



# Dumbarton House Family Book Club





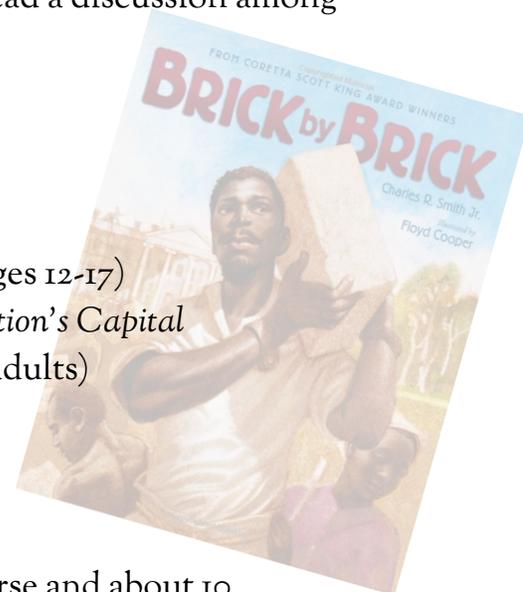
# Book Club: In the Shadow of Liberty

Dumbarton House is a Federal period house museum and headquarters of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of American (NSCDA). Founded in 1891, the NSCDA is dedicated to inspiring patriotism, preserving history, and promoting education. The NSCDA invites you to explore the rich history of our nation and reflect on the wisdom and bravery of those who contributed to our country's founding.

This multigenerational bookclub is designed to allow participation from all members of a household. After reading any or all of the books listed below, use the guiding questions and specific questions for each book to lead a discussion among your friends and family.

## Books

- *Brick by Brick* by Charles Smith (for children ages 4-9)
- *In the Shadow of Liberty* by Kenneth Davis (for children ages 12-17)
- *Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital* by Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove (for adults)



## Guiding Question 1

From 1804-1813, Dumbarton House was home to Joseph Nourse and about 10 indentured and enslaved workers. Indentured servants were men and women who signed a contract or agreement in which they agreed to work for a certain number of years in exchange for transportation to American and, once they arrived, food, clothing, and shelter. Enslaved people were people of African descent who were considered property and forced to work without freedom or pay.

The Declaration of Independence states that "all men are created equal" and accused the British of being "tyrants," meaning cruel and oppressive. How do these words contradict the fact that many Founding Fathers who signed the Declaration were also slave holders or enslavers of people?

## Guiding Question 2

How did African Americans contribute to the founding of the nation in ways you may not have thought about before?

Think about the ways African Americans contributed to the economy, city architecture, and more with their labor - often hidden in the shadows, so to speak.

### Questions for *Brick by Brick*

1. How long did the enslaved people work each day to build the White House? Did they get paid for all of their hard work? What kinds of jobs did they do?

*(Hint: They worked 12 hours a day and any money they were paid went to the White people who owned them as property. They did many jobs like making bricks, cutting trees, and carving stone.)*

2. Did any kids help build the White House? What kinds of tasks did enslaved people do? Does that sound like it was hard work?

*(Hint: enslaved children helped make bricks. Enslaved people sawed wood, cut stone, made bricks and mortar, and other did other jobs.)*

3. At the end of the book, the story says that slaves used shillings to be free. What does that mean? Do you think it would take a long time to save up shillings to become free?

*(Hint: Shillings are money, so enslaved people would save up any money their owners gave them so they might be able to buy themselves. If they owned themselves, they could be masters of their own lives and be free.)*



This brick is a copy of a real brick that was probably made by an enslaved person (see the original in the background). You can see the impressions where their fingers pressed into the soft material before it was baked and hardened.

## Questions for *In the Shadow of Liberty*

1. What power were enslaved people able to exercise even though they lacked any rights or protections? How did they contribute to the creation of the United States in ways that are not typically recognized?

*(Hint: they rebelled by running away and taking other actions like refusing to work. They transformed the landscape and produced the raw goods like cotton and tobacco that made Americans rich and able to fund buildings, streets, and other projects in the new nation. They also helped the Founding Fathers, like Billy Lee helped George Washington and George Granger helped Thomas Jefferson.)*

2. How were free and enslaved African Americans involved in the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and Civil War? How did war affect how people viewed enslaved people? How did war affect whether enslaved people were freed?

*(Hint: The British freed the enslaved people owned by the rebels fighting against them in the Revolutionary War (pg 132) and Abraham Lincoln did the same thing, freeing enslaved people who were owned by Confederates before freeing all enslaved people.)*

3. Why was researching the lives of these enslaved people difficult for author Kenneth Davis? Remember, understanding the source of a document is important for a historian to understand what biases or opinions influence what is written. How is this related to the title of the book, "In the Shadow of Liberty"?

*(Hint: Think about primary sources and how Davis researched these enslaved people. Did they leave written records behind? Did we hear from them directly or just about them? Usually, they either were not taught how to read and write or no one saved their letters. For instance, their birth and death records were rarely kept, page 45 and many other records have been lost.)*

4. Did the Founding Fathers know slavery was wrong? If they did, why did they still keep enslaved people and not free them?

*(Hint: Yes, many Founding Fathers wrote that they disliked slavery but they were afraid to free enslaved people or did not want to give up wealth and power and live without their free labor, which would be "inconvenient.")*

5. Why did Frederick Douglass say "This Fourth of July is yours, not mine"?

*(Hint: what does the Fourth of July celebrate? Freedom and independence, which African Americans did not have.)*



## Questions for *Chocolate City*

1. The trade in enslaved people thrived in the capital city in the shadow of the White House and Capitol. How did the optics of slavery clash with the rhetoric of freedom in the new democratic nation and how did this affect the United States' global reputation in the eyes of foreign visitors?
  2. As the capital of the nation, Washington, D.C. has often been held up as an example for states to follow. How did this status as role model affect the status of slavery in the District and other racial topics?
  3. As described in the book, Washington, D.C. failed to develop any meaningful industry aside from government. How did this affect the makeup of the population, available employment, and other demographics?
  4. How did new technology (like street cars for instance) help lead to increased segregation in the expanding city in the early 1900s?
  5. The book explains how a person's race - more specifically how white or Black someone looked - affected where that person lived, worked, and sent their kids to school. Red lining and overt discrimination may be over, but how do these pressures still shape the city today?
  6. How have protesting, picketing, and public boycotts changed discriminatory practices in business, education, and other industries? How do you see these tactics still being used today?
  7. How is the issue of home rule and lack of congressional representation in Washington tied to racism and white fears about Black people? Hint: review chapter 6)
  8. Many of the names and events in *Chocolate City* might be new to you. Why do you think we do not learn about these people and stories in history class? Should that change?
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## Craft Activities

The 13th Amendment officially ended slavery in 1865, but inequality and discrimination still affect American lives today. People still march in the streets to protest unfair policies and to ask for equality. Design a protest poster to advocate for a cause you care about.

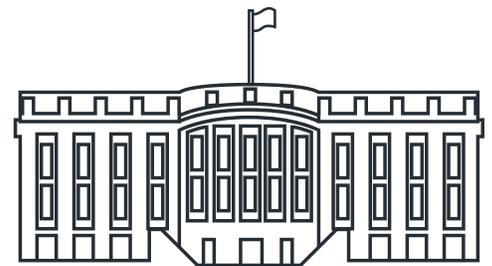


African American artists have long expressed themselves through quilts. Quilts have a long history. They were made by enslaved people because they needed warm blankets and often only had scraps to use. The symbols and shapes these craftswomen used can tell a story. Today, many quilts are in museums as folk art - art made by normal people to represent things that are important to them. Design your own quilt using geometric shapes and [www.soulsgrounddeep.org/gees-bend-quiltmakers](http://www.soulsgrounddeep.org/gees-bend-quiltmakers) for inspiration.



On page 262 of *In the Shadow of Liberty*, Davis states, “There are no poems or statues that recognize William Lee, Ona Judge, Isaac Granger, Paul Jennings, and Alfred Jackson.” Write a poem or design a statue honoring someone you think society should remember.

The White House was built by enslaved labor in a style called “Federal Period style.” Learn more about this architectural style and design your own building using our Parthenon to Portico program on our website.



For adults: In *Chocolate City*, grassroots efforts by individuals often made significant changes in the city at large. With your family, write a letter to your representative (city or state) advocating for a cause you care about.

[www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative](http://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative)

[www.usa.gov/local-governments](http://www.usa.gov/local-governments)