary of Caribbean American Coalition
Co-Chair of Finance, First Presbyterian Church of Flushing
Board Member of AM Weprin South Asian Coalition'
Co-naming of streets for outstanding people:
Borough President's Civic Engagement Committee
Chair of QCC Citifield Committee – entertainment at CitiField

I remember the movie "Mississippi Masala" with Denzel Washington and Mira Nair how close we are. His statement: "You are 1 shade lighter than me. That's all".

The history of Black America gave me and millions of immigrants to come and settle here, contribute to society and make better livelihoods for themselves and their families. .

Always remember that we owe generations of Black American them so much that made our lives better. We are grateful.

I try to foster and support inter-ethnic relations because it's a bigger voice when we collaborate and learn from each other. There are inherent obstacles, yes. I have travelled to 42 of the states on business and leisure and I know when I see discrimination.

I regularly interact with elected and appointed officials: Caucasian, Blacks, Asians, Latino.

I financially support many African-Americans & Asians in office from US Congress Minority Speaker, US Congress Members, NYC Mayor, City Council Speaker, Council Members, NYS Assembly and Senate Members.

I am grateful for the long and arduous pathways carved by Black American to make it possible for me to be here and make progress in my life and the lives of others. To contribute in any way I can as

CONCLUSIONS

I trust that I have provided some valuable information to you on this topic, as much as I can in the 12 minutes allotted. I trust that I have shared with you the importance of Black History in everyone's lives.

That history is intertwined, our journeys are inter-dependent. That collectively we all share the same space, time, history, needs, and aspirations. Our lives are interconnected and it is important that we understand history and one another to make our lives better and share our pain and progress with others around us.

So I encourage you to learn more about history, to embrace history and be courageous in your belief that we can progress more than we have to date. It makes you a more informed person and a better society in which to live.

Q/A

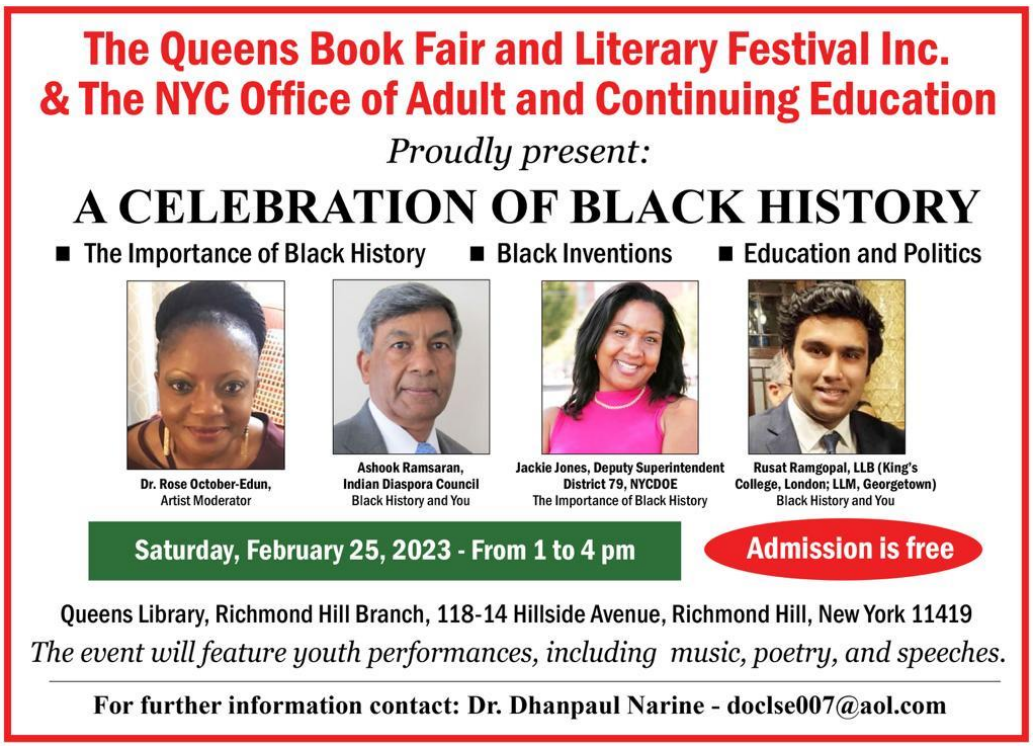
I will answer any questions you may have at this time.

Ashook K. Ramsaran – Guyanese born of Indian parents, Ramsaran was educated in USA and resides in New York, USA. He is President of Indian Diaspora Council, past president of GOPIO. He is actively engaged in several community organizations: Executive Vice President of Queens Civic Congress, Chair of NY Presbyterian Hospital Advisory Council, a board member of St. John's University Center for Caribbean & Latin American Studies, co-chair of Queens Borough President Civic Engagement Committee, secretary of Caribbean American Coalition, and several others. He is the recipient of numerous national and international awards including India's Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA) in recognition of outstanding community service. Contact: AshookRamsaran@gmail.com

Group of Attendees & Panelists

Tara & Deo Gosine

Presentation of Indian Diaspora Recognition Mementos by Deo Gosine



The 1619 Project - *New York Times Magazine*

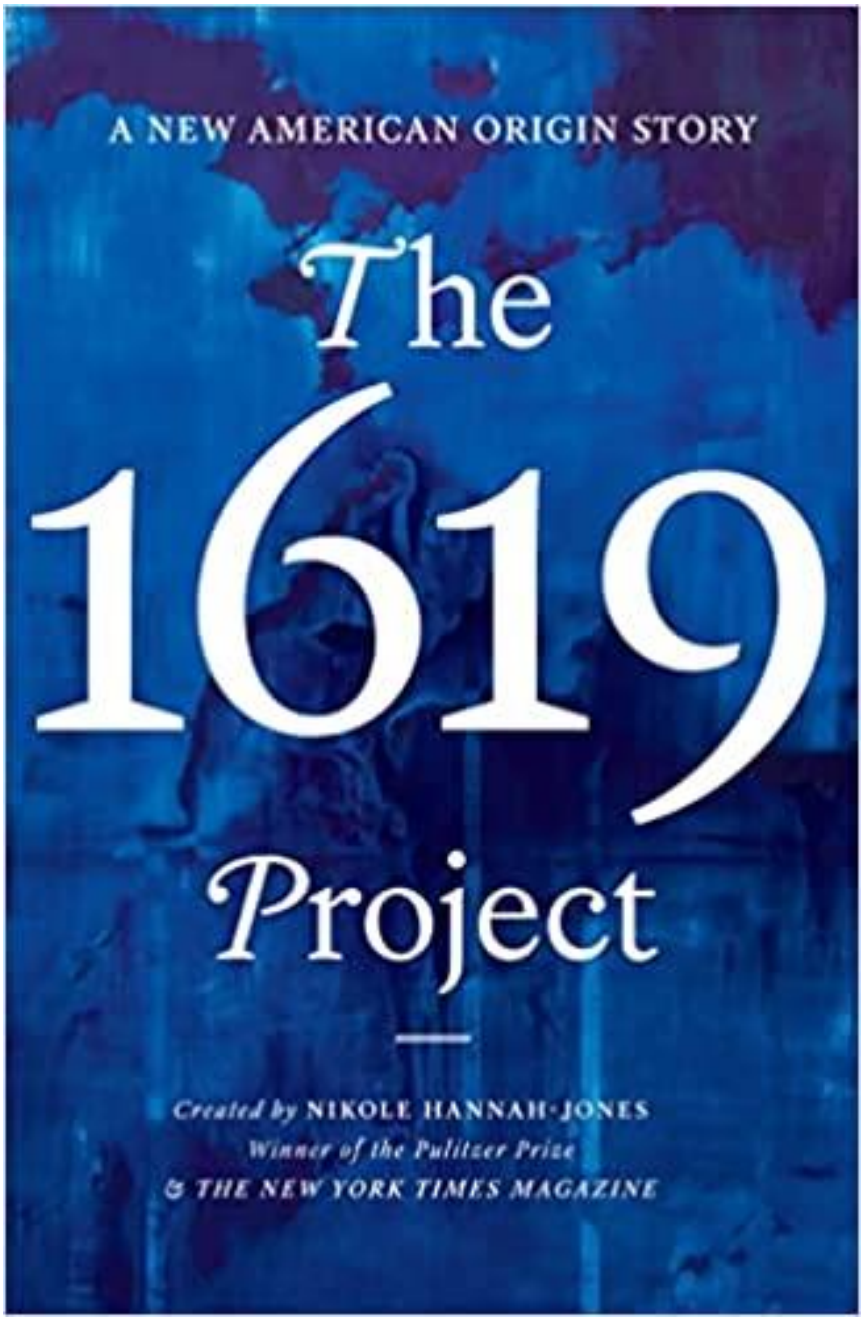
A dramatic expansion of a groundbreaking work of journalism, The 1619 Project: A New American Origin Story offers a profoundly revealing vision of the American past and present.

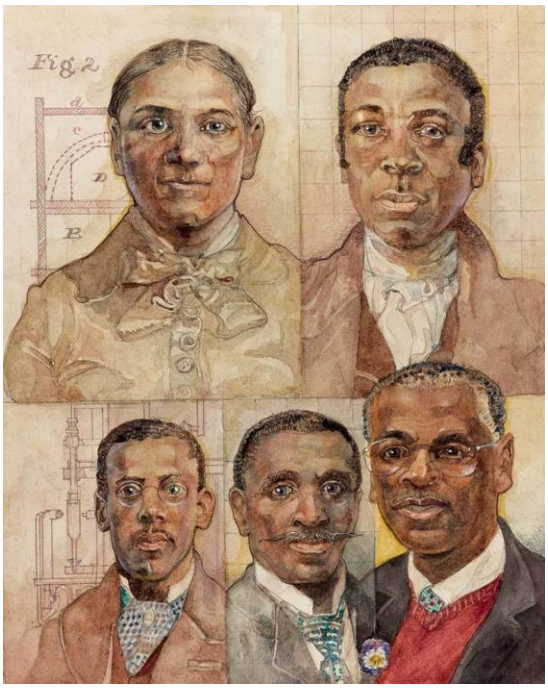
In late August 1619, a ship arrived in the British colony of Virginia bearing a cargo of twenty to thirty enslaved people from Africa. Their arrival led to the barbaric and unprecedented system of American chattel slavery that would last for the next 250 years. This is sometimes referred to as the country's original sin, but it is more than that: It is the source of so much that still defines the United States.

The New York Times Magazine's award-winning "1619 Project" issue reframed our understanding of American history by placing slavery and its continuing legacy at the center of our national narrative. This new book substantially expands on that work, weaving together eighteen essays that explore the legacy of slavery in present-day America with thirty-six poems and works of fiction that illuminate key moments of oppression, struggle, and resistance. The essays show how the inheritance of 1619 reaches into every part of contemporary American society, from politics, music, diet, traffic, and citizenship to capitalism, religion, and our democracy itself.

This is a book that speaks directly to our current moment, contextualizing the systems of race and caste within which we operate today. It reveals long-glossed-over truths around our nation's founding and construction-and the way that the legacy of slavery did not end with emancipation, but continues to shape contemporary American life.

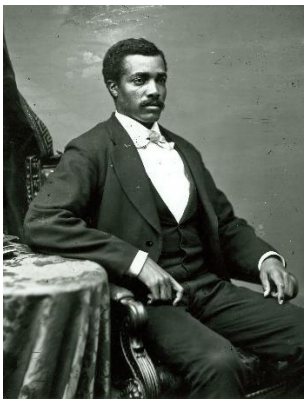
In August of 1619, a ship appeared on this horizon, near Point Comfort, a coastal port in the English colony of Virginia. It carried more than 20 enslaved Africans, who were sold to the colonists. No aspect of the country that would be formed here has been untouched by the years of slavery that followed. In the 400th anniversary of this fateful moment, it is finally time to tell our story truthfully.





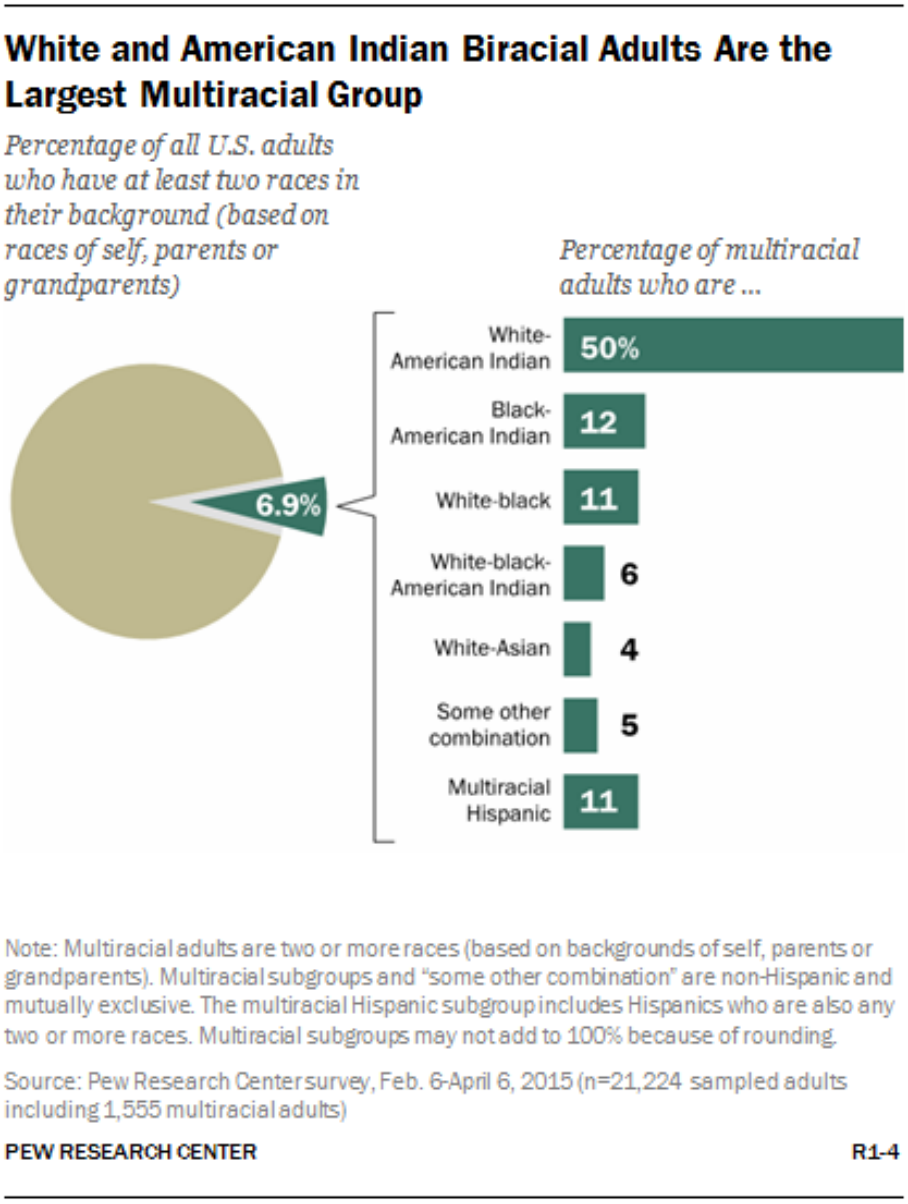
Early Black Members of the US Congress

BENJAMIN TURNER was born a slave in North Carolina in 1825, the education he received was more than most slaves. Turner, who had helped manage his owner's hotel and stable, had enough of his own money to purchase property in Selma, Alabama around the time the Civil War started. When the town was captured during the war, much of the city was burned leaving Turner with $8,000 in damages as the result. Turner's elected positions included: tax collector (1869), councilman for Selma (1869), and US Congress (1871-1873). After his Congressional term, Turner returned to business pursuits and ran a farm until his death in 1894.



JOSIAH WALLS was born into slavery in Virginia in 1842. He was a private servant to a Confederate soldier until he was emancipated by Union soldiers in 1862. Walls received some education before he decided to serve with the Union Army from 1863-1865. After his wartime service, he lived in Florida and used his earnings from working as a teacher to buy a farm. His elected positions included: state senator (1869-1872, 1876-1879) and US Congress (1871-January 1873; March 1873-1875 & 1875-1876). Walls returned to his farm after his political career ended and later ran the farm for Florida Normal College (now Florida A&M) until his death in 1905

JEFFERSON LONG was born a slave in Georgia in 1836, was self-educated and ran his own successful tailoring business. Long worked to promote literacy/education opportunities for blacks in Georgia after the Civil War and was known as a great orator. He became the second black American elected to the House of Representatives, and though he only served for 3 months (January-March 1871) Long was the first black representative to speak on the House floor. Long went back to his tailoring shop after his time in Congress and opened other businesses before his death in 1901.



It's important for all of us to learn more about other black history heroes to keep alive the memory of these American heroes!

Source: https://wallbuilders.com/early-black-members-of-the-us-congress/