

Digging up the deeply rooted tree of racism

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing October 2, 2020

🌿 Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd killing 🌿

*BAPL continues its relevant and pertinent programming.
Join in as the City reckons with race.*

*A Bethlehem Area Public Library “Courageous Conversation” on
Ibram X. Kendi’s [Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History
of Racist
Ideas in America](#)*

BAPL’s Rayah Levy

It would be interesting to debate what the true center, the living heart of a town is.

Gadfly’d vote for the library.

You can’t have a great town without a great library.



That warehouse of ideas, information, and knowledge for its residents.

That collection of great minds ever available for residents to tap.

And all of those great minds are not just on the shelves.

Gadfly has more than once remarked in these pages about the wonderful **programming** and **resources** BAPL’s staff is producing, especially relevant to the nation’s and our city’s reckoning with race in the post-GeorgeFloyd era.

Tuesday night, BAPL’s Rayah Levy kicked off a series of “Courageous Conversations” framed by Ibram X. Kendi’s award-winning book *Stamped from the Beginning*.

This is no book club for dilettantes engaging in idle chatter “after tea and cakes and ices,” the faux-intellectual social set T.S. Eliot parodied.

This is serious business.

Listen to Rayah passionately lay out the purpose of the series as digging out the deep roots of the age-old tree of racism and planting new trees for the education of the new generation.

Audio Player not available in this archive

And the tree is old, the roots are deep.

Kendi dates the origins of racist slavery practice in Western Culture, our culture, with the work by the Portuguese in 1415.

The cause was greed.

“We” began making money off the bodies of African Americans 600 years ago.

Our assignment for the Tuesday conversation was the first section of Kendi’s book, moving from the 15th century Portuguese to the turn of the 18th century and slavery in New England and Virginia.

The first Africans were sold in what is now the United States in Jamestown in 1619. (Remember Gadfly suggested a week or so ago that you look at the controversial **1619 project**.)

One of the things that struck Gadfly was that in the 300 years between the Portuguese King John and the magisterial New England minister Cotton Mather although slavery prospered, grew, and spread, there was always tension in the White culture about it. Portugal, Spain, England were all Christian/Catholic countries. Slavery never completely set comfortably in these cultures. Slavery took root, but it had to be continually justified. It had to be ever made to fit in. It had to be repeatedly rationalized. It required an excuse.

Somewhere in his discussion of the local Columbus issue in these pages recently Gadfly remembers saying that it takes real work to hold a people (a race) down, takes continuing work, work never paused for a cultural

minute. That's what systemic racism is all about — the work of many hands in many areas over a long time.

In a future post, Gadfly might give you a taste of the arguments used to justify slavery. His students mostly hadn't thought about this and mostly found the taste sour.

The next Courageous Conversation takes place October 27
[register here](#)