Episode 3 Script

Speakers: Claire Lavarreda, Catarina Tchakerian

**Claire Lavarreda:** Howdy! I’m Claire.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** And I’m Catarina.

**Claire Lavarreda**: And welcome to the *Unfinished History Podcast*! One of the central historical themes we’re addressing in this podcast is that the American Revolution, as it was originally conceived by the Founding Fathers, was not fought for the independence of all Americans. Rather, it was a fight for white men who owned property. If the goal of the American Revolution was to realize the inalienable rights of human beings, it remains unfinished. As some listeners may know, the Founding Fathers weren’t really champions of equality, and it’s our goal in this podcast to highlight the people left out of the common narrative. So, in this episode, we’re talking about some of the interesting BIPOC people from the era of the American Revolution.

Let’s dive into the person I want to talk about today, and that is Chief Pontiac of the Ottawa Nation. I also want to note that I’ve spoken about Chief Pontiac before in a very early prototype-version of this podcast about a year ago, and I would like to give credit to my project partner at the time, Luke Pilkington. He presented on Captain Joseph Brant “Thayendenegea” in our episode on indigenous figures while I presented on Chief Pontiac, so I just want to give him a little shout-out before continuing on.

Back to Chief Pontiac’s story– for those of you who aren’t familiar with this figure, Chief Pontiac was the renowned indigenous figure best known for his leadership during Pontiac’s Rebellion of 1763, which was part of a broader pan-Indian attack on British forts as retribution for encroaching settlements and aggression. Pontiac was born Obwaandi'eyaa - I might have said that wrong - in 1720, and though the exact location is uncertain, it is believed he was born in the area of Ohio and Michigan. Though his mother was part of the Chippewa nation, Pontiac’s father was Ottawan, leading Pontiac to be raised within the Ottawa nation. I’d like to take some time now to talk about the Ottawa nation itself before we continue talking about Pontiac.

I would like to encourage our listeners to check out the websites of the actual tribes and nations themselves. Some of these sites include the Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma, which can be found at <http://www.ottawatribe.org/>, the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, at <https://lrboi-nsn.gov/> and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians at <http://www.gtbindians.org/>. There are several bands across Canada and the United States, so feel free to search for more beyond what I mentioned!

So diving back into some research, the Ottawa people, also known as “Odawa” - which meant traders - lived along the Ottawa River - named after the Algonquin word for trade - which formed in Canada approximately 175 million years ago in the Ottawa-Bonnechere Graben rift valley. It was frozen until about 17,000 years ago when it began to melt and became the river it is today that flows through Eastern Canada.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** That’s really cool.

**Claire Lavarreda:** And it’s old!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yeah!

**Claire Lavarreda:** Though it was named after the Algonquin word for trade, the actual native peoples called it Kichisìpi, meaning “Great River.” The native peoples lived and migrated across Canada and the northern United States, forming various bands as time went on. The 17th and 18th century saw the Ottawa peoples become involved in the fur trade and make contact with Europeans, which brings us back to our discussion on Chief Pontiac.

As we can imagine, Pontiac grew up in an era of conflict. The early to mid-18th century for indigenous peoples was constantly marked by French, Spanish, and British interference in their land and daily lives. Sources confirm that there was a huge amount of resentment towards the British after the 7 Year’s War, largely due to the fact that the British made tricky alliances with various Native groups and then broke promises they made to these peoples, specifically those regarding land. As we know, 18th century attitudes towards Native Americans were– to put it mildly– atrocious. For example, British Governor General Jeffrey Amherst described them as the “Vilest Race of Beings that Ever Infested the Earth.” And America’s own Thomas Jefferson described them as “merciless savages,” while George Washington wrote an entire letter calling them “wild beasts of a forest.” And I would like to thank Luke and Catarina for pointing out Jefferson and Washington’s statements to me - I only had Amherst. So, between various conflicts, encroaching land settlements, and overt racism, it’s really not hard to see where the roots of Pontiac’s Rebellion and pan-Indian movements began.

Other various figures would come to stoke the fire of this growing anger, most namely a man of the Lenape people in Delaware known as the prophet Neolin. Neolin encouraged Native Americans to push white people out of their lands, saying he had received divine word from the Creator. Amongst this environment of philosophy and conflict, Pontiac began to emerge as the leader of the rebellion that would involve the Ottawa, Delaware, Shawnee, Ojibwe, Tunica, Huron, Choctaw, and many, many others. He became chief in 1752 after the passing of the Detroit Ottawan chief Kuinosakis (who died of smallpox) and fought against British encampments along Michigan’s Great Lakes for an entire decade, ultimately becoming the leader of all Detroit Ottawans and declaring the start of his famous rebellion in 1763.

Though Pontiac’s Rebellion would end in a great deal of violence and lead to hate groups (like the Paxton Boys) attacking Native Americans unprovoked, the rebellion did prove to the British and American colonists that they were not people who would take abuse lying down. The war also foreshadowed the American Revolution by increasing American tension and relations with land. Besides the historical ramifications, there is also a lot of academic disagreement on who Pontiac was, with words like “despot” and “menace” being mentioned. And in my opinion, I don’t think Pontiac’s actions were inherently wrong. Even though all war and loss of life is horrible, I think we can also see where Pontiac and his fellow people were coming from – it was a part of a larger battle of survival against extinction. So, I’d like to finish my analysis of Pontiac with a quote from a speech he gave to the French in 1763 regarding how he had defended them from the British as well as rival Native groups. I feel that it is adequately summarizing the nature of the tricky alliances at the time, while highlighting the often ungrateful nature of the Europeans as they pitted Native Americans against each other. So this is a direct quote: “It is now seventeen years [1763] that the Salteurs [Chippewa] and Ottawas of Michilimackinack, and all the Indians of the North came with the Sac and Fox Indians to destroy you. Who defended you? Did I not? Did not my people? When Mekinak, great chief of all those nations, said in his council that he wished to carry to his village the head of your commander, eat his heart, and drink his blood, did I not take your part, by telling him in his own camp, that if he wished to kill the French, he must begin by killing me and my people?... I am the same French Pontiac, who seventeen years ago, gave you his hand.”

**Catarina Tchakerian:** That’s very impressive, and Pontiac sounds like an impressive individual-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yes.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** And I’m not going to fault him for fighting against genocide.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yeah! It’s, it’s difficult because nobody wants to, you know, condone violence and anything like that but-,

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yeah.

**Claire Lavarreda:** You know, it’s, this has been going on for years, the abuses they suffered-.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Absolutely. And it’s in the same vein, to me, as the rebellions of enslaved persons.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yes, yeah, completely-,

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Absolutely.

**Claire Lavarreda:** That’s a really good comparison. So before I hand things off to Catarina, I want to give a quick digital humanities project shout-out. So, today, I am shouting out a site called [The Digital Native American and Indigenous Studies Project](https://humanitiesforall.org/?thumbnail=the-digital-native-american-and-indigenous-studies-project#projects) run by directors Jennifer Guiliano, Charmayne “Charli” Champion-Shaw, Holly Cusack-McVeigh, Larry Zimmerman, and Mary Cox out of Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis as part of the broader Humanities for All initiative. Users can navigate through the site to find projects related to various communities. For example, I went through the “Indigenous” filter and found a variety of projects like [Mukurtu](https://humanitiesforall.org/projects/mukurtu-an-indigenous-archive-and-publishing-tool#disciplines=indigenous-studies) - a content management system built alongside Indigenous communities - and the [Standing Rock Lakota/Dakota Language Project.](https://humanitiesforall.org/projects/standing-rock-lakota-dakota-language-project#disciplines=indigenous-studies) It’s a really neat website and tool that lets you find all these humanities projects. Please check them out!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** I have decided to focus on math, today. Actually, a mathematician. So, I’d like to introduce y’all to Benjamin Banneker. Now, when we talk about people of African descent in relation to the American Revolution, some popular topics are Crispus Attucks, who was killed in the Boston Massacre, and the British offer to grant freedom to enslaved persons who fought for the British or the Loyalist side. Now, I want to go beyond some of these more-familiar narratives to discuss Mr. Banneker, specifically in relation to Thomas Jefferson.

Benjamin Banneker was born in 1731 in Maryland. By the time he died in 1806 at the age of 74, he was recognized as an accomplished mathematician and astronomer. He published six very successful almanacs that went through more than twenty editions during his lifetime that were truly instrumental in the lives of farmers, like himself. According to the website of the Benjamin Banneker Historical Park and Museum, “When Banneker was not star-gazing, you could find him maintaining his one-hundred acre tobacco farm, orchard, and apiary.” Benjamin Banneker was also an inventor. He created an entirely-wooden clock based on looking at somebody else’s watch at the age of 22. And this clock actually ran until it burned with the rest of his house the day after he died. So, that-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Oh!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Means it ran from when he was 22 to when he was 74.

**Claire Lavarreda:** That’s insane.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yes. And he also predicted an eclipse - a solar eclipse - accurately even where experts failed to do so in 1789. So he was really a remarkable human being.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yeah.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Now, being such an intelligent man, Banneker’s educational history was somewhat cobbled, having received some formal education from a “one-room Quaker schoolhouse,” but most of his knowledge came from his own efforts and his familial network. So, his grandmother taught him to read and he borrowed math and science books to teach himself those subjects. He did have a Quaker patron who encouraged and enabled his pursuits - I’m not going to say that that person didn’t exist - however, I would like to focus on his grandfather-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Who was actually an overlooked influence on his life. Although Banneker was born a free man, we know that on his paternal side there was a history of enslavement. In “Removing the Master Script: Benjamin Banneker ‘Re-Membered’” by Ellen E. Swartz, Swartz explains that “Banneker’s lifelong undertakings in mathematics and astronomy and his understandings of the natural world were anchored in the knowledge and ancestry of his grandfather.” His grandfather was a man of royal lineage-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Oh!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** So, sometimes called a prince. He was captured from west Africa and then brought against his will across the Atlantic into slavery. But, as Swartz points out, that knowledge and the mental capacity he had did not stay behind.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** And scholars have tried to pin down his grandfather’s exact origin - his name was “Banne Ka,” which is where we get the surname-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Oh, okay.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** “Banneker.” And some say he was Wolof - his name is a word in that language.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Okay.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** But others have traced him to being Dogon. The Dogon people were “well known for their ancient and highly sophisticated knowledge of astronomy, numerology, and irrigation” - any and all of this his grandfather could have brought with him to bear in Maryland. Now, Banneker, his grandson, inherited his grandfather’s fine mind - this was noted - and his ancestry was part of this nebulous that all came together to create this accomplished thinker.

A particularly famous incident from Banneker’s life is an exchange he had with Thomas Jefferson. His letter to Jefferson in August of 1791 has often been characterized as a ‘plea’ for the ‘better treatment’ of enslaved individuals, as if he was trying to beg and tug on Jefferson’s heartstrings in the gentle way. But if you really look at this letter, he’s quite up front, and he’s directly confronting Jefferson and the hypocrisy of his revolutionary vision. So I’m going to read a few excerpted paragraphs from this letter, and we’re going to come back to it at the end. Here’s from the letter: “I suppose it is a truth too well attested to you, to need a proof here, that we are a race of Beings who have long laboured under the abuse and censure of the world, that we have long been looked upon with an eye of contempt, and that we have long been considered rather as brutish than human, and Scarcely capable of mental endowments…Now Sir if this is founded in truth, I apprehend you will readily embrace every opportunity to eradicate that train of absurd and false ideas and oppinions which so generally prevails with respect to us, and that your Sentiments are concurrent with mine, which are that one universal Father hath given being to us all, and that he hath not only made us of one flesh, but that he hath also without partiality afforded us all the Same Sensations, and endued us all with the same faculties, and that however variable we may be in Society or religion, however diversifyed in Situation or colour, we are all of the Same Family, and Stand in the Same relation to him…” And then another excerpt: “Here Sir, was a time in which your tender feelings for your selves had engaged you thus to declare, you were then impressed with proper ideas of the great valuation of liberty, and the free possession of those blessings to which you were entitled by nature; but Sir how pitiable is it to reflect, that altho you were so fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father of mankind, and of his equal and impartial distribution of those rights and privileges which he had conferred upon them, that you should at the Same time counteract his mercies, in detaining by fraud and violence so numerous a part of my brethren under groaning captivity and cruel oppression, that you should at the Same time be found guilty of that most criminal act, which you professedly detested in others, with respect to yourselves.”

**Claire Lavarreda:** He read Jefferson his rights.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yeah, he did.

**Claire Lavarreda:** He did!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** These comments are extremely clear, especially his point about all races being part of God’s children.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Mhm.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** And so, that is directly tied to Jefferson’s own formative words in the Declaration about our endowments from God.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** So, if we are from God, surely those endowments should all be the same.

**Claire Lavarreda:** So true.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** And in the last section, you know, Banneker’s words really convict the Founding Fathers of their hypocrisy in leaving people of color out of their view for what a successful revolution would accomplish. Now - we’re going to circle back, like I said - Jefferson did respond to Banneker later that month. So, I’ll read a snippet here where he says “No body wishes more than I do to see such proofs as you exhibit, that nature has given to our black brethren, talents equal to those of the other colours of men, and that the appearance of a want of them is owing merely to the degraded condition of their existence both in Africa and America. I can add with truth that no body wishes more ardently to see a good system commenced for raising the condition both of their body and mind to what it ought to be, as fast as the imbecillity of their present existence, and other circumstances which cannot be neglected, will admit.” Yes.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Okay!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Claire already knows Jefferson’s not my favorite Founding Father.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yeah!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Notice what he says - that he “wants to see proofs” - as if Banneker’s accomplishments and the almanac that he actually enclosed with the original letter weren’t proof enough that color has no bearing on ability. And he also talks about how “no body wishes more ardently to see a good system commenced” and dang it, Jefferson. You were able to put so many systems for a new country and government, why is this the millstone around your neck you can’t overcome? Jefferson is acting like he had no agency in the continuation of the institution of slavery-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** In the new republic, which he absolutely did and he continued to profit from, being a slaveowner himself.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yeah.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** So, I want to consider these in light of some notes Jefferson made in his “Notes on the State of Virginia,” but we’re going to break for a project shoutout first. So, as you know, Claire, I am a crafty gal.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Mhm.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** So, the project I want to talk about today is a really neat Scalar project called “Knitting Data: Data Visualization and Crafts.” It’s really meta in the sense that it’s a Scalar project, so it is itself a digital humanities project, and at the same time, it’s discussing these really cool crossovers between analog fiber arts and digital technology use. The creator of “Knitting Data” is Rebecca Michelson, the senior library assistant in Special Collections at the USC Libraries, USC being the University of Southern California. It’s an accessible, enjoyable, quick-read exploration of how crafting, especially knitting, can be used to display and communicate data in a way that is tangible, visual, and diverse. The project summarizes and links to further information about historical crafty-coding like wampum, and also gives examples of ways that data has been knit in the modern day. My favorite was a Sleep Pattern Baby Blanket-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Aw!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** But Claire, I think you should try out the Rail Delay scarf.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yes!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Being that you take the commuter train in.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yes, yeah!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** And this project seriously made me want to go knit some coded information. So check it out at <https://scalar.usc.edu/works/knitting-data/index?path=index>.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Nice!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** That will be linked in the footnotes. If you knit any data, definitely submit it to them for their gallery!

**Claire Lavarreda:** That sounds like an awesome project and I want to check it out, especially for the rail delay, but also for the wampum coding, that sounds awesome.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yes, and there’s also an example of how a certain group used to use runners to relay information and they would carry cords with knots on them and the knots - like, the color of the cord meant something, the knots meant something, and it was all this, like, coded information, which was really interesting, and I forget exactly which group it was but it’s very cool.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Well, I’ll check it out.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yeah. Back to Jefferson’s “Notes on the State of Virginia.” I’m going to quote some of his commentary/ I’ll warn you, it’s incredibly racist and inflammatory, but we’re going to come back at a high note at the end. So, let’s check out this quote: “Comparing [people of African descent] by their faculties of memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid…” Considering that Jefferson couldn’t keep his finances under control, I don’t think he should be talking about math. But you’ll notice that he tries to degrade people of African descent in this off-the-cuff assumption that they can’t understand math - like Euclidean geometry.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Okay…

**Catarina Tchakerian:** What’s wonderful is that Banneker was an accomplished mathematician! And it’s not like Jefferson has a right to gatekeep what makes somebody a human being-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Capable of reason, but he was just so directly ignorant. So, according to AP Central of the College Board, Benjamin Banneker wrote mathematical puzzles that “illustrate that some problems are most easily solved without algebra,” and he used single and double position methods, which are apparently “early techniques for solving problems that are difficult to translate into equations.” Feel free to explore Banneker’s math further on the website. It’ll be linked in the footnotes. Needless to say, Banneker was obviously an incredibly intelligent man, particularly gifted in math.

**Claire Lavarreda**: Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian**: And I find a beautiful irony and justice in the fact that Jefferson’s ignorance was so reputed by Banneker’s work in his own time. And I’d like to remind you that Banneker predicted a solar eclipse more accurately than many contemporary experts!

**Claire Lavarreda:** Which is huge!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** And this math takes astronomical calculations…

**Claire Lavarreda:** Okay that was, that was a good insert, there.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Thank you. Let’s look at another Jefferson comment: “The improvement of the blacks in body and mind, in the first instance of their mixture with the whites, has been observed by every one, and proves that their inferiority is not the effect merely of their condition of life.”

**Claire Lavarreda:** K, so.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** This is a gross comment.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Uh huh.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** It’s completely stupid.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** And it’s really quite something coming from a man who enslaved his own children that were born through him raping an enslaved woman. So, I’d love to hear your thoughts.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yeah, besides the fact that Jefferson is trash, as we have established, it’s, it’s just so obvious to him that the only thing that matters is his own superiority, white superiority, and, like, his own power.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yes.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Clearly he does not really care about improving anyone’s status in life. Clearly he thinks that just because he’s white, makes him the best. And I think it’s just so horrifying that he even applied that own mentality to his children.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yeah.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Not that it’s good that he applied it to anyone!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yeah.

**Claire Lavarreda:** But the fact that he still treated his own children as, as beneath him is horrible.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** And beyond that, his commentary about their conditions in, in Africa as well as America - you know, in some of this research I found how wonderful and advanced many societies were-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Outside of white Europe. And the fact that - even, just in math! If we’re talking about math.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** The number zero, I believe, was invented, what, by the Aztecs?

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yeah.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Way before we were aware that the Aztecs existed-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** From Europe. And then these African societies, I believe, the Dogon, they had already charted star maps in a way that hadn’t been done in Europe.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right. What I don’t get is that if Jefferson was really the educated, all-knowing man he perceived himself to be, he would have known this.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yeah, but he didn’t!

**Claire Lavarreda:** But he’s just jealous and angry.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yeah. He’s a bitter man. A final note from Jefferson. He says “It is not their condition” - speaking of, of African-descended or African people - “It is not their condition then, but nature, which has produced the distinction. Whether further observation will or will not verify the conjecture, that nature has been less bountiful to them in the endowments of the head, I believe that in those of the heart she will be found to have done them justice.” Now, he does say these are all his “suspicions,” but here he’s saying that their hearts are equal but their reasoning is not.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Okay…

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Racist. Ignorant. Of course there’s no natural distinction between different human races. Outward appearance has zero impact-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Upon your mental capacity. Benjamin Banneker is a wonderful example of how wrong Jefferson - and other Founding Fathers with a similar mindset - were about the African-descended people that lived in the nation. Banneker was an intelligent, capable man, defied everything close-minded people like Jefferson could have imagined, and he lived in their time. You know? They-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** If they’d just bothered to open their minds, they would have seen examples in their own time of reason and humanity beyond-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Of course.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** What they were exhibiting.

**Claire Lavarreda:** They didn’t even want to see it.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** No. Let’s shift gears and turn back to Banneker. After those ugly thoughts, I just want to bring us back to Banneker’s wonderful vision of what the American Revolution should have accomplished, and show that in that time, there were people capable of seeing that. I’m going to read the full letter, and I’m going to insert some of my own commentary. So, some of it, you’ll have heard before in the excerpts. So, “From Benjamin Banneker. Sir,” - to Thomas Jefferson - “I am fully sensible of the greatness of that freedom which I take with you on the present occasion; a liberty which seemed to me scarcely allowable, when I reflected on that distinguished, and dignified station in which you stand; and the almost general prejudice and prepossession which is so prevalent in the world against those of my complexion. I suppose it is a truth too well attested to you, to need a proof here, that we are a race of beings who have long labored under the abuse and censure of the world, that we have long been looked upon with an eye of contempt, and that we have long been considered rather as brutish than human, and scarcely capable of mental endowments.” So, I wonder what kind of person-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yeah!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Would have thought something like that, if not Jefferson? So, “Sir I hope I may safely admit, in consequence of that report which hath reached me, that you are a man far less inflexible in sentiments of this nature, than many others, that you are measurably friendly and well disposed towards us, and that you are willing and ready to lend your aid and assistance to our relief from those many distresses and numerous calamities to which we are reduced.

Now sir if this is founded in truth, I apprehend you will readily embrace every opportunity to eradicate that train of absurd and false ideas and opinions which so generally prevails with respect to us, and that your sentiments are concurrent with mine, which are that one universal Father hath given being to us all, and that he hath not only made us all of one flesh, but that he hath also without partiality afforded us all the same sensations, and endued us all with the same faculties, and that however variable we may be in society or religion, however diversified in situation or color, we are all of the same family, and stand in the same relation to him.” So, a pause here. We already mentioned how this ties into the question of God’s endowments, but also consider Jefferson’s comments that he wished that something could be done about the system of slavery. Jefferson had every opportunity-,

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yep.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** To end the institution of slavery - and if nothing else, to at least stop promoting it and profiting from it.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** But he didn’t. He doubled down. So, this is just further proof that the Revolution was meant to include white men with property. But, that, at that same time, there were people that understood the vision should be bigger.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** So, back to the letter. “Sir, if these are sentiments of which you are fully persuaded, I hope you cannot but acknowledge, that it is the indispensable duty of those who maintain for themselves the rights of human nature, and who profess the obligations of Christianity, to extend their power and influence to the relief of every part of the human race, from whatever burden or oppression they may unjustly labor under, and this I apprehend a full conviction of the truth and obligation of these principles should lead all to. Sir, I have long been convinced, that if your love for your selves, and for those inestimable laws which preserve to you the rights of human nature, was founded on sincerity, you could not but be solicitous, that every individual of whatsoever rank or distinction, might with you equally enjoy the blessings thereof, neither could you rest satisfied, short of the most active diffusion of your exertions, in order to their promotion from any state of degradation, to which the unjustifiable cruelty and barbarism of men may have reduced them.” So, unfortunately, Banneker was knocking on the door of the wrong people.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yeah.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** I don’t, I wish that Banneker had been more involved in everything.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yeah!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Although he actually did survey Washington DC! Another cool fact! Yes! “Sir I freely and cheerfully acknowledge, that I am of the African race, and that in color which is natural to them of the deepest dye, and it is under a sense of the most profound gratitude to the supreme ruler of the universe, that I now confess to you, that I am not under that state of tyrannical thraldom, and inhuman captivity, to which too many of my brethren are doomed; but that I have abundantly tasted of the fruition of those blessings which proceed from that free and unequaled liberty with which you are favored and which I hope you will willingly allow you have received from the immediate hand of that being, from whom proceedeth every good and perfect gift. Sir, suffer me to recall to your mind that time in which the arms and tyranny of the British Crown were exerted with every powerful effort in order to reduce you to a state of servitude, look back I entreat you on the variety of dangers to which you were exposed, reflect on that time in which every human aid appeared unavailable, and in which even hope and fortitude wore the aspect of inability to the conflict, and you cannot but be led to a serious and grateful sense of your miraculous and providential preservation; you cannot but acknowledge, that the present freedom and tranquility which you enjoy you have mercifully received, and that it is the peculiar blessing of Heaven.”

**Claire Lavarreda:** I want to comment, if that’s okay.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Go ahead.

**Claire Lavarreda:** I think it’s kind of smart, of, obviously, of Banneker to throw back in Jefferson’s face, like “Hey, you know, you were fighting against being a servant or being crushed beneath the British Crown,” and, you know, “Look at what my people are experiencing.” I think that was a very good move on-,

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Absolutely. He’s, he’s - this is a very persuasive letter.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yeah.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Absolutely. “This sir, was a time in which you clearly saw into the injustice of a state of slavery, and in which you had just apprehensions of the horrors of its condition, it was now sir, that your abhorrence thereof was so excited, that you publicly held forth this true and invaluable doctrine, which is worthy to be recorded and remembered in all succeeding ages. ‘We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, and that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’” I get chills.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Wow, yeah!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** No, we could look at what Jefferson said as a recognition of broader human rights, but as we’ve said repeatedly, this revolution was never meant to be fought for women or people of color.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** - “all men” meant all white men, with property, especially at that point. Universal white male suffrage was still to come. And, if we think that Banneker could have been referring to the segments of the Declaration where Jefferson discussed slavery and its moral depravity, Jefferson was sure to list that as one of the issues that the King was to blame for.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Okay.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yes. So, “Here sir, was a time in which your tender feelings for your selves had engaged you thus to declare, you were then impressed with proper ideas of the great valuation of liberty, and the free possession of those blessings to which you were entitled by nature; but sir how pitiable is it to reflect, that although you were so fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father of mankind, and of his equal and impartial distribution of those rights and privileges which he had conferred upon them, that you should at the same time counteract his mercies, in detaining by fraud and violence so numerous a part of my brethren under groaning captivity and cruel oppression, that you should at the same time be found guilty of that most criminal act, which you professedly detested in others, with respect to yourselves.”

**Claire Lavarreda:** Um…yeah! That’s right on target!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** “Sir, I suppose that your knowledge of the situation of my brethren is too extensive to need a recital here; neither shall I presume to prescribe methods by which they may be relieved,”- He’s like, “I’m not going to do your job for you.”!

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yeah, no!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yeah - “otherwise than by recommending to you and all others, to wean yourselves from these narrow prejudices which you have imbibed with respect to them, and as Job proposed to his friends ‘Put your souls in their souls stead,’ thus shall your hearts be enlarged with kindness and benevolence toward them, and thus shall you need neither the direction of myself or others in what manner to proceed herein.” He’s basically telling, he’s giving Jefferson a step-by-step to human empathy.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Right.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yeah.

**Claire Lavarreda:** “This is how we do it…”

**Catarina Tchakerian:** Yeah. “And now, sir, although my sympathy and affection for my brethren hath caused my enlargement thus far, I ardently hope that your candor and generosity will plead with you in my behalf, when I make known to you, that it was not originally my design; but that having taken up my pen in order to direct to you as a present, a copy of an almanac which I have calculated for the succeeding year, I was unexpectedly and unavoidably led thereto.” So, part of the purpose of this letter was to enclose his almanac. And, the rest of the letter pertains to the almanac that Benjamin Banneker enclosed, and which you are welcome to read. This is available on the Founders Online Archive, as well as Jefferson’s response.

So, Banneker serves as a reminder to us all in 2022 that there were enlightened, forward-thinking, brave individuals who lived through the American Revolution and the early American Republic who fully understood the injustice of slavery and advocated clearly for an American Revolution that encompassed people of color under its umbrella. And Thomas Jefferson was decidedly narrow-minded in his vision of the American Revolution and who the American nation was really built for. Although, of course, he was not the only one to blame.

**Catarina Tchakerian:** I also want to briefly bring up the Digital Humanities component of this episode. Now, when Claire and I were discussing what Digital Humanities component we wanted to do, we really liked the idea of using SketchUp as a tool and a platform to create a 3D model of an artifact. We decided to use SketchUp partially because of our familiarity with the tool but also because it’s accessible to our audience and a great way for people to learn how to create 3D models. When I was deciding what I wanted to model for this particular attempt, I reached out to the Banneker site and asked them if they had any artifacts that might be appropriate for this particular project. I told them I wanted something related to Banneker’s life, and I also explained some of the limitations I was working under using SketchUp. For instance, I couldn’t use anything that was overly intricate and had a lot of particular and small design as that would be difficult to recreate in SketchUp. When I reached out to the site, they very quickly responded. Jonathan Wood, who is a naturalist and historical park manager with the National Park Service at the site, responded and let me know that a lot of Banneker items were either returned to the Elcot family and a fire at his cabin soon after his death had actually destroyed a lot of his material possessions. He also explained that some of the items in their collection were broken or damaged artifacts, or they were too large to be pulled out of their collections for this purpose specifically.

But he did give me the information about a jaw harp that was part of their collection that had been uncovered during an excavation. It's made of cast iron and it was from the mid 18th century during Banneker's life, the picture shows a jaw harp that is somewhat deteriorated and missing the middle tongue portion. I was very appreciative of the site's help in giving me this information and their support of our project. In order to model this, I started by creating an ideal model. I looked up some of the dimensions of 18th century jaw harps and was able to determine roughly the size that the model should be. And I started by creating this model, using very smooth polygons, and assuming that there was no deterioration or damage or buildup on the jaw harp itself. From there, I went ahead and added small details and building upon it with additional polygons to mimic the shape and size that I could see in the image that was provided to me.

Here's where I wanna talk about some of the limitations of SketchUp and creating a 3D model. It isn't really well built for you to add a lot of complex polygons or to distort something in a way that might mimic weathering or rust. Additionally, there are some limitations with the textures that are available for free with SketchUp. If someone wanted to create a 3D model that might more closely demonstrate the contours of this artifact, they'd probably want to have physical access to the artifact and perhaps use a more complex tool for that modeling. They might want to use some of the textures available in a program like Unity or to create their own texture in Photoshop and add it in Unity. But we really wanted to show what can be done using SketchUp totally for free. This is something that is absolutely accessible to any one of our listeners if they wanna create 3D models of their own favorite artifacts or something else.

So that wraps up the digital humanities component for this episode. I'm gonna go ahead and wrap up with a mathematical puzzle attributed to Benjamin Banneker, if it sounds all right with Claire.

**Claire Lavarreda:** Yes!

**Catarina Tchakerian:** So, y’all can find some of his puzzles and the mathematical explanations and solutions on the College Board website! Actually, his handwriting is also shown. So, here we go with his delightful puzzle.

A cooper and vintner sat down for a talk,

Both being so groggy that neither could walk;

Says cooper to vintner, "I'm the first of my trade,

There's no kind of vessel but what I have made,

And of any shape, sir, just what you will,

And of any size, sir, from a tun to a gill."

"Then," says the vintner, "you're the man for me.

Make me a vessel, if we can agree.

The top and the bottom diameter define,

To bear that proportion as fifteen to nine,

Thirty-five inches are just what I crave,

No more and no less in the depth will I have;

Just thirty-nine gallons this vessel must hold,

Then I will reward you with silver or gold,

Give me your promise, my honest old friend."

"I'll make it tomorrow, that you may depend!"

So, the next day, the cooper, his work to discharge,

Soon, made the new vessel, but made it too large:

He took out some staves, which made it too small,

And then cursed the vessel, the vintner, and all.

He beat on his breast, "By the powers" he swore

He never would work at his trade any more.

Now, my worthy friend, find out if you can,

The vessel's dimensions, and comfort the man