ARBiT
it happens here...

Strengthening Families, Celebrating Commitment

Observed annually on March 22, Black Marriage Day highlights the cultural, social and economic significance of marriage within the Black community. The day underscores the role of strong family structures in fostering stability, intergenerational wealth, and community development. It also draws attention to challenges such as economic disparities, incarceration rates and social barriers that have historically impacted Black families. Beyond statistics, the observance celebrates commitment, partnership and resilience. Community events, discussions and faith-based gatherings often mark the occasion, encouraging dialogue around strengthening relationships and promoting healthy marriages as a foundation for collective progress and empowerment.

राष्ट्रदूत
SUNDAY
22 March 2026
A-B

#STATUE STORIES

A Bronze Head Purposefully Buried

Augustus is a young, kind of movie star. He sets out to attract everyone with his magnetic beauty and make everybody want to follow him

Augustus was one of the most brilliant minds, a real game changer. Someone who changed the path of history forever. This is a head of a bronze statue of Augustus, the really extraordinary object that we have from the first century BCE. Partly extraordinary because it still has its eyes. We are not used to seeing these eyes. We are used to very vacant sort of eye sockets of our Roman figures, but this still has its eyes, which make it a really fascinating object to see and a really evocative object.

When this statue was cast, Augustus had just defeated his rivals in a brutal civil war to lead Rome. It was the first time one man ruled alone, and Augustus used this image to cement his reign. What we see with Augustus is actually a bit of a change in the way that Roman politicians, Roman Statesmen were presented. Previously, age was seen as a sort of way of communicating wisdom. So, statues and busts of wrinkles and signs of age on a face was something that you would have been used to seeing.

Augustus doesn't do this. Rather, he wants to put forward the sort of youthfulness of a ruler and the vitality of a ruler. This is a young, kind of movie star. He sets out to attract everyone with his magnetic beauty and make everybody want to follow him. So, in that sense, it is a real shift of gears from the traditional way of representing authority. This scale is larger than life, giving Augustus the appearance of a god. And yet, this object is also a cautionary tale for future rulers like Honorius. Look closely and you can see microscopic grains of sand embedded in the bronze. They tell a story of the dangers of imperial ambition.

The reason why the head is so well preserved is because it was purposefully buried. In 30 BC, Augustus's army invaded Egypt and expanded into Kush to the south. But the Kushites resisted and pushed back. They looted Roman treasures, pulling the head of Augustus's statue from its body. They carried their prize back to their capital, Meroe, where they buried it under the steps of a temple. Kushites could now literally rub their feet in the face of Augustus. So, in a very disrespectful and insulting way, every time someone went on pilgrimage to this temple, what they did was ultimately walking on the head of the emperor, the most powerful leader of the world at that time. It was the sign that aggressive empire building comes at a cost.

Vanilla Cultivation Began On The Isle of Réunion

PART:1

Eric Jennings, an author and historian specializing in French colonial history, says, "The arrival of vanilla beans and their consumption is tied to Europeans basically duplicating Indigenous drinks from Central America." The French fell particularly hard for vanilla, Jennings explained, mixing it into a growing variety of sweets, including a frozen custard (better known today as ice cream) that had been introduced by Catherine de' Medici, according to legend, when she married the future King Henry II of France, in 1533. In 1789, Thomas Jefferson returned home from his stint as the second U.S. ambassador to France with such a love for vanilla ice cream that he had it served at what would later become the White House.

Vanilla producer Bertrand Côme displays bound and dried vanilla beans for sale at his Réunion farm. The beans generally grow as long as 6 to 11 inches.

● Bulbul Joshi

The flight from Paris to the island of Réunion, a French overseas department in the Indian Ocean, takes 11 hours, skirting the smoldering crater of the Piton de la Fournaise volcano before landing just shy of the water. But after disembarking at Roland Garros Airport, the pioneering French aviator was from Réunion, you find yourself in a tropical paradise with all the trappings of its motherland, with French wine and cheeses in its supermarkets and a boulangerie around every corner. Four hundred miles east of Madagascar, Réunion is a sort of Francophone Hawaii. It's a magnet for adrenaline junkies, known for its 600 miles of marked hiking trails, its zip-line and white-water rafting adventures, its lava tube expeditions and perfectly cresting surfing waves, as well as the dubious distinction, from a few years ago, of registering the most fatal shark attacks in the world per capita. But beyond the plunging waterfalls and palm-tree-lined lagoons hides another story, about this far-flung former colonial outpost's agricultural history and the beginnings, of all things, of the modern trade in vanilla, the supremely fragrant 'bean' that is, among spices, second only to saffron in value on the global market.

In fact, the vanilla plant's natural habitat is the tropical forests of Mexico, where native bees fertilize the big, blooming white orchids. The Aztecs, who considered the plant sacred, mixed its dried seedpods into a cold cocoa drink, chocolatl, as Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés discovered when he arrived at Tenochtitlán in the early 16th century. European aristocrats developed a taste for vanilla after it arrived from Spain's colonies in the New World on ships loaded with looted gold and silver. Eventually, a variation on the Aztecs' cocoa drink, now served hot, with added sugar and milk, took off across the Continent, soon spreading to the distant corners of the French Empire.

Eric Jennings, an author and historian specializing in French colonial history, says, "The arrival of vanilla beans and their consumption is tied to Europeans basically duplicating Indigenous drinks from Central America." The French fell particularly hard for vanilla, Jennings explained, mixing it into a growing variety of sweets, including a frozen custard (better known today as ice cream) that had been introduced by Catherine de' Medici, according to legend, when she married the future King Henry II of France, in 1533. In 1789, Thomas Jefferson returned home from his stint as the second U.S. ambassador to France with such a love for vanilla ice cream that he had it served at what would later become the White House. (Jefferson's handwritten recipe, based on that of French butler Adrien Petit, is among his official papers in the Library of Congress.)

Jennings's, new book, *Vanilla: The History of an Extraordinary Bean*, will be published this summer. Jennings is a historian at the University of Toronto who spent a decade researching vanilla's cultural history and its global economic spread.

Born on Réunion to enslaved parents in 1829, a child, whose mother died while giving birth, was known simply as Edmond, landowners didn't give last names to those they enslaved. Edmond grew up on a small plantation, Bellevue, above the town of Sainte-Suzanne, on the island's north coast. The island was uninhabited when the Portuguese first set foot on it in the early 16th century. In 1642, the French claimed the island for Louis XIII. Worked by enslaved captives transported from Africa, Madagascar and South Asia, dense forests soon became thriving coffee and sugar plantations. Later, indentured workers from India and China took over the grueling cultivation. The melting-pot Creole cuisine and Creole language found on the island today are a legacy of these successive waves of forced labor, a cultural mix 400 years in the making.

By the early 19th century, enslaved people made up 70 per cent of the island's population. This was Edmond's childhood world at Bellevue. The plantation's owner, Ferréol Bellier-Beaumont, was said to have 'treated him more like a son than a slave,' according to a letter written by Bellier-Beaumont's friend, a local official and botanist named Auguste Mézières Lépervanche. Bellier-Beaumont himself wrote of his affection for Edmond in an 1861 letter to the Sainte-Suzanne justice of the peace. "He was my favorite, and always at my side."

Bellier-Beaumont was a horticulturist with a passion for rare plants, and he taught Edmond from a young age the scientific names for the trees and plants he grew on the property, though he never taught him to read or write. In Bellevue's garden was a single vine of Vanilla planifolia, native to Mexico, that Jennings believes descended from one of the first vanilla saplings to survive on the island, after a shipment arrived from Paris in 1822. By then, the French had been struggling for years to break the Spanish monopoly on what had become a lucrative spice, planting vanilla in the tropical outposts of their own empire. But with no natural pollinators, every attempt to produce beans had failed.

At Bellevue, Bellier-Beaumont's vanilla vine grew beautiful flowers, but it never bore fruit. That all changed one day in 1841, when Edmond, then 12 years old, approached a blooming vanilla orchid and nimbly peeled back the lip of the flower to reveal the pollen inside. With the help of a needle or a sliver of wood (the historical record is unclear), he nudged back the rostellum, the thin membrane separating the male anther from the female stigma. Poking around further, he pressed the two parts together.

Months later, Bellier-Beaumont, accompanied by Edmond, was surprised to discover a green vanilla bean dangling from the spot where that flower had been. "Walking with my faithful companion, I noticed on the only vanilla plant I still had, a well tied bean," Bellier-Beaumont wrote years later. "I was astonished and told him so. He said it was he who had pollinated the flower."

Bellier-Beaumont was incredulous, but two or three days later, he noticed another bean on the vine. Edmond now showed him what he'd done. "Vanilla in that period was only cultivated in a few amateur gardens as a plant of pure curiosity," Mézières Lépervanche wrote. "Edmond, with the sagacity only a botanist can appreciate, was able to distinguish in the abnormal flower of the vanilla plant the organs of fertilization that are different from those of flowers in general and noticed very judiciously that the failure of the ovary resulted from the fact that the sexual organs were separated by a 'veil,' and he had the idea to lift it."

Today, the vast majority of the world's commercially cultivated vanilla plants are hand-pollinated using Edmond's pioneering technique, le geste d'Edmond, Edmond's gesture, as they took to calling it on Réunion. A skilled grower can pollinate 1,500 flowers in a day using his method; the process has yet to be mechanized.

After Edmond shared his discovery, Bellier-Beaumont paraded him proudly around the island, offering demonstrations to other plantation owners. "I have no way of proving it," Jennings told me, "but I've wondered many times if Bellier-Beaumont didn't charge attendance at these tours. Edmond gets all this attention projected on him and becomes a bit of a local star."

Edmond's technique was quickly adopted, enabling a new industry to take root. Soon two growers, Ernest Loupy and David de Floris, developed a system for more efficiently processing fresh green vanilla beans. Rather than simply leaving them out in the sun to dry, as was traditional in Mexico, they sped up the process by scalding fresh beans in hot water, to prevent them from ripening further, before drying them. Within 25 years of Edmond's innovation, Jennings said, "Réunion becomes the global leader in vanilla."

But with increased production-Réunion's vanilla output more than tripled between 1860 and 1880, land and labor costs rose, too. And with a huge new market emerging in the United States following the introduction of soft drinks (Coca-Cola debuted in 1886) and ice-cream cones (invented in New York City in 1896), Réunion's vanilla producers began looking to Madagascar, the much larger and less-developed French colony next door, as an alternative growing site.

Madagascar's new vanilla growers found great success in the lush, humid northeast coast of the island, where the vines attached their aerial roots to shaded tree trunks and climbed towards the canopy. It didn't take long for Madagascar to surpass Réunion as the new world capital of vanilla, a position it has held since the early 20th century. And despite periods of political instability in Madagascar, which gained independence from France in 1960, as well as natural disasters, boom-and-bust growing cycles tied to market speculation, and competition from artificial vanillin, the lab-made iteration of vanilla's main flavour component, first identified by a French scientist in 1858, some 80 percent of the world's vanilla is still grown in Madagascar today.

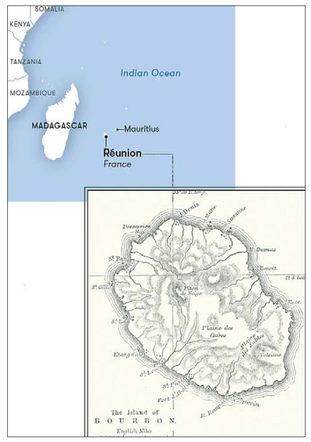
Back on Réunion, Edmond's story became the stuff of legend. Today, multiple streets bear his name, as well as several schools on the island. In Sainte-Suzanne, where he grew up, two memorials commemorate his contribution to botanical history. Novels and a children's comic book have embellished the details of his life. Of Bellevue itself, however, where Edmond pollinated that first vanilla orchid, nothing remains, the property largely is reclaimed by the forest. Only a rudimentary monument on the side of a road stands to mark the site.

To be continued...

rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com

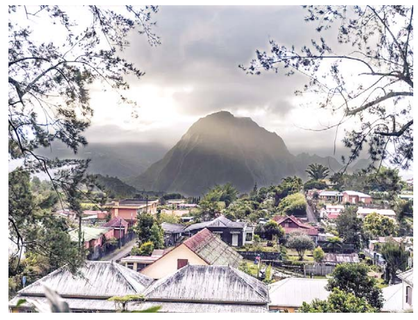
#ALL THAT'S GOOD

Historian Eric Jennings at Toronto's Allan Gardens. His new book on vanilla explores, in part, how one of the world's most expensive crops became synonymous with "bland."



Once called Bourbon Island, Réunion lies about 420 miles east of Madagascar. The tropical but mild climate mixed with high humidity, adequate rainfall and volcanic soils bolstered vanilla growth on the isles.

At about 4,300 feet above sea level, Bélouve Forest, at the center of Réunion Island, is considered a high-altitude tropical jungle. Bélouve has been described as the heart of the lush Réunion National Park.



Hiking to the peak of Piton d'Anchaing is one draw for tourists. Réunion also offers remote beaches, volcanoes, pristine coral reefs and lush rainforests.

#INJUSTICE

Du Bois Saw This and Everything Changed Forever

Du Bois had devoted his life to fighting racial injustice through intellectual means, Sam Hose's lynching would serve as the catalyst that shattered his faith in reason

On April 23, 1899, in Newnan, Georgia, the brutal lynching of a Black farmhand named Sam Hose marked a pivotal moment in American history, and it forever changed the life and worldview of W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the greatest scholars and activists the nation has ever produced.

Hose, falsely accused of murdering his employer, was seized by a mob of over 2,000 people. What followed was an unimaginable act of terror. Hose was tortured, burned alive for more than 30 minutes, and then dismembered while the crowd cheered and watched. His body parts were then sold as grisly souvenirs in local stores. This barbaric public spectacle was not just an isolated incident of racial violence, it was a grotesque manifestation of the systemic racism that permeated every facet of life in the American South during the era of Jim Crow.

For Du Bois, a man who had devoted his life to fighting racial injustice through intellectual means, Sam Hose's lynching would serve as the catalyst that shattered his faith in reason and set him on a revolutionary path.

The Intellectual Du Bois: Reason and Justice

Before the lynching of Sam Hose, Du Bois was already an established intellectual figure. Born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1868, Du Bois had risen from humble beginnings to become the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University. His early work focused on understanding the complexities of race and society through the lens of reason and education. Du Bois believed that intellectual engagement, the pursuit of knowledge, facts, and scientific inquiry, could ultimately defeat the racial prejudice and injustice that Black Americans faced.

His most famous work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), was a profound meditation on the experience of Black Americans in a racially divided society. It introduced the concept of 'double consciousness,' the feeling of being torn between one's own identity and the way society views them. Du Bois's work was grounded in a deep belief that exposing the truth of racial oppression would inspire change in society, through education, debate, and the power of reason.

The Moment of Transformation: Sam Hose's Severed Knuckles

Du Bois's worldview, however, would be forever altered by a single, horrific moment. After learning about Sam Hose's lynching, Du Bois traveled to Georgia with the intention of writing an article that would defend Hose's life using the tools of reason and facts. He planned to use his scholarly background to expose the injustice of the lynching and show the world the inherent barbarity of such acts. But before Du Bois could reach the newspaper office, he walked past a storefront window. There, to his shock and horror, he saw the severed and burned knuckles of Sam Hose, displayed for sale like a grotesque souvenir. The mob's barbaric mutilation of Hose's body was now being commodified and turned into a public spectacle for all to see. In that moment, Du Bois experienced a profound realization. The deeply entrenched racial hatred, the systematic dehumanization of Black people, could not be confronted simply by presenting facts, no matter how compelling or true. The raw, visceral nature of racial violence was beyond the realm of intellect, it was a passionate, emotional force that facts and reason alone could not dismantle.

From Scholar to Revolutionary

The moment Du Bois saw Sam Hose's mutilated remains was a turning point in his life. The scholar became a revolutionary. This was no longer a fight that could be waged solely on the academic battlefield, it was a fight for survival, for human dignity, and for racial justice. Facts, as Du Bois had once believed, could no longer be the sole weapon in this battle.

This realization set Du Bois on a new path, one that would combine intellectual rigor with direct action. Du Bois began to see the fight for racial justice as urgent and immediate, not as something that could be slowly solved through gradual intellectual change. His work would no longer just be about writing and research, it would involve direct political engagement, protest, and activism.

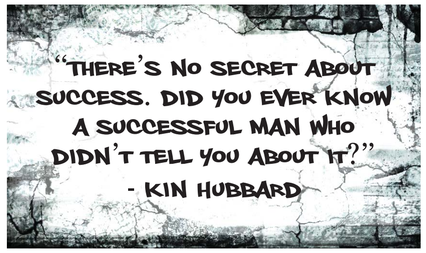
Du Bois's response to this turning point was to find the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. As a key figure in the NAACP, Du Bois used his platform as editor of its magazine, *The Crisis*, to push for a more radical, confrontational approach to achieving civil rights for African Americans. He advocated for immediate civil rights, the end of segregation, and an end to the disenfranchisement of Black voters.

The Legacy of Du Bois's Transformation

The lynching of Sam Hose and the trauma Du Bois experienced upon seeing his severed body parts was a defining moment in the history of the Civil Rights Movement. It was the spark that transformed Du Bois from a scholar into one of the most passionate and dedicated advocates for Black equality in American history.

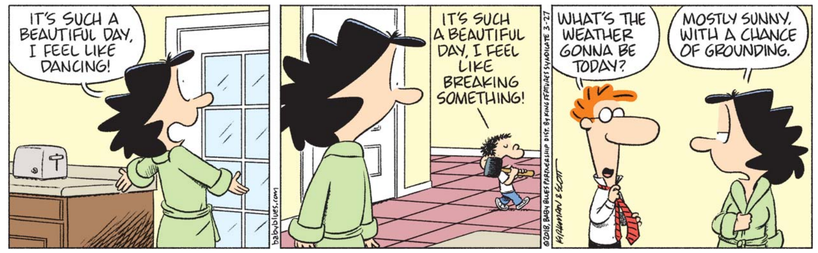
His new outlook resonated throughout the work of the NAACP and in his later contributions to the Pan-African movement. Moreover, his journey from intellectual to activist would inspire generations of leaders, thinkers, and advocates in the Civil Rights Movement, including figures like Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Angela Davis.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES

By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman