

1619–2019 COMMEMORATION FIRST AFRICAN LANDING

1619 Jamestown (but not only) An Answer to the New York Times

By Nikki Giovanni

There may be a timeline, but there is no time limit to change that does not, will not, cannot change.

No matter what the color the people or language they speak, no matter which God is served, no matter which food is eaten or forbidden, which clothes are worn or not, no matter the hair covered or shaved, no matter how we look at it...there have been slaves.

Every civilization or rather most, reach a point where slavery is recognized as wrong or in some cases simply a bad idea.

Or perhaps more accurately those who used to sell slaves now no longer have the currency or strength to control the lives of human beings so they create a lie on a supreme court for the same purpose.

I have often wondered when I think of the murder of Jesus what he and Simon the Cyprian talked about as Simon gave Jesus some relief with getting the Cross to Calvary.

We have a bit of an idea what Socrates was thinking as he drank hemlock.

In our time we know Martin Luther King wanted to hear music at dinner “Play it beautifully for me” before the shots took his life.

And there would be many others who were hanged, beaten to death, fought in wars for the right or wrong side.

But I have wondered, as a person living in Virginia how the peanut got here.

We know Europeans didn't go into
communities to find West Africans.

Africans did.

We know when communities recognized defeat they were lined
up and brought to shore to be sold.

But don't we also see a grandmother trying to defend her
grandson and failing reaching to put in his hand a peanut.

"Don't forget me," she says.

And he holds tightly to what will be called America where he is
sold.

He plants that charge for a promise to keep.

And he stays to watch it grow.

Others would escape and think him cowardly.

But he had promises to keep.

Others did not understand the strength it takes to wipe spit from
your hanging brother, to cradle your daughter after a rape, to
lovingly put your wife into the ground.

But he had promises to keep.

And he kept them.

Virginia is not the Peanut State.

Virginia is the State of Promises.

The only question is will we keep them.

Nikki Giovanni wrote this poem in honor of the 2019 Commemoration of the First African Landing. The poem was read for the first time on August 24, 2019 at the First African Landing Commemorative Ceremony at Fort Monroe in Hampton, Virginia.