

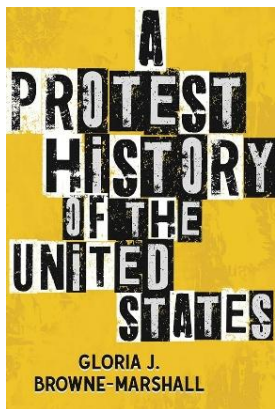
The CommUUnicator

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Waynesboro

The History of Protest

Members and friends of UUFW will be out protesting this Saturday at the third “No Kings” nationwide rally. This is a good time to review the ACLU’s guide to “[Protester’s Rights](#).” It is also a good time to reflect on the role of protest in our history. The book, *A Protest History of the United States* by Gloria J. Browne-Marshall. It was published last year by the UUA’s Beacon Press. This review is by author and lecturer, David Luhrssen.

The first act of protest after Europeans arrived in North America was ... a war? Specifically, Chief Powhatan’s war against the English colonists at Jamestown. Gloria J. Browne-Marshall makes that point early in *A Protest History of the United States*, whose thesis is that public pressure—protest—has been the engine of progress in a nation that became the U.S. from before the nation’s beginning.



The outcome of Powhatan’s war shows that protesters don’t always win, yet Browne-Marshall (Africana studies professor, John Jay College), tries to accentuate the positive, citing the suffragettes, organized labor, the ‘60s civil rights movement. She

will be criticized by some for her expansive deployment of the word “protest,” but she argues that the definition extends beyond picketing and shouting to speaking out, litigation and even maintaining cultural identity in the face

of assimilation. Violent or nonviolent protests? She hedges, referring to “some experts” who “argue that violent movements are counterproductive and that nonviolent protests are more effective in achieving social change.”

Browne-Marshall’s thinking flows from a core realization: “The United States of America has maintained a dual personality, writing of freedom in the Declaration of Independence with one hand, lashing the backs of enslaved people with the other, and all the while on stolen Indigenous land.” That will be enough to get *A Protest History* banned from libraries in the current climate. But as she writes in one of her more profound assertions, “Reading is resistance against an educational system that often whitewashes the past.”

[Gloria J. Browne-Marshall discussed her book on C-Span](#) last December.

