



## How I Learned My House Was Built on a Former Plantation

In this episode, series creator and co-editor Juleyka Lantigua, shares a deeply personal and relevant story. While driving through her neighborhood, she notices that street signs have been changed and decides to research the new name, Josiah Henson. She discovers that Josiah Henson was an influential figure in Black history, born into slavery in Maryland, and brought to the plantation that her then home stood on. This realization shakes her to the core as it confronts the tendency to treat slavery as a distant and irrelevant past.

Pamela Kirkland:

I am Pamela Kirkland, a reporter and producer. The conversation around reparations can seem both overwhelming and contradictory. On one hand, it's hard to imagine how our country could ever fully atone for the centuries of injustice and atrocities committed against Black and brown citizens. On the other hand, there's the belief that reparations are not only achievable, but essential to healing and moving forward. What we know is that reparations are owed to the descendants of the enslaved, and frankly, the bill is past due.

Hi everybody. This is Jueyka Lantigua, I'm the founder of LWC Studios and the creator of this series on reparations in the modern context. And I have a really weird story to share, which is deeply personal, but also really relevant to the work that we've been trying to do with the series. So, Last February, I was driving out of this cul-de-sac where I live in Rockville, Maryland, which is about 30 minutes outside of DC to the northwest, and I noticed that at one of the main corners of a major thoroughfare and a smaller street, they're changing the street signs.

And then out of curiosity, I decide to take a slightly longer route to see if all of the street signs had been changed.

And sure enough, for the entire length of this major street, all of the street signs have been changed. So I just took a bunch of pictures because I was not familiar with this new name.

So I get home immediately, go to the Googles and I type in Josiah Hanson, And I am immediately blown away by what I start to learn.

So Josiah Hanson was an amazing, transformative figure in American history. He was born into slavery in Maryland, and then he was brought as a child to the plantation essentially on the land that I lived on.

So within an hour I learned about [Josiah Henson](#), but I also learned that the house that I'd been living in with my family, where my children had been raised over the last eight years, was built on a former plantation.

And he shook me to my core, absolutely shook me to my core because. a lot of us treat slavery and that unbelievable injustice as history, something that happened 400 years ago. We treat it as if it is not relevant to who we are, we treat it as if it doesn't influence who we are. And here it was literally at my front door. So of course, you know, I went into a deep, deep rabbit hole learning as much as I could about him

And in the process of doing this research, I learned that there's a Josiah Hansen museum. I drive by it almost every single day for months, essentially avoiding going into the museum, because I know that I'm gonna have to face some really deeply rooted fears about, living in a capitalist system, about not honoring and ignoring the past, about sweeping history under the rug, about being focused on our future prosperity. There is so much that this realization on earth's for me.

And then I'm sitting at my desk during my Google deep dive, and I realize I've gotta tell my family, right? I am married to a Nigerian American. My kids are being raised as black Americans, and I cannot hold this information.

So it takes me about a day to sort of think about what I would say to my sons who are then 10 and 12 years old. After they got home from school, I sat them down and I said, "Hey, I've got something sensitive to share with you and you can ask me anything, but I may not have all the answers. And if I don't, we'll look them up. We'll figure it out together. But I learned this week that our house was built on a former plantation, and I learned that from that plantation came one of the greatest abolitionists in the history of the U.S. He was a former enslaved person who was born into a plantation in southern Maryland, and then was moved here as a child where his mother was also an enslaved person. His name was Josiah Henson, and now the street that we used to know as Montrose Parkway is called Josiah Henson Parkway."

The first thing that my 10 year old said to me was, "Are we moving?"

I will never forget that exchange as long as I live, because the clarity with which he was able to understand the gravity of what we had just learned struck me like a blow to the head. So I took a breath and I said to him, "No, baby, we're not moving. But I think we have to find a way to honor the ancestors and the people who labored on this hollowed ground."

We talk about Josiah Henson and we talk about the history of this place. And now when we see all of the construction and we see all of the development, and when we talk about class differences, the conversation just takes on a much deeper meaning.

So I am so grateful that I get to exist and live and help my children have this real context for what happened so long ago, but how very much still informs who we are in the United States.

Kirkland:

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Still Paying the Price is made possible by a grant from the MacArthur Foundation and is an original production of LWC Studios. Juleyka Lantigua is the show's creator and executive producer. I'm Pamela Kirkland, the series co-editor. Kojin Tashiro is our sound designer and mixed this episode. Paulina Velasco is our managing editor. Michelle Baker is our associate producer. Amanda DeJesus is our production intern. Lindsay Hood is our fact-checker. Thank you for listening.

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