

BLACK LIBERATION MONTH NEWS 83

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BLACK FAMILY HISTORY IS FOR BLACK LIBERATION



Five generations of one family on Smith's plantation. Beaufort, South Carolina

Why Black Liberation Month

Black Liberation Month is our attempt to unite with the founders and supporters of Negro History Week, and join their emphasis on study with our emphasis on struggle. Moreover, the concept of Black Liberation Month more accurately reflects the needs of our movement, particularly the need to build on the massive participation of people in the upsurge of struggle during the 1960s.

Carter G. Woodson, noted Afro-American nationalist historian, founded Negro History Week in 1926. In addition to the newspaper column of J. A. Rodgers, this was the major source of information that Black people had about their history. Every year in schools, churches, civic and political organizations, Negro History Week has been a time for historical reading and discussion.

We believe that Negro History Week has made a great contribution to mass awareness of Black History. Moreover, the recognition of Negro History Week has caught on, and has become an intellectual tradition in the 20th Century Afro-American experience. However, times have changed considerably since 1926. In political and cultural terms, the time has come to transform our orientation: from Negro to **Black**, from history to **liberation**, from week to **month**.

The revolutionary upsurge of the 1960s is our most recent historical experience of massive militant protest. It continues to be a rich source of lessons for current and future struggles. Black liberation month unites with Woodson's effort, but does so by raising it to a higher level based on the lessons of the 1960s.

In sum, our study of history must be linked with the revolutionary history of the Black liberation movement. Our goal is not simply to symbolically institutionalize a change in our yearly calendar of events, but to use this month as one more way to raise the consciousness of the masses of people about the historical nature of exploitation and oppression, to unite people around a correct political line, and to mobilize people to actively take up the struggle for Black liberation.

EVERY YEAR, millions of people observe Black Liberation Month and/or Black History Month. They learn about what Black People have done. These things make us proud of our heritage, and help everybody, including Hispanic, Asian, and white peoples to know the *real* contributions that Black people have made to everyone's benefit. By keeping the Study of Black history alive we can continue to rescue our history from racist distortions and omission.

But when we study genealogy, our own family history, we can go deep. We can get a clear picture of how our particular family lived, struggled, and survived. We discover achievements against great odds, against the problems of oppressions and exploitation. We can use our family history as a basis for understanding how other black people struggled and made changes so that we could all have better lives. This knowledge puts each of us in the center of black history as a continuing movement of struggle. For just as generations in the past have helped to shape the world we live in today, we must, in turn, be the generation that changes and shapes the world of tomorrow, a world that is based on freedom and democracy for all men, women, seniors, and youth.

Genealogy: Education for Liberation

Black genealogy (family history) represents "Education for Liberation." Adlean Harris and Curtis Brasfield of the Afro-American Genealogy Society of Chicago point out that researching black genealogy is different from and much harder than researching rich white people, the rich Anglo Sector, or ancient or modern rulers. Part of maintaining a dominant position in society has been keeping an accurate record of family history because wealth and power are often passed on from generation to generation. Genealogy as a movement of poor people is very important, then, because it can give us the most accurate information on what happened among common people. Blacks were always told that the past would always be a mystery because no records were kept. While it is true that the same records were not kept for the rich and the poor, Black and White, some records or oral history can be found for everyone's family.

A second way Peoples College sees genealogy as "Education for Liberation" is that it links academic programs (school) with the community. Organizations like the Afro American Genealogical Society of Chicago play a vitally important role in teaching and training people, providing access to information and resources. We want to expand the potential for genealogical research by making it a part of all Black Studies Programs, by providing resources in various schools, and by working jointly on compiling and disseminating information and holding community workshops with local groups.

Finally genealogy is important because it stresses empirical research, which means locating records and documents which give evidence of certain views of ideas that we have. Rather than assuming facts or focusing totally on Black leaders, we are able to look at history through the lives and experiences of the people who made it. This requires fact and not fiction!

Where We've Been: Three Experiences in Black History

Our study of Afro American history teaches us that the masses of Afro Americans have been in three different job roles since coming to this continent: *slave*, *sharecropper* (farmer), and *factory worker*. While this does not describe every single black person it does define family history for the majority of us. Each of these roles existed mainly in a different historical time period which had different characteristics and during which we responded differently. During all of these time periods, the country and the people who run it got rich off labor and forced them to live under oppressive conditions. It is important that we know how Black people, how our families, experienced each of these three historical periods, slavery, rural, and urban.

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BOOKS TO READ

(These books can be found at branches of the Chicago Public Library or TIMBUKTU BOOKSTORE.)

Historical Background

1. Peoples College, *Introduction to Afro-American* (1977)
(the most comprehensive general survey of the Black experience. Used as a text in many Black Studies programs.)
2. Illinois Council for Black Studies, *Black People and the 1980 Census* (1980)
(proceedings of the most important conference on this subject ever held.)
3. Vincent Harding, *There is a River* (1981)
(a recent interpretation of Black History from a Black point of view.)
4. Alem Habtu & Yemi Agbeyegbe, *Africa Before the White Man* (1976)
(an accurate discussion of African History.)

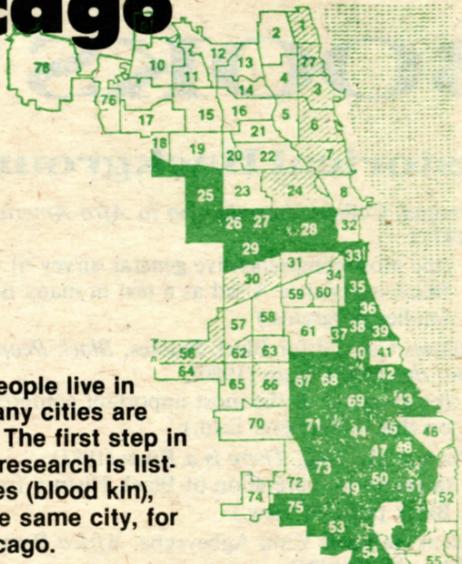
The Black Family

1. Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (1976)
(a new study proving Black family strengths during slavery.)
2. Harriet McAdoo, ed., *Black Families* (1981)
(a recent collection of 20 articles mostly by contemporary Black intellectuals.)
3. Robert Staples, ed., *The Black Family: Essays and Studies* (1971)
(a collection of over 40 readings covering the general social science literature.)
4. Gerald A. McWorter, Ed., *Studies on Black Children and Their Families* (1982)
(papers presented at 6th Annual NCBS Conference.)

Black Genealogy

1. James Walker, *Black Genealogy: How to Begin* (1977)
(a useful primer for getting started.)
2. James Rose and Alice Eichholz, *Black Genesis* (1978)
(the standard technical reference work on Black genealogy.)
3. The Afro-American Genealogical and Historical Society of Chicago, *Guidelines and Practical Suggestions for Researching Your Family History* (1983)
(the most up to date guidelines for self-help family projects.)
4. Dempsey Travis, *An Autobiography of Black Chicago* (1981)
(a Chicago family and sketches of 16 others.)

BLACK LIBERATION MONTH

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
<p>WHAT IS PEOPLES COLLEGE?</p> <p>Peoples College is an organization of Black people dedicated to educational activities that will help Black people live better lives and enable them to help make the entire society a better place for all people to live. It is an example of people pulling together in the spirit of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Paul Robeson, W.E.B. Dubois and Ida B. Wells.</p> <p>Peoples College was founded in Nashville, Tennessee (1970) and is now based in Chicago, Illinois. The key theme is "Education for Liberation." Peoples College</p>	<p>has been active in many community issues; has helped to build Black Studies in Illinois and around the country; has published books and pamphlets, including INTRODUCTION TO AFRO-AMERICAN STUDIES, VOLUME I & II, and supports many peoples struggles, especially for the freedom of Africa.</p> <p>Peoples College operates Timbuktu Bookstore, a non-profit educational center and art gallery at 2530 S. Michigan. Write for information: P.O. Box 7696, Chicago, IL 60680.</p>	<p>1</p> <p>1960: The sit-in movement was launched by four students in Greensboro, N.C. This sparked a new phase of militant Black protest that exposed the national oppression of Black people in the U.S.A.</p>	<p>1964: Eduardo Mondlane, first president of Frelimo, was assassinated by a mail bomb. Frelimo won a victorious national liberation struggle of the people of Mozambique against the Portuguese.</p>
<p>6</p> <p>1973: Native Americans unleashed armed resistance at Wounded Knee, South Dakota to protest government repression. Wounded Knee is a historic site of the 1890 massacre where federal troops killed over 300 Indians.</p>	<p>7</p> <p>1865: Black Laws of Illinois were repealed.</p> <p>1926: Negro History Week was founded by Carter G. Woodson in honor of Frederick Douglass.</p>	<p>8</p> <p>1964: Malcolm X founded the Organization for Afro-American Unity.</p>	<p>1943: 4,000 Black and white youth participated in the American Youth Congress march in Washington D.C. to protest government discrimination against Black servicemen during U.S. war policy.</p>
<p>13</p> <p>1817: Frederick Douglass, ex-slave, abolitionist, and organizer for Black freedom, was born.</p>	<p>14</p> <p>1790: Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church was born in Philadelphia. The development of the independent Black church made a major contribution to the formation and development of the Afro-American nation.</p>	<p>15</p> <p>1851: Black Abolitionists crashed a courtroom in Boston to rescue a fugitive slave.</p>	<p>1937: The National Negro Labor Council was founded in Chicago. It organized workers in the C.I.O.</p>
<p>20</p> <p>1895: Frederick Douglass died.</p>	<p>21</p> <p>1965: Malcolm X was assassinated at age 39 in the Audubon Ballroom in New York City.</p>	<p>22</p> <p>1872: The National United Front of farmers, workers and city folk, in which the Colored National Farmers Alliance played a prominent role, formed a Peoples Party in St. Louis and tried to establish itself as a national third political party.</p>	<p>1868: W.E.B. DuBois was born. He was a writer, an educator, a graduate, as well as an advocate of Pan Africanism, Secretary of the first Pan African Conference in 1900, organizer of the 1919 and key leader in the struggle to bring the case of colonialism before the Versailles Peace Conference.</p>
<p>27</p> <p>"Without struggle there is no progress." Frederick Douglass</p>	<p>28</p> <p>... Political work must be rooted among the masses and carried out on a professional level. What is required is that our feet march in the struggles waged by the masses, our hearts throb in empathy with their joys and sorrows, while our heads rationally use the science of revolution to develop our strategy and tactics.</p> <p>Peoples College Editorial for Marxism and Black Liberation</p>	<p>BLACK FAMILY HISTORY</p> <p>Chicago</p>  <p>Mississippi</p> <p>Before migrating to cities, most Black people lived in the rural south as sharecroppers. The sources of genealogical research are the church records (family Bibles, cemetery records, etc.) and the family history, letters, etc.)</p>	

FEBRUARY

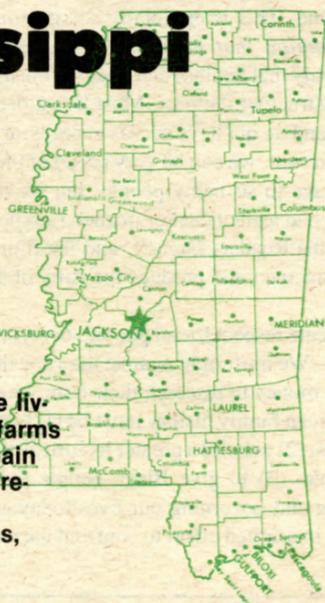
Most Black people live in cities, and many cities are mostly black. The first step in genealogical research is listing all relatives (blood kin), who live in the same city, for example, Chicago.

MONTH CALENDAR 1983

WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
2	3	4	5
<p>1968: Amilcar Cabral, first president of Guinea-Bissau, was assassinated by a mail bomb. Cabral led the glorious national liberation struggle of the people of Mozambique against the Portuguese.</p>	<p>1965: The Selma-to-Montgomery March dramatized the fight for Black voting rights. It ended with a rally of 25,000 people in front of the state capital.</p>	<p>1913: Rosa Parks, the Black worker who sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott, was born.</p>	<p>1968: There was a demonstration in Orangeburg, South Carolina, to end segregation in bowling alleys in that city, resulting in a police assault on February 8, brutally murdering 4 students and wounding 50.</p>
9	10	11	12
<p>1968: Black and white youth led the American Youth Congress march in Washington D.C. to protest government discrimination against Black servicemen and the war policy.</p>	<p>"While it was true a thousand years ago, that human toil and energy was unable to feed, clothe and shelter all mankind, this has not been the case since the beginning of the nineteenth century; and today, with what we know of natural forces; with the land and labor at our disposal, with the known techniques of processing materials and transporting goods, there is no adequate reason why a single human being on earth should not have sufficient food, clothing and shelter for healthy life." <i>W.E.B. DuBois</i></p>	<p>1933: The first Black library was founded in Philadelphia. This is one of the many examples of Black peoples' struggle to build institutions and to develop culturally.</p>	<p>1909: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded at Niagara Falls, N.Y.</p> <p>1793: The Fugitive Slave Law was passed which made it illegal to protect an escaped slave.</p>
16	17	18	19
<p>1909: National Negro Congress founded in Chicago. It organizes workers in the C.I.O.</p>	<p>1865: The Klu Klux Klan, a fascist organization that promotes white supremacy, organized in Pulaski, Tennessee.</p>	<p>1688: Quakers of Germantown, Pennsylvania made the first formal protest against slavery in the western hemisphere.</p>	<p>1909: W.E.B. DuBois organized the first Pan African Congress which was held in Paris, France.</p>
23	24	25	26
<p>1868: W.E.B. DuBois was born. He was a writer, an educator, and a statesman, as well as architect of Pan Africanism, Secretary of the Pan African Conference in London, organizer of the second in London, and key leader in attempting to bring the case against racialism before the Versailles Peace Conference.</p>	<p>"Modern imperialism and modern industrialism are one in the same system; root and branch of the same tree. The race problem is the other side of the labor problem; and the Black man's burden is the white man's burden." <i>W.E.B. DuBois</i></p>	<p>1877: The Hayes-Tilden Betrayal was announced.</p>	<p>1884: At the Berlin Conference the Europeans ended the "Scramble for Africa".</p>

FAMILY HISTORY AND BLACK LIBERATION

Mississippi



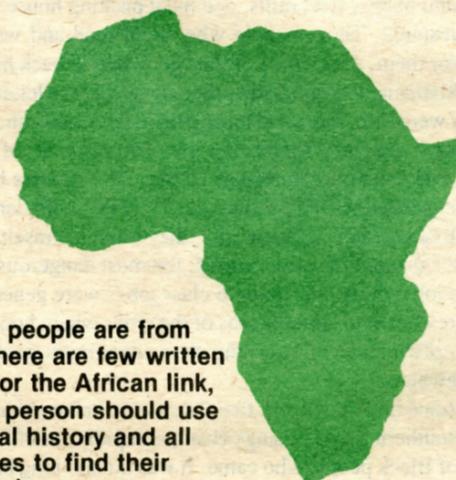
Before migrating to the cities, most Black people lived in the rural south on farms as sharecroppers. The main sources of genealogical research are the churches (family Bibles, cemeteries, etc.) and the family (oral history, letters, etc.).

Slave States



Until the civil war most Blacks were slaves. Records for this period were kept by slave owners (plantation logs, bills of sale, etc.), although some Blacks kept their own records.

Africa



All Black people are from Africa. There are few written records for the African link, but each person should use family oral history and all other clues to find their African link.

BLACK GENEALOGICAL GUIDE:

How to do a Family History Chart

Goal: To Cover 125 Years (at least back to slavery)

Your family history is your link to all history and helps you to understand not only *what* happened, but *why* it happened.

What you need to know about your family:

1. Who are your family members. List each name according to their relationship to you.
2. What are their dates of birth and death?
3. What jobs did each hold?

What you need to use:

1. Oral interviews (talk to oldest relatives).
2. Get official records (birth certificates, etc.).
3. Family Bibles.
4. Letters, diaries.

(Your name in full) Birth date Birth place Marriage date Where married	_____ (Your father's full name)	_____ (Your father's father)	_____ (Your grandfather's father)	
	Birth date Birth place Marriage date Where married Death date Where died			
	_____ (Your mother's maiden name)	_____ (Your mother's father)	_____ (Your grandfather's father)	_____ (Your grandmother's father)
	Birth date Birth place Death date	Birth date Birth place Death date Where died	Birth date Birth place Death date Where died	Birth date Birth place Death date Where died

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Three Experiences in Black History

The Slave Experience

During slavery Black people had no rights; it was against the law to teach a slave to read or write. There was no guarantee that any one family would be kept together. When Black people did have information about themselves, it was an oral history brought with them from Africa. Otherwise, there were records from ship's logs providing slave traders with specific information. In slavery, the most accurate information was kept in plantation records. Names were inconsistently used. The difficulties with slave records reflect the inconsistent business practices of white plantation owners and managers. Information which follows these events can be very difficult to locate.

The Rural Experience

As sharecroppers, Black people worked extremely hard, getting very little in return for their toil. However, working on an isolated farm, the Black family had some degree of independence. Most Black families existed as single units sharing with other Black tenants or renting a farm from a large landowner. As a result, the entire family did the work required on the farm. Black people made a picture of keeping family Bibles, and some kept farm logs. The record keeping established during this period, such as the logging of church memberships, also provided important information.

During this period, especially during the Civil War, there were Black people who escaped the plantation to fight in the war (often changing their names). Those who escaped to find freedom in the North, or those who died fighting or escaping, made it difficult for the plantation owners or government to keep consistent records. Because of the records, though, all Black people should be able to trace their history back to the Civil War.

The City Experience

Conditions in the South grew from bad to worse and Black people were victimized by the Ku Klux Klan, the exploitation of the sharecropping system, and the boll weevil. Many began to migrate when northern industrial capitalists sent recruiters to find workers for jobs in auto plants, steel mills, and meat packing houses. More money and better living conditions resulted. Those people who could read and write, or find someone else who could do it for them, sent letters of the "good news" back home to the folks in Mississippi, Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, and other places. These letters said things were better and as soon as they were able, more and more people left the South, leaving one form of oppression to go to another searching for a better life. For example, of the 232,565 Blacks in Chicago in 1930, 41,693 were born in Illinois (18%), 38,356 were born in Mississippi and another 23,485 in Tennessee, 21,269 in Georgia, 17,811 in Louisiana and 12,165 in Arkansas.

When Black people got to the city, they found themselves forced into unskilled factory jobs. The jobs that nobody else wanted, the most dangerous jobs, and the lowest paid jobs. There was a job ceiling and "middle class jobs" were generally not available. They found themselves restricted to certain areas of the cities where housing was already in bad shape - "ghettoes" - often replacing working class white immigrants forced by real estate interests to move elsewhere.

At the same time, however, their lives were better off in the cities than they were on the small rural southern farms. Things changed rapidly, as cities grew and took full advantage of millions of Black people who came. It was not too long before Black people realized that

while the oppression they suffered had indeed changed, it had not gone away! This was especially true when the country as a whole experienced hard times, like the Depression in the 1930's, when Black people would lose their jobs first, get kicked out of their homes, and get put in prison more than any other group of people. Soon they saw this as a recurring pattern, Black people always on the bottom, among those most unemployed, with the lowest family incomes, and the least amount of educational opportunities to get a better one.

Now after 250 years of slavery, Blacks could not realize the American dream. It was these conditions which would lead Black people to resist, sometimes non-violently, sometimes violently, but nevertheless to fight for what was rightfully theirs. Often, they joined and were joined by other groups of poor people whose lives were similar to their own.

During all of these changes, lifestyle and family culture also changed considerably. Official records on Black people were more accurate and consistent than they had ever been, since vital statistics were based on national standards, birth certificates, marriage licenses and death certificates. Ties that bound Black families together were also being transformed. Blacks who had left the South and migrated north sometimes lost track of family histories and records. This was all a part of losing farms, and being driven off the land. This is another reason for the importance of family reunions today. Because they bring together the generations who remained in an area with those who migrated, it is a means of preserving the family bond.

Where We are Going: Family History as a Road to Building the Freedom Struggle

It is clear that the search for family history is an important way for building family unity. Family history can make each new generation of Black people more self-conscious of their role in history and active participants in the on-going fight for a new society that guarantees freedom and democracy for everyone. This is especially so since *almost all Black families have faced racism and exploitation that have curtailed their family's developing its full potential.* Every person or family that begins such a search must be aware of the difficulties that stand in the way of reconstructing the past. Most Black people, like most people in our society over-all, are not rich and do not have access to necessary records that document the histories of our families. Therefore, we can be very proud of the work of Alex Haley and *Roots* and the inspiration it gave to so many people, but we must also remember that *Roots* (the book and TV version) had a great deal of financial support from a major foundation, publishing companies (like the Readers Digest), and the film industry which allowed a large team of investigators to uncover and produce the story of the Haley family.

Thus, it is the realization that in order to create respect for all people, everyone should have the opportunities for genealogical research. We must fight against the view that only a few people should have the opportunity and the money to research their family history.

Finally, the ultimate goal of an Afro-American family history must be (1) to make history tell the truth about ourselves and our families; (2) to build a greater historical consciousness among all people, especially Black people; (3) to give Black people the tools to increase the role that we can play in controlling and governing our lives today and in the future; and (4) to bring all Black people together in a united effort to confront the enemies of freedom and democracy wherever they appear.