

The editor of the New York Times Book Review should read this influential insert over which she presides. Thus, in the 14 November 2021 edition, Elaine Elinson of San Francisco wrote: I'm wondering if anyone else found it ironic, in [the 125th anniversary issue](#) (Oct. 24), that all of the great fiction included by women authors — including some iconic feminist works — was reviewed by men.

Some, like those who reviewed Doris Lessing's "The Golden Notebook" and Sylvia Plath's "The Bell Jar," just didn't get it! Were there no women reviewers on the roster?

What this perceptive letter writer observed could just as well be said for reviews of Black books and writers, for the person chosen to review the new book co-edited by the estimable Nikole Hannah-Jones, i.e. 'The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story,' was none other than Adam Hochschild, scion of a family that likely has done more damage to Africa—and by implication, African-Americans—than any other since slavery was abolished in 1865.

To begin with, the Bay Area's Mr. Hochschild probably should read the New York Times too, for he repeats the misleading critique of this work—taken up with a vengeance by certain mainstream scholars—that slavery had little or nothing to do with the revolt against British rule in 1776. Just before Hochschild's reprimand, Times Editor, Jake Silverstein in an informative analysis of the 1619 Project that he authorized, quoted two-time Pulitzer Prize winning historian, Alan Taylor, suggesting precisely that slavery had quite a bit to do with 1776. Not physician heal thyself but reviewer please read the publication where you write.

Readers should know that I am not necessarily a disinterested party in that my book, 'The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance & the Origins of the USA' (not to mention preceding texts I wrote summarizing the 17th and 16th centuries, the latter of which just won the American Book Award) deals precisely with this fraught matter. Contrary to Hochschild and others new to the historiography of the 18th century, the case for slavery and the founding does not turn alone on 'Somerset's case' or the 1772 case—as powerful as it was--wherein a London judge suggested that slavery should no longer obtain in England—a matter so well-known that it was represented by Hollywood in the stirring movie, 'Belle', starring Gugu Mbatha-Raw. Hochschild, like other critics, assume that the momentum for abolition should be sought in London—and not in 'Tacky's Revolt' in Jamaica in 1760 which shook London to its core and anticipated the epochal Haitian Revolution, 1791-1804, where the London elite realized that class struggle amongst the enslaved could cause not only a loss of life for European invaders but, more importantly, the loss of investments.

Or if Jamaica is too far distant, attention could have turned toward Stono's Revolt in South Carolina or revolts in New York City in 1712 and 1741, where the same question of loss of lives and investments were joined.

Or attention could have been directed toward the point that Britain—a relatively small nation with a contemporary population just north of 60 million was seeking to contain an empire that not only included North America and the Caribbean but India too and, thus, had to rely even more on Negro troops—the specter of “Negroes with Guns” continues to send a frisson of apprehension coursing down the spines of North America settlers, as evidenced by the reaction to the 1967 entry into legislative chambers in Sacramento by the nascent Black Panther Party: armed to the teeth. Even Ronald Wilson Reagan (temporarily) dropped his ironclad adherence to the vaunted Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and lurched toward gun control.

Like ‘Belle’, the reliance of London upon Black troops is sufficiently notorious to have attracted the attention of Hollywood: see ‘For Queen and Country,’ starring Denzel Washington, no less—not at all obscure fare, in other words.

In other words, Hochschild and other uninformed critics should do a bit of reading—or viewing—before committing pen to paper.

This is particularly the case in light of the fact that Hochschild is able to live well and pursue a career as a writer because of the depredations committed by a corporation, once headed by his father: American Metal Climax or AMAX. It once controlled two of the largest copper mines in Africa where it exploited African labor shamelessly and profited from the ongoing justification for same by dint of the widespread notion that Africans were inferior—a defamation that continues to bedevil African Americans.

Of course, Hochschild—the writer—then profited over the destructive handiwork of his family by publishing a popular book on the Congo, now slated to be directed in a major motion picture by Ben Affleck—who almost got Henry Louis Gates, Jr. sacked from his popularizing genealogy escapade, ‘Finding Your Roots,’ when the program sought to obscure unappetizing details about the depredations of the Affleck family.

And if that irony is insufficient, consider that Hochschild—the writer—perpetrated his own damage in Africa for during the bad old days of apartheid in South Africa, he was a major supporter of Patrick Duncan, the epitome of “liberal anticommunism,” which attacked Nelson Mandela's African National Congress viciously for accepting aid from the socialist camp and the South African Communist Party during a time when the U.S. and Western Europe turned its back on the struggle and frolicked in the super-profits delivered by racism and cheap African labor. Ironically, Duncan and his supporter, Hochschild, were so avid in their anticommunism that they were willing to jeopardize their own lives insofar as they were in alliance with the so-called Pan Africanist Congress of Azania, which trumpeted the doctrine of “one settler, one bullet”, this being driven by their unalloyed antipathy to Mandela. Perhaps we should praise their altruism in being willing to sacrifice their own lives in order to foil the coming to power of those—they surmised—might jeopardize private property, i.e. capital investment.

Besides, Hochschild's competency as a reviewer of the 1619 Project is further questioned when he openly expresses ignorance of a heroine of the African American struggle, Callie House, an early advocate of reparations to the enslaved and their descendants, and subject of a well-known study by Mary Frances Berry—or at least well-known to those who are competent in the field.

Hochschild, like many blinkered defenders of 1776 argues inconsistent counts, like the lawyer who says of his client: “he didn't do it and he won't do it again.” In other words, 1776 is supposedly this great leap forward for humanity—as for slavery, everybody was doing it (so maybe it was not the profound breakthrough as suggested—this common sense notion hardly occurs). On the scales of history, his brief sojourn volunteering to challenge Jim Crow in Dixie, hardly compensates for his family's plundering of a continent.

Of course, Hochschild wanted the book to pay more attention to those like himself—i.e. those defined as “white”—but, if the book had veered in that direction it would have been justifiable to linger on Hochschild's own affluence fueled by exploitation of African miners, a direct legacy of the African Slave Trade which delivered so many of our ancestors to this hemisphere.

Again, it would be well if Editors paid more careful attention to who is chosen to review—and, likewise, reviewers should be more forthcoming about their own debilities when it comes to reviewing important books, especially in areas where they have demonstrated little competency e.g. African-American Studies—and where their affluent lifestyles are today buoyed by the exploitation that Nikole Hannah-Jones and her eloquent colleagues so rightfully and righteously bemoan.