A SPIRITUAL FORMATION CURRICULUM & COUNTER-WITNESS

THE 1526 PROJECT

RESISTANCE AT 500

In 2026, America will throw the most expensive birthday party in the history of empires. We are celebrating the anniversary of resistance instead.

1526 – 2026

TWENTY WEEKLY SESSIONS · FIVE MONTHLY DEEP-DIVES

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THE 1526 PROJECT

Resistance at 500

A FREE THREE-SESSION PREVIEW

Celebrating Five Hundred Years of Resistance
to European Christian Settler-Colonialism and Slavery
in North America — 1526 to 2026

The Founding Rebellion • The Failed Empire • The Maroons

About This Preview

This is a free, three-session preview of The 1526 Project: Resistance at 500 — a twenty-week spiritual formation curriculum and a public counter-witness to the Semiquincentennial of American Independence.

The three sessions gathered here sit at the very heart of the project. They tell the founding story the United States has never been willing to keep: the first European colonial settlement on the mainland, San Miguel de Gualdape (1526); the failed empire of the slaver Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón; and the maroon and fugitive faith of the Africans who rose up, walked into the woods, and began the only American revolution that has ever mattered — two hundred and fifty years before the Founders objected to the king's stamp tax.

What you are reading is three sessions of twenty. The complete curriculum also includes the Stono Rebellion, Bois Caïman and the Haitian Revolution, Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey and Mother Emanuel, Palmares, the Great Dismal Swamp, Indigenous refusal from Tecumseh to Standing Rock, John Brown, Harriet Tubman and the Combahee River Raid, the German Coast Uprising, the Amistad, the Creole mutiny, the St. John insurrection led by Breffu, and the Baptist War — plus five monthly deep-dive essays, the Feast of Maroon Freedom liturgy, a stand-alone July 4 liturgy, and full appendices.

Get the complete curriculum: the-1526-project.netlify.app

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A Debt to The 1619 Project

This project takes its name, and much of its method, in homage to The 1619 Project — the landmark work created by Nikole Hannah-Jones with The New York Times Magazine in 2019, which reframed the American story around the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in 1619 and insisted that slavery and Black resistance belong at the center of the national narrative. Where The 1619 Project reckons with the year slavery's enduring American institution took root, The 1526 Project reaches back another ninety-three years — to the first settlement, the first enslaved Africans, and the first rebellion — and asks the church to keep a different anniversary. We build on Hannah-Jones's work with gratitude.

Week 3 — San Miguel de Gualdape: The First Settlement

Sunday, July 19, 2026 • Seventh Sunday after Pentecost • Proper 11 (Year C)

Gathering Words

Leader: We have come to tell a story most of us were not told.

People: We have come to listen.

Leader: It is a story about the first colony, the first cross planted in soil it had no business in, and the first people to set fire to a system.

People: It is our story. We are still inside it.

All: God of the Guale, God of the runaway, be with us as we tell. Amen.

Scripture

Isaiah 5:8–9

> *Woe to you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to live alone in the midst of the land! The LORD of hosts has sworn in my hearing: Surely many houses shall be desolate, large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant.*
>
> *— Isaiah 5:8–9, NRSVue*

Historical Reflection: The Founding That Failed

Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón was a wealthy slaver and crown official in the Spanish colony on Hispaniola. He had received a royal grant — a capitulación — to settle a great swath of the North American mainland for the Spanish crown. Ayllón reconnoitered the coast in 1521 and 1525, and had taken Indigenous captives during those voyages, including a man whose Spanish baptismal name was Francisco de Chicora. Francisco told Ayllón stories — possibly true, more likely strategic — about a wealthy interior land. Ayllón believed him.

In July 1526, Ayllón set sail from Puerto Plata with six ships, six hundred people, and at least one hundred enslaved Africans. The expedition included three Dominican friars, the future founder of the Order of Preachers' work in the New World. They landed first at a place called Winyah Bay in present-day South Carolina. The flagship ran aground. Francisco de Chicora and the other Indigenous captives slipped away into the woods at the first opportunity. Their story ends there in the Spanish records, which is to say their story begins.

Ayllón moved his settlement south, perhaps to the Sapelo Sound area on the Georgia coast, perhaps to the mouth of the Pee Dee River; the exact site is still debated. He named it San Miguel de Gualdape, after the Archangel Michael and the Guale people whose land he was on. He laid out a town. He planted a cross. He ordered his enslaved Africans to begin construction.

Within weeks the colony was in trouble. Food was short. Disease — likely malaria, possibly typhus — swept through the European settlers. Internal conflict erupted between Ayllón's lieutenants. The relationship with the Guale, who were hospitable at first, soured quickly as the colony's demands for food increased. Ayllón himself fell ill in early October and died on October 18, 1526.

The exact date that the Africans rose in rebellion is uncertain. Spanish chroniclers, writing from a great distance, recorded only the outcome — but it was on or around the third week of October, possibly the very day Ayllón died, possibly within a few days. The enslaved rebels set fire to the settlement, killed at least some of the surviving Spanish overseers, and — this is the crucial part — did not try to take the ships home. They walked into the woods. They went to live with the Guale.

The remaining Spanish settlers, perhaps one hundred and fifty out of an original six hundred, fled back to Hispaniola in the surviving ships. They reported the colony as a disaster. They did not report it as the founding of something. They could not yet see what had happened.

What had happened was this: on a coast that would not be 'discovered' again by Europeans for another forty years, the first Africans on the North American mainland had — within ninety days of being brought here — refused. They killed their masters, joined the people whose land it was, and formed what historians now call a maroon community. They had, in the same gesture, rejected slavery and resisted settler-colonialism. They had chosen Indigenous kinship over the empire that brought them. They had chosen the woods over the cross-as-property-line.

They are the founders of this country in any sense that the gospel can recognize. They are who we should honor and celebrate on this 500th anniversary.

The Examen

1. What did I know about San Miguel de Gualdape before this week? What does it tell me that I did not know?
2. The Spanish chronicler who wrote down what happened could see only failure. What had he been trained not to see?
3. Where in my own life have I been trained to see something as a failure when it was, in fact, an escape?

4. If the maroons of 1526 are the founders, what does that change about how I understand citizenship, inheritance, and church membership?

Lament and Remembrance Liturgy: The Unrecorded Names

Light five candles, one for each century since 1526.

Leader: For the rebels of San Miguel de Gualdape, whose names we do not know —

People: We light a candle for the first century.

Leader: For their descendants among the Guale, whose lineages were broken by later raids —

People: We light a candle for the second century.

Leader: For the maroons of the Great Dismal Swamp, of the Florida Everglades, of the Carolina interior —

People: We light a candle for the third century.

Leader: For the rebels of Stono, of Southampton, of Charleston, of Harpers Ferry —

People: We light a candle for the fourth century.

Leader: For us, and for the rebels still being born —

People: We light a candle for the fifth century, and we promise to keep it lit.

Silence for one minute.

Action: The Map and the Story

Find a map of the southeastern Atlantic coast. Mark the likely location of San Miguel de Gualdape. Mark the lands of the Guale. Mark where you live in relation. Make this map visible in your gathering space for the rest of the curriculum. It is not decoration; it is orientation.

Closing Benediction

Leader: Go out into a country that was founded by people who refused it.

People: We will carry their refusal.

Leader: Go out into a Christianity that was founded by people who broke its chains.

People: We will break what is left of them. Amen.

Companion Resource

Read: Paul E. Hoffman, A New Andalucia and a Way to the Orient: The American Southeast During the Sixteenth Century (1990), chapters 3–4, for the most thorough scholarly account of Ayllón's expedition.

JULY DEEP-DIVE

Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón and the Anatomy of a Failed Empire

A longer essay for monthly deep-dive sessions, retreats, or solo reading

Introduction: The Use of a Failure

It is tempting, when telling the story of San Miguel de Gualdape, to dwell on its failure as if failure were enough. The colony failed; therefore the gospel won. The colonists died; therefore the maroons were vindicated. The empire fell; therefore we can rest.

This is wishful thinking, and it is not how empires work. Ayllón's colony failed in 1526, but by 1565, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés had founded St. Augustine — the first European colony to last — only sixty miles south. By 1607, Jamestown was thriving on Powhatan land. By 1619, the Africans whose descendants would be the Stono rebels, the Nat Turners, the Frederick Douglasses, the W.E.B. Du Boises, and us, were being unloaded at Point Comfort. Empires fail and try again. The next try is almost always crueler and more brutal.

The right use of a failure, in maroon theology, is not to celebrate it as if the work were done. The right use is to study it — to learn what went wrong for the empire and right for the resistance, so that we know what to do when both come back. This deep-dive is an anatomy lesson.

I. The Man and His Mortgage

Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón was born around 1475 in Toledo, into a family of provincial nobility. He arrived in the New World in 1502, in the same fleet that brought the Dominican Bartolomé de las Casas — yes, that Las Casas, who would later become the great Spanish critic of Indian slavery. The two men were contemporaries, peers, and on opposite sides of every important question for the next forty years.

Ayllón rose quickly in the colonial bureaucracy of Hispaniola. By 1511 he was a royal judge and he had grown wealthy from a combination of sugar plantations, gold mining, and the encomienda system, by which the labor of Indigenous Taíno people was granted to Spanish settlers in perpetuity. As the Taíno population collapsed under disease and overwork — a collapse so total that by 1525 there were almost no Taíno laborers left — Ayllón joined the rising chorus of Spanish settlers calling for African slaves as replacements. It was self-interested, he owned slave ships.

Ayllón was also a believer. He was, in his own estimation, a faithful Catholic. He took his Dominican confessors seriously. He brought three of them on his 1526 expedition. He may even have intended, in some piece of his mind, to bring the gospel to the peoples of La Florida. The fact that his version of the gospel was indistinguishable from the imperial project of Spain did not strike him as a contradiction. It does not strike most empires as a contradiction. This is part of what makes empires dangerous: they are very sincere.

II. The Capitulación and the Theology of the Permit

In June 1523, Ayllón obtained from the Spanish crown a royal contract — a capitulación — granting him the right to settle and exploit a vast and vaguely defined territory north of the Florida peninsula. The contract was made possible by, and was a direct application of, the Doctrine of Discovery we considered in Week 2. The relevant logic was this: Inter Caetera (1493) had given Spain everything west of a line drawn through the mid-Atlantic; the lands of La Florida were west of that line; therefore the lands were Spain's to give. The Indigenous nations already there were not parties to the contract. They were the contract's object, not its subject.

This is the theology of the permit. Empire works by issuing pieces of paper that name things into possession. The Doctrine of Discovery was such a paper. The Treaty of Tordesillas, the Royal African Company charter, the Indian Removal Act, the General Allotment Act, the Indian Appropriations Act, the Davis Plan in occupied Palestine, the Bureau of Land Management's grazing permits on Diné land: all of them are the same kind of paper, doing the same kind of work. The work of manufactured ownership.

Maroon theology has, from the beginning, refused the authority of the permit. Not because law is bad, but because the law of the permit-issuing power is downstream of the law of the Creator, who never deeded the land in the first place. When the African rebels of 1526 walked away from Ayllón's settlement, they were not just escaping; they were declaring that his capitulación was a piece of paper they did not recognize. Five hundred years later, every act of land back, every movement of resistance against the vestiges of slavery and settler colonialism, and every act of mutual aid is doing the same theological work.

III. Francisco de Chicora and the Politics of the Interpreter

In 1521, on a reconnaissance voyage commanded by Ayllón's associate Francisco Gordillo, the Spanish captured at least sixty Indigenous people along the Carolina coast. Many died at sea. One, given the baptismal name Francisco de Chicora, was taken back to Hispaniola and then to Spain, where he met the great historian Peter

Martyr d'Anghiera and proceeded — depending on whom you believe — to tell either the unvarnished truth, or the strategic lie, or some combination of both, about the wealth and wonders of his homeland.

Peter Martyr wrote it down. There was, according to Francisco, a land called Duhare ruled by a giant king named Datha. There were pearls. There were deer as tame as cattle. There was a tribe of people with tails. The stories spread; they shaped Spanish ambitions for a generation; they were the immediate cause of Ayllón's 1526 expedition; and they were almost certainly — at least in part — Francisco de Chicora trolling his captors.

Here is the maroon theology of the interpreter: the colonized speaker is never simply a victim of translation. He is also a strategist and a trickster. He understands the demands of the powerful and offers them their own desires in a form they cannot resist. The pearls Francisco described drew Ayllón into a swamp that killed him. The wealthy interior cities Cabeza de Vaca's later interpreters described drew Coronado into a desert that broke him. Even Pocahontas, in the version of the story she may have actually lived, played the English court like a fiddle.

Francisco de Chicora, who disappeared into the woods at Winyah Bay in the first hours of Ayllón's 1526 landing, is one of the unsung patron saints of resistance. He used the empire's hunger against it. He went home and found life and liberation with a new people.

IV. The Dominicans and the Conflict Within Christianity

The three Dominican friars on Ayllón's expedition — Antonio de Montesinos, Antonio de Cervantes, and Pedro de Estrada — were not random chaplains. The Dominican order in 1526 was the order that, sixteen years earlier, in 1511, had publicly preached against the encomienda system in the same Hispaniola Ayllón ruled. Antonio de Montesinos was that preacher. The famous sermon — 'I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: this voice tells you that you are all in mortal sin, that you live in it and die in it, by reason of the cruelty and tyranny that you exercise against these innocent people' — had set off a forty-year struggle within Spanish Catholicism that included the conversion of Las Casas, the writing of the New Laws of 1542, and the eventual partial reform of the encomienda system.

That Montesinos was on Ayllón's expedition is one of the great mysteries and tragedies of this story. He was, at the same moment, a critic of the system of European Christian conquest and a willing participant in it. He died at San Miguel de Gualdape — possibly of disease, possibly, according to one tradition, killed by the enslaved in the rebellion. The historical record does not allow certainty about whether he ever knew, or would have approved, what the Africans did.

What we can say is this: the conflict between empire religion and gospel Christianity is not a conflict between Christians and non-Christians. It is a conflict that runs through every Christian institution, every Christian seminary, every Christian congregation, and — if we are honest — every Christian heart. Montesinos and Ayllón were both Christians. So were the rebels. The question maroon theology asks is not whether you call yourself a Christian, but whose side your Christianity is on. Is it on the side of the colonizers and enslavers or is it on the side of the oppressed?

V. The Rebellion and Its Aftermath

We do not know the names of the rebels. We do not know whether they had a leader, or several leaders, or whether the rising was spontaneous. We do not know what language they spoke to each other, though it would have been some combination of Wolof, Mandinka, Fulani, Akan, or one of the West African languages from which the Spanish slavers drew their captives. We do not know whether they had been Muslim, or had practiced one of the many West African religious traditions, or had been baptized. Probably some had been all three.

We know that they killed at least some of the surviving Spaniards. We know that they burned the settlement, or significant parts of it. We know that they did not flee back to Hispaniola in the available ships, which had been the only conceivable strategy if they were merely escaping. They chose a different strategy: they walked into Guale country and stayed. They became Guale, or they became African-and-Guale, or they became something for which we do not yet have the right word.

This last point is the theologically decisive one. They could have run home. They could have run for the sea. They chose, instead, to root themselves in a new place by joining the people whose place it already was. This is the maroon move. It is the move the Guale Africans made in 1526, the Saramaka of Suriname made in the 1690s, the Seminole Maroons of Florida made in the 1700s, the Black Loyalists of Nova Scotia made in the 1780s, the contraband camps of the Civil War made in the 1860s, the Black Panther Party's free breakfast programs made in the 1960s, the Zapatistas made in 1994, and the Standing Rock water protectors made in 2016. It is the move of choosing where you are and who you are with, over what the empire has assigned you.

The Africans of San Miguel de Gualdape were the first to make that move on the soil that became the United States. They are the true founders. The country that was founded later, on different principles, has never been able to bring itself to remember them.

VI. What the Failure Teaches

The colony of San Miguel de Gualdape failed for many reasons — disease, internal conflict, supply problems, the deteriorating relationship with the Guale, the rebellion itself. But the deepest reason it failed is one that empires never learn. Ayllón and his colonizing band tried to plant a community in a place where it had no kin, on the strength of a piece of paper that no one local recognized, with a labor force that did not consent. None of the things that make a human community survive — covenant, consent, kinship — were present. Instead, what was present was only force, and force was not enough to create community.

Maroon communities have lasted longer than colonial ones, as a rule, for this reason. They are built on consent. They are built on covenant. They are built on kinship — sometimes biological, more often chosen. They are built on the assumption that the land is a partner and not a property. When the empire shows up at the edge of the swamp, the maroons can melt into the trees because the trees are family. The empire cannot do this. Its trees are lumber.

This is the practical lesson Ayllón's failure leaves us: empire is a less efficient form of social organization than kinship. It only looks more efficient because it counts the wrong things. Maroon Christianity counts the right ones–the gospel ones.

Discussion Questions for the Deep-Dive Gathering

5. Which character in this story do you most identify with: Ayllón, Montesinos, Francisco de Chicora, an unnamed Spanish soldier, an unnamed African rebel, an unnamed Guale elder? What does that identification reveal?
6. What pieces of paper authorize your current life — your mortgage, your degree, your citizenship, your church membership? Which of them rest, somewhere upstream, on the Doctrine of Discovery? What would it look like to renounce that paper without abandoning the relationships it organizes?
7. The Dominicans were on the wrong expedition. Where, today, are good people on wrong expeditions? Where might you be?
8. If the rebels of 1526 had a name for what they became — Guale-and-African, neither-and-both — what would it have been? What is the name of your own becoming?

Closing Practice for the Deep-Dive

Sit in silence for ten minutes. Then take a piece of paper. Write down one piece of empire's paper that you carry, and one piece of kinship that you carry. Fold the paper. Carry it in your pocket for a week.

Week 9 — Maroons and the Fugitive Theology of Resistance

Sunday, August 30, 2026 • Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost • Proper 17 (Year C)

Gathering Words

Leader: There is a Greek word the New Testament uses for a particular kind of disciple — pheugō, the one who flees.

People: We have come to learn from the runners, the refugees, the migrants, the fugitives..

Leader: There is a tradition on this continent called the maroons.

People: There is a tradition in the academy now called fugitivity.

Leader: There is a faith that has always known itself to be on the move.

People: We have come to recover and reimagine that faith. Amen.

Scripture

Hosea 2:14–15

> *Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.*
>
> *— Hosea 2:14–15, KJV*

And: Matthew 2:13–15 — the flight into Egypt.

> *Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt.*
>
> *— Matthew 2:13–14, NRSVue*

Historical Reflection: From Maroon to Fugitive

The word 'maroon' comes from the Spanish cimarrón — originally an adjective applied to cattle that had escaped Spanish ranches and gone wild in the hills. By the mid-1500s it was being applied to escaped Indigenous people, and then, increasingly, to escaped Africans. The English borrowed it, the French borrowed it (marron), the Portuguese had their own version (quilombola, from Kimbundu), the

Dutch in Suriname called them 'bush negroes' (a phrase that, like the English term, was originally an insult that the people themselves eventually reclaimed). The Brazilian Portuguese word quilombo, from the Kimbundu word for a fortified war camp, is now the legally recognized term in Brazilian law for the communities of escaped slaves and their descendants — and there are over six thousand of them still.

A maroon, then, is someone who escaped slavery, strived not to return, but to build a life out in the uninhabitable wilderness. The word covers a wide range of arrangements. Some maroons were individual fugitives who hid in the woods for weeks before recapture. Some were small bands surviving in the margins of plantation country. Some were vast confederations — Palmares, the Saramaka, the Maroons of Jamaica, the Seminole Maroons of Florida — that lasted for generations and fought European powers to negotiated treaties of independence. Some lived in mountains, some in swamps, some on islands, and some in indigenous territory on the moving frontier of slavery.

The maroon strategy was practiced everywhere slavery was practiced. The historian Richard Price has documented maroon societies in every slave-holding region of the Americas: Brazil, Suriname, Colombia, Venezuela, French Guiana, Cuba, Hispaniola, Jamaica, the Bahamas, Mexico, Peru, the Carolinas, Louisiana, Florida, and Virginia. The first such society on the mainland of North America was, as we have seen, the one that formed in the wake of San Miguel de Gualdape in 1526. The maroon story, on this continent, is five hundred years long without interruption. It is the original form of North American resistance.

But to call this only a story of escape is to underread it reductively. In the last two decades a new vocabulary has emerged in Black studies — what scholars now call fugitivity — that has helped us see what the maroons were doing in a deeper way. The political theorist Neil Roberts, in Freedom as Marronage (2015), argues that the dominant Western philosophical traditions have understood freedom as either a sovereign condition (the autonomous individual) or a civic achievement (the rights-bearing citizen) — and that both of these miss what the maroons demonstrated. Freedom, Roberts argues, is most accurately a process, a movement, a flight. The maroon is not free because she has arrived at a free place. She is free because she is in the act of fleeing. Marronage names that act.

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, in The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study (2013), pushed the concept further. The fugitive, they argue, is not running toward an arrival; the fugitive is constituting a different way of being in the meanwhile. The undercommons is the underground beneath the official institutions — the back rooms of the university, the kitchens of the seminary, the basement gatherings of the church — where the work of refusing the institution's

terms takes place. To plan fugitively is to plan in the meanwhile, with the people, against the terms the institution has set. The maroons of the Dismal Swamp were fugitive planners. So were the slave-quarter Bible readers. So is every undocumented mutual-aid network organizing food in the back of a church basement tonight.

Jarvis Givens, in Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching (2021), traced the long tradition of Black educators who taught against the curriculum the masters and the state had set — who used the schoolhouse as a maroon enclave, teaching a Black history and a Black possibility that the official school refused to recognize. Saidiya Hartman, throughout her body of work — Scenes of Subjection, Lose Your Mother, and Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments — has insisted that fugitive existence is not a deviation from the main story of Black life under slavery and its afterlives; it is the main story. The plantation does not get to define what Blackness is. The fugitive does.

Theologian Kelly Brown Douglas, building on the same lineage, has named what we are calling, in this curriculum, fugitive faith. Christian faith in the Black tradition has never primarily been the faith of the settled. It has been the faith of the running, the hiding, the slipping-away, the not-staying-put. To have faith, in this tradition, is to be in motion — toward the kingdom that has not yet arrived but that breaks in wherever the running gathers.

Maroon theology, then, is a form of fugitive theology. The maroon escapes and builds a place. The fugitive escapes and holds the process of escape itself to be sacred. Both are doing the same gospel work from slightly different angles. The maroon community in the swamp and the fugitive disposition in the heart are the inhale and exhale of the same prayer and breath.

The biblical witness is overwhelmingly fugitive. Hagar runs from Sarah. Jacob runs from Esau and from Laban. Moses runs from Pharaoh's army. David runs from Saul. Elijah runs from Jezebel and Ahab. Mary and Joseph run from Herod, with the infant Christ, all the way to Egypt — and the gospel does not even bother to scandalize this; the Holy Family is a refugee family, and the savior of the world is a fugitive baby. The early church scattered from Jerusalem under persecution and, the book of Acts notes, those who scattered preached the gospel as they went; the geographic spread of Christianity is a fugitive spread. Even the resurrection itself is a kind of flight — the body that would not stay buried, the friend who slipped out of the tomb, the Lord who 'goes ahead of you to Galilee' (Mark 16:7), faster than the empire's news can follow.

Maroon Christianity is the recognition that the church is, at its truest, a fugitive community. Whenever Christians have refused to be co-opted, whenever they have chosen kinship with the suffering over alignment with the powerful, whenever they

have run toward the woods and waited for the empire to lose interest, they have practiced this faith. The early church practiced it. The desert monastics practiced it. The Beguines, the Anabaptists, the Quakers under persecution, the Black Church under slavery, the base ecclesial communities of Latin America, the Catholic Worker, the Bruderhof, the sanctuary movement, the L'Arche communities, the underground railroad and its present-day continuations among migrant supporters: fugitive communities, all of them, in their own ways. To be a maroon Christian is to remember that the gospel does not require us to be static, central, or settled. It requires us to be faithful — and faithfulness, in the long tradition of the running, is itself a form of arrival and liberation.

The Examen

9. Where in my own life am I living too centrally — too close to the powers, too settled to be free?
10. Neil Roberts says freedom is the movement, not the arrival. Where in my life have I confused the arrival with the freedom?
11. Moten and Harney name 'the undercommons' as the underground beneath the official institutions where another way of being is rehearsed. Where is my undercommons? Who is in it? When did I last show up?
12. Kelly Brown Douglas names a fugitive faith — a faith that is on the run, never settled, always moving toward the kingdom. Is my faith fugitive in this sense? Or has it become institutional? What would it take to recover the running?

Lament Liturgy: For the Fugitive Saints

Leader: For the people whose names history refused to record —

People: We follow you.

Leader: For the maroons of the Great Dismal Swamp, of the Florida Everglades, of the Cypress Creek bottoms of Louisiana, of the South Carolina low country —

People: We follow you.

Leader: For Hagar and Ishmael, fleeing into the desert; for Moses fleeing across the Red Sea; for Mary and Joseph fleeing to Egypt with the Christ child —

People: We follow you.

Leader: For the desert monks and mothers, the Beguines, the Brethren of the Common Life, the Anabaptists, the Quakers, the Diggers —

People: We follow you.

Leader: For Harriet Tubman who would not stay arrived, who kept going back into the dark to bring more out —

People: We follow you.

Leader: For the underground churches in occupied lands, the sanctuary congregations on the migrant trail, the basement Bible studies in places where the gospel is illegal —

People: We follow you.

Leader: For every fugitive faith that has refused to be domesticated, for every theology that has kept moving when settling would have been easier —

People: We follow you. Stay just ahead of us. Amen.

Action: A Fugitive Practice

Begin one small practice, this week, that the institution you are part of has not authorized. Not necessarily illegal, but fugitive. A daily prayer at a fixed hour that your job's calendar does not bless. A weekly fast that your household does not center its meals around. An offering of money that does not appear on the church's annual budget because it goes to a fund the broader community is not aware of. A reading group that meets in a kitchen, not a classroom. A letter to a prisoner whose name your prayer chain does not have permission to add. Fugitive practice is the discipline of refusing to wait for institutional permission. Begin small. Begin now.

Closing Benediction

Leader: Go in the company of the fugitive saints.

People: We will run where they ran.

Leader: Go in the company of the swamp, the desert, the mountain, the basement, and the kitchen.

People: These are our cathedrals. Amen.

Companion Resource

Read: Neil Roberts, Freedom as Marronage (2015), Introduction. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study (2013), the first essay 'The University and the Undercommons.' Jarvis R. Givens, Fugitive Pedagogy (2021), Introduction. Kelly Brown Douglas, Resurrection Hope: A Future Where Black Lives Matter (2021). Also: Richard Price, Maroon Societies (3rd ed., 1996), and Sylviane A. Diouf, Slavery's Exiles (2014).

How to Use This Curriculum

The 1526 Project is built to flex — lay leaders can run it with no special training; scholars can teach it with footnotes. Here are several ways in.

As a Personal Devotional

For one. Move through one session a week as a guided rule of life from Independence Day to Advent. Read the history slowly; pray the examen; keep the action.

- Read the week's reflection on Sunday; sit with one examen question each weekday.
- Pray the lament liturgy aloud, even alone — light a candle and speak the names.
- Carry the week's action into the world before the next Sunday comes.

As a Small-Group Study

For a circle. Designed for a 75–90 minute gathering. A lay facilitator can lead it straight off the page — gather, read, reflect, examine in pairs, lament, and commit to action together.

- Distribute the reflection in advance or read it aloud together.
- Do the examen in silence, then share in pairs — no fixing, no advice.
- Close with the responsive liturgy and the week's shared practice.

As a Worship and Preaching Aid

For the assembly. Every session is anchored to a Sunday in the lectionary year and a scripture text. The liturgies, calls to worship, and benedictions are public-domain and ready for the bulletin.

- Preach the week's text through the lens of the rebellion it remembers.
- Drop the calls to worship, laments, and benedictions straight into the order of service.
- Build toward the October 18 Feast of Maroon Freedom and the Advent I close.

As a Seminary and College Syllabus

For the classroom. Primary-source-rich and footnoted. The five monthly deep-dives function as longer essay-length units, each with discussion questions and a closing practice.

- Pair each week with its companion readings from the reading list.

- Assign the deep-dives as anchor texts for monthly seminars.
- Use the discussion questions for written reflection or seminar prompts.

As a Podcast or Article Series

For the public. The curriculum is built to run alongside a twenty-part public series — one episode or essay per week, plus five long-form interviews tied to the deep-dives. The appendix supplies a suggested guest list weighted toward Indigenous, Black, Caribbean, and Latin American scholars and elders, who should be invited as primary voices and paid for their time.

Continue the Work

You have read three of the twenty sessions. The full arc runs from Independence Day, July 4, 2026, through the First Sunday of Advent, November 29, 2026 — twenty weekly gatherings and five monthly deep-dives, each pegged to a Sunday in the Christian year and to a rebellion the textbooks tried to bury.

The complete curriculum can be used as a personal devotional, a small-group study, a worship and preaching aid, a seminary or college syllabus, or the backbone of a public podcast and article series. Every session follows the same six-fold shape drawn from the maroon communities themselves: gather, remember, examine, lament, celebrate, and act.

Get the full curriculum, the 2026 anniversary calendar, and the field guide for using it:

the-1526-project.netlify.app

Five hundred years. The work continues.