BLACK AMERICA IN Smithsonian

September 2016
smithsonian.com

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM:

REP. JOHN LEWIS
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ISABEL WILKERSON
LONNIE G. BUNCH III
NATASHA TRETHEWEY
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ANDREW YOUNG
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JESMYN WARD
WENDEL A. WHITE
ILYASAH SHABAZZ
MAE JEMISON
SHEILA E.
JACQUELINE WOODSON
CHARLES JOHNSON
JENNA WORTHAM
DEBORAH WILLIS
THOMAS CHATTERTON WILLIAMS
and many more

+

BLACK TWITTER
A WORLD IN CRISIS FINDS ITS VOICE

HEADING NORTH
THE GREAT MIGRATION CHANGED EVERYTHING

ESCAPE FROM BONDAGE
A LONG-LOST SETTLEMENT OF RUNAWAY SLAVES

SINGING THE BLUES
THE SALVATION OF AMERICA'S ROOTS MUSIC

•DEFINING MOMENT•

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OPENS
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Lincoln Memorial on the National Mall

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Visit the National Zoo and marvel at giant panda cub Bei Bei or snap a selfie in front of the National Zoo's iconic Z-O-O sculpture. Don't leave the neighborhood without stopping by Baked By Yael for a delicious panda cake pop.

14TH & U STREETS

By day, stroll through 14th Street's local shops to find unique treasures to remember your trip. By night, discover why U Street was once dubbed "Washington's Black Broadway" with live jazz at Lincoln Theatre.

Ford's Theatre in Penn Quarter

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DC's newest neighborhood on the Anacostia River sits just five blocks south of the U.S. Capitol Building. Relax near the waterfront at Yards Park, cool down with a treat from Ice Cream Jubilee or head across the river to explore the Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum.

PENN QUARTER

History buffs will swoon at the historic relevance of this neighborhood. Tour Ford's Theatre or take in national treasures at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. And if you're in need of retail therapy, Penn Quarter is a great place to find major retailers and get your shopping fix.

Shopping on 14th and U Streets

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NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY & CULTURE GRAND OPENING

Sept. 24
History will be made with the debut of the National Mall's newest Smithsonian museum, dedicated to the African American experience.

NATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL

Sept. 24
This renowned literary festival features book readings and signings from popular authors.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART EAST BUILDING REOPENS

Sept. 30
The art institution's 75th anniversary includes the unveiling of its revamped space and a debut exhibition, *In the Tower: Barbara Kruger* (Sept. 30-Jan. 29).

TASTE OF DC

Oct. 8-9
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Smithsonian
SEPTEMBER 2016

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A special issue of the magazine on the occasion of the opening of the Smithsonian's national African-American museum

This flute was one of the few possessions of the probably autistic prodigy Thomas Greene Wiggins, who was born enslaved in Georgia in 1849 and, under the name "Blind Tom," became an international star. **Photo by Wendel A. White**

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JOIN THE JOURNEY

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Contributors

John Lewis

Called the "conscience of the U.S. Congress," Representative Lewis of Georgia was a major figure in the civil rights movement of the 1960s, serving as a leader of the 1963 March on Washington and the 1965 protest in Selma that became "Bloody Sunday" after Alabama state troopers beat Lewis and others. As recently as June, he got into what he calls "good trouble," staging a sit-in in Congress to demand stricter gun control. For *Smithsonian* he **reflects on the segregation** he experienced in the South: "When children and adults grow up seeing these signs day in and day out, it scars the soul."

Isabel Wilkerson

As Chicago bureau chief for the *New York Times*, Wilkerson received a Pulitzer Prize in 1994—the first African-American woman to be awarded journalism's highest honor. Around then she realized that the Great Migration was "the backstory of much of what I was writing about," she says, "the connective tissue between so many stories." This led to her best-selling book *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*, winner of a National Book Critics Circle Award. She revisits the phenomenon in an **original reported essay** examining recent claims of a "reverse migration."

Danny Clinch

As a director of music videos, Clinch has been nominated for three Grammy Awards and worked with such artists as Willie Nelson and Pearl Jam. His images have appeared in *GQ*, *Esquire*, *Vanity Fair*, on album covers and in his three books of photography. Though a veteran of the music scene, he says the diversity of people at the **International Blues Challenge** in Memphis blew his mind. "It opened my eyes to how far this music travels."

Jesmyn Ward

Ward's novel *Salvage the Bones*, which won the National Book Award, is set on the Gulf Coast and tells the story of a family in the path of **Hurricane Katrina**—an experience she could relate to directly. Ward and her family evacuated their home in coastal Mississippi as it flooded after the hurricane. "Writing about my family's experience was even more affecting than writing about the family in *Salvage the Bones*," says Ward. She's the editor of the new anthology *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks About Race*.

Oprah Winfrey

Publisher, television executive, actress, Broadway producer, movie producer, philanthropist (she made a major financial donation to the national African-American museum), Winfrey is one of the most successful media figures in U.S. history. We asked the famed interlocutor who inspires her. **"Harriet Tubman is a personal hero,"** she says. "I look at my ancestors and I consider her to be among them. Not directly, but in the story of slavery and those who survived it."

Jenna Wortham

A staff writer for the *New York Times Magazine*, Wortham previously covered technology for the newspaper and for Wired. In this issue, she considers **Twitter's role in African-American life**. "I think Twitter has irrevocably changed how humans talk to and see one another," Wortham says. "It allows us to expand our worldview." She's working on an art book called *Black Futures* and met her collaborator, Kimberly Drew, through Twitter.

Jacqueline Woodson

Woodson is the author of more than 20 books for children and young adults. Her 2014 best seller, *Brown Girl Dreaming*, won a National Book Award, a Coretta Scott King Award and a Newbery Honor. In this issue, she writes about the **impact of black and white dolls**—on her as a child, and on history. "White dolls did not mirror the way I looked, and white characters in books rarely mirrored my Brooklyn experience," she says. "Children need to see mirrors of themselves in the world as a means of feeling legitimized and part of something bigger."

Natasha Trethewey

The Mississippi native was the U.S. poet laureate from 2012 to 2014. She's the author of four poetry books, including *Native Guard,* awarded the 2007 Pulitzer Prize, and a nonfiction work, *Beyond Katrina*. To write about the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street **Baptist Church in Birmingham**, Trethewey studied "newspaper articles, interviews, survivors' accounts and architectural descriptions of the church and its directional orientation."

Deborah Willis

A leading scholar of African-American photography and a noted photographer herself, Willis is the chair of New York University's department of photography and imaging. She has specialized in studying depictions of black women—an interest that she says was sparked visiting her mother's beauty shop as a girl, where she was introduced "to a world of women's stories, their activism and their images." Among the topics of Willis' recent books are fashion and beauty, emancipation and the first lady, Michelle Obama. "I see myself in the tradition of **Frederick Douglass**, in that I feel that not only must we create, we must also develop a more inclusive history of American art by researching and writing about art that has been overlooked."

Touré

A widely published journalist and former co-host of the MSNBC discussion show "The Cycle," Touré is the author of five books, including *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness?* He says his piece about the **current state of the blues** draws on his love of the genre: "Muddy Waters' 'Mannish Boy' is the song that means the most to me. It's a simple song lyrically, but there's so much there, talking about the masculinity, sexuality and power of the young black man."

Wendel A. White

Works by the acclaimed New Jersey-based photographer have been collected by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago. Though the things he photographs are quite varied—people, landscapes, still lifes—"all of them," he says, "are about the history and foundations of the African-American experience in the U.S." Because of his renown for documenting African-American artifacts (including, eight years ago, a lock of Frederick Douglass' hair), we asked him to go behind the scenes of the National Museum of African American History and Culture and render iconic **objects in the collection**. The most poignant to him? The stained-glass shard from the bombed Birmingham church.

Katie Nodjimbadem

Our staff reporter writes the Ask Smithsonian column each month and regularly contributes to Smithsonian.com. For this issue, she interviewed several key figures. "It was surreal to interview John Lewis about history within minutes of him leaving the House floor in June, when he made history again," she says.

OUR SEPTEMBER COVERS

We created four different covers for this special issue. Each image showcases a work by a leading artist or photographer with a fresh perspective on what it means to be black today.

Collage art by ***Lorna Simpson*** *disrupts views of race, gender.*

Photographer ***xST/ Shawn Theodore*** *documents street life.*

Photo by ***Delphine Diallo****, face painting by* ***Laolu Senbanjo****.*

Amy Sherald*'s 2016 painting* Innocent You, Innocent Me.

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SPECIAL ISSUE

Black. in America

A summer of crisis. The end of the Obama era. A new museum. Our nation reaches a defining moment

In 2003, when officials finally approved the idea of an African-American museum in Washington, they could not have foreseen how fateful the timing would be. The opening this month comes at the end of the first black president's eight years in the White House (a symbol of power built, not incidentally, by slaves, the powerless). It also caps a historic summer of violence and anguish. "A racial crisis flares around us," the Georgetown professor Michael Eric Dyson wrote in July after the nation reacted in horror to the killing of black men by white police officers in Louisiana and Minnesota and the killing of white police officers by a black man in Texas. Not in half a century have such momentous events concerning black life in America converged with such force. And that, simply, is the reason for this special issue. We delve into this fraught but opportune moment from multiple angles—from the discovery of a previously unknown settlement of escaped slaves, to a new chronicle of the Great Migration, to the inside story of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. This new feature of our landscape is itself a historic achievement as well as a place to better understand history, a place that a presidential commission 13 years ago said was "the only national venue that can serve as an educational healing space to further racial reconciliation." Long, long overdue. And just in time.

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Uneasy Lies the Crown

Martin Luther King Jr.'s message of peace might seem like a distant dream after this summer of violence—which is why his daughter, Bernice King, believes it's more urgent than ever

"My heart aches right now, because the next generation de-serves a lot better."

Bernice King, the youngest child of Martin Luther King Jr., was sitting on the top floor of the King Center, the Atlanta educational nonprofit she has run since 2013, staring down at her smartphone. The screen pulsed with the news of the week: Protests in Baton Rouge. Protests in New York. Five cops assassinated in Dallas. A Minnesota man named Philando Castile fatally shot in his car by a police officer while his fiancée streamed the encounter on Facebook Live.

King says she watched the video, all the more devastating because of the woman's young daughter in the back seat: "And she goes, 'Mommy, I'm here with you,' or something like that, and watching that, I just broke down in tears. All I could think about was being at my father's funeral, sitting on my mother's lap and looking up at her, and being so puzzled, so troubled, so perplexed and confused, and, phew, I will tell you: It brought me back."

Five years old at the time of her father's death, King has spent most of her life grappling with his oversized legacy. As a young woman she dodged the ministry, stumbled through law school—at one point, she

BY MATTHEW SHAER
PHOTO BY MELISSA GOLDEN

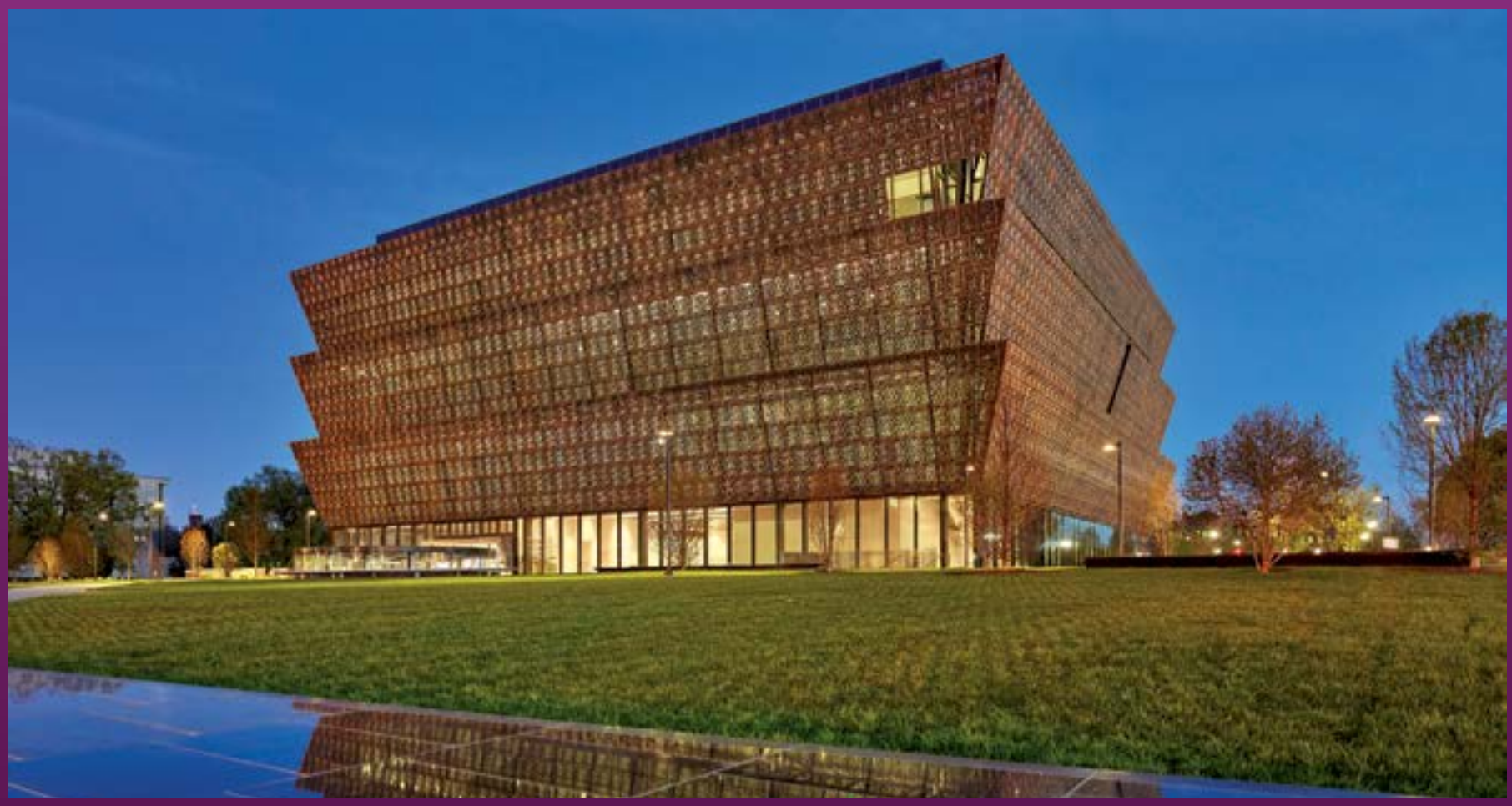
says, she contemplated suicide—and clerked for a judge in Atlanta. "I wanted to feel free to be Bernice, to find myself amid all the trauma, and not to get lost in all that Kingness," she recalls. "But the whole time, I was staying involved with the King Center"—which her mother, the late Coretta Scott King, founded in 1968—"attending the conferences on my father's nonviolent philosophy, and eventually I decided that's where my heart was."

Not that it's been easy. In 2005, then a member of the King Center's board, she was criticized for her use of center grounds for a march against same-sex marriage legislation. And in 2006, she attempted, unsuccessfully, to block the transfer of nearby historic buildings to the National Park Service, only to fall into a series of spats with her two brothers. (Her sister died in 2007.)

Now King finds herself at the helm of the King Center—with its mission to spread the gospel of nonviolent protest—at perhaps the most fraught moment for American race relations in a generation. "I have a lot of sadness about what's happening in our nation," she says. "It just seems like we've become so polarized. So focused on violence." But she takes solace in the work the center does: the educational seminars the organization sponsors in the field, in places like Ferguson, Missouri; the ongoing stewardship of the vast King archives.

"I see a major part of my job as keeping Daddy's words and philosophy alive," King says. "Because I think if we could get back to that philosophy, to listening and not being afraid of exploring the information on the other side, and finding ways to make connections without compromising personal principles—well, we'd move things forward." Then she offered a piece of wisdom from a different parent. "It's like my mother said: 'Struggle is a never-ending process. Freedom is never really won, you earn it and win it in every generation.' That's how I feel today, you know? The fight isn't over." O

THANK YOU



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Solving for X

Her father advocated using either "the ballot or the bullet." But Ilyasah Shabazz wants to show another side of Malcolm X

Ilyasah Shabazz was just 2 years old and sitting in the audience with her pregnant mother and three sisters when her father was assassinated onstage at the Audubon Ballroom in New York City in 1965. Malcolm X, the magnetic and polarizing spokesman for the Nation of Islam, had broken with the black nationalist group, and three Nation members were convicted of the killing. The "apostle of violence as a solution to the American Negro's problems . . . was murdered today," the *New York Herald Tribune* reported, nodding at Malcolm X's exhortation to use "any means necessary" to achieve equality. In his eulogy, the actor Ossie Davis expressed a more nuanced view, lamenting the loss of "our living, black manhood."

As debate raged over Malcolm X's impact, Ilyasah Shabazz and her five sisters were insulated from the firestorm by their mother, Betty Shabazz, who moved the family from Queens to a big house on a tree-lined street in Mount Vernon, New York. "I think my mother focused on making sure that we were whole," Shabazz says one morning in her apartment not far from her childhood home as she recalls a suburban upbringing of private schools and music lessons. Betty herself exemplified a quiet community activism, founding a program that helped teenage mothers continue their education.

Though Malcolm's coats hung in the hall closet and his papers were in the study, it wasn't until Shabazz went away to college and took a course on her father—reading his speeches and his autobiography—that his

BY THOMAS STACKPOLE
PHOTO BY WAYNE LAWRENCE

EXCELLENCE

work came into focus. “My father was made to be this angry, violent, radical person. And so I always say, look at the social climate. . . . He was responding to the injustice.” Her favorite speech of his is the 1964 Oxford Union debate, where he argued that when “a human being is exercising extremism, in defense of liberty for human beings, it’s no vice.”

Like her father, Shabazz advocates for civil rights, but, like her mother, a professor before her death in 1997, she stresses education. “When young people are in pain, they don’t say, ‘I’m in pain. Let me go get a good education,’” she says. A decade ago, she founded a mentor program that introduces teens to artists, politicians and educators who overcame hardship. Last year, she began teaching a class at John Jay College of Criminal Justice on race, class and gender in the prison system.

She has also written three books about her father, including one for children, and co-edited a volume of his writings. While her books gently echo his appeals for education and empowerment, she boldly defends his legacy. When we learn African-American history, she says, “it’s either Malcolm or Martin, the bad guy and the good guy. But if you look at our society and our history, we know about Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, and we’re taught to celebrate both of them.”

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Ahead of the Class

Her family's name is synonymous with the case that ended segregation in schools. More than 60 years later, Cheryl Brown Henderson says we still have a lot to learn

BY KATIE NODJIMBADEM
PHOTO BY JASON DAILEY

In 1970, when Cheryl Brown earned a spot on the all-white cheerleading squad at Baker University in Kansas, someone set fire to her dormitory-room door. "People don't like change and power concedes nothing without a fight," she says.

She would know. Few families in U.S. history are more closely tied to the fight over desegregation. She was just 3 in 1954 when the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* that the nation's segregated schools were unconstitutional.

Her father, Oliver Brown, a pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, had joined the lawsuit on behalf of Cheryl's sister, Linda, then 8, who was barred from attending the white elementary school in their Topeka neighborhood. The case, organized by the NAACP, involved more than 200 plaintiffs from three other states and the District of Columbia and, famously, was argued by Thurgood Marshall, who went on to become the country's first African-American Supreme Court justice. Cheryl Brown says her father was hesitant to join the lawsuit, but her mother convinced him so their children and others "would have access to any public schools, not simply being assigned based on race."

Cheryl Brown (pictured above at left with her mother, Leola Brown Montgomery, center, and sister Terry Brown Tyler), whose married name is Henderson, went on to work as a teacher and guidance counselor for Topeka Public Schools and serve as a consultant for the Kansas Board of Education. (Her sister Linda worked as a Head Start teacher and a music instructor. Her father died in 1961.) In 1988 Brown Henderson co-founded the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research to inform the public about the historic lawsuit.

By providing scholarships for minority students to pursue careers in education, Brown Henderson is trying to break down another educational barrier—the achievement gap. Overall, black and Latino students have lower high-school graduation rates and lower standardized test scores than white students. She acknowledges the need for sweeping policy reform but also believes that educators of color must play a significant role in the development of minority students. "We have a lot of work to do," Brown Henderson says. "We can't keep losing generations."

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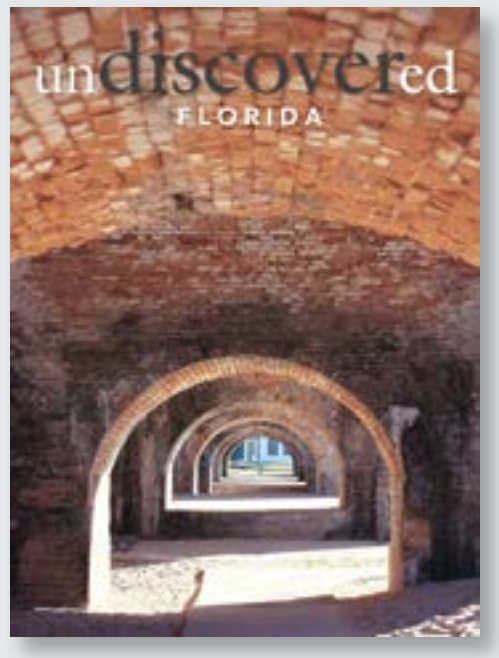

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Aligning the Stars

The renowned singer Harry Belafonte rallied famous actors and musicians to the civil rights movement. His youngest child, Gina Belafonte, activates a new generation of tech-savvy celebrities

Last year, Sankofa, the nonprofit organization founded by Harry Belafonte and his youngest child, Gina, got a call from Usher's manager: The singer needed help. "He was angry about people getting murdered by police officers," Gina says. "So we sat down with them and strategized how they could bring their message to the masses." The result was "Chains," a video that forced viewers to stare into the eyes of unarmed people who were killed by police. If the camera detected a wandering gaze, the words "Don't Look Away" appeared and the video stopped playing.

The short film epitomizes what the Belafontes had in mind when they started Sankofa in 2014: It bridges the worlds of entertainment and advocacy. The New York-based group—whose members include actors, professors, lawyers and community organizers—is a digital-era continuation of Harry Belafonte's longtime grassroots organizing.

It was in 1953 that Belafonte had his first meeting with Martin Luther King Jr. Both men were then in their mid-20s, and the civil rights leader wanted the singer to join him in launching his movement. Their 45-minute appointment stretched to four hours, and Belafonte became one of King's most trusted allies. "I respond as often as possible, and as totally as possible, to Dr. King," Belafonte told TV host Merv Griffin in 1967. "And his needs and emergencies are many."

It was a risky time to be so deeply involved in politics. The McCarthy hearings were silencing some of Hollywood's most impassioned

BY JENNIE ROTHENBERG GRITZ

voices. Still, King and Belafonte were able to recruit celebrities such as Sidney Poitier, Paul Newman, Sammy Davis Jr., Charlton Heston, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan to attend the 1963 March on Washington.

Gina Belafonte, who was born in 1961, remembers many of these artists passing through her family's living room. "It was an open-door policy," says Gina, now an actress herself, with credits including the 1988 film *Bright Lights, Big City* and the soap opera *All My Children*. "I was sitting on their hips, on their laps, on the chairs next to them, and then, finally, stuffing envelopes and licking stamps, helping out however I could."

As an adult, Gina devoted herself to the issue that was on King's mind just before he died. "He was about to launch the Poor People's Campaign," she says. For years, Gina was involved in reforming the prison system and working with former gang members.

Now, at Sankofa, Gina is carrying on her father's work with celebrities. In October, the organization will host a two-day social justice festival in Atlanta featuring singers such as Estelle, Dave Matthews, and Carlos Santana and activists such as Cornel West. Harry Belafonte, nearing 90, remains involved in Sankofa's meetings and planning. As he put it in *Sing Your Song*, a 2011 documentary about him that Gina lead-produced, "I tried to envision playing out the rest of my life almost exclusively devoted to reflection. But there's just too much in the world to be done."

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Black Comedy

Dick Gregory wrote the book on how to tackle racism with humor. In a one-woman show, his daughter Ayanna Gregory brings his story to a new audience

In the early 1960s, when Dick Gregory was working at the Playboy Club in Chicago, he used to tell a joke about a restaurant that refused to serve "colored people." The punch line: "That's all right, I don't eat colored people. Bring me fried chicken."

Gregory, who started performing in the 1940s, was one of the first mainstream comedians to boldly highlight the absurdity of segregation in his routine. But at civil rights rallies, he was all business. "When I went down to Selma, I wasn't going there to entertain no goddamn people," he says now. "I went down to go to jail. I was ready to die." What do comedy and activism have in common? Timing, says Ayanna Gregory, the second youngest of Gregory's ten children. "In comedy, if you don't have the right rhythm, folks won't catch the joke," she says. "He had that rhythm in other parts of his life, too. It's all about paying attention and knowing what you need to do, in that moment."

BY JENNIE ROTHENBERG GRITZ
PHOTO BY TOM WOLFF

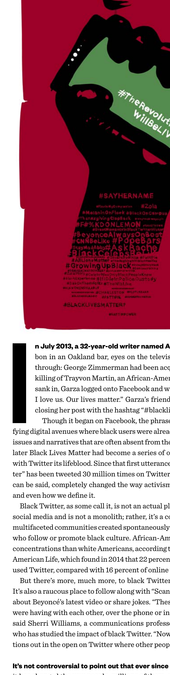
It took Ayanna a while to find her own rhythm. After starting out as a schoolteacher, she began performing for young audiences. In a musical program called "I Dream a World", she encourages kids to imagine progress. "When you ask kids what they want, they tell you what they don't want: 'I want a world with no drugs and no violence.' I ask, 'What about the world you do want? What does that look like?'"

Last year, Ayanna debuted a one-woman dramatic tribute to her father, "Daughter of the Struggle", which recounts that her older siblings were taken away in police wagons and faced down mobs in Mississippi. "Dad never told any of us what to do with our lives," Ayanna said. "But we grew up with his example—seeing someone who isn't willing to kill for his beliefs but is willing to die for them. That made all the difference." O

Black Tweets Matter

"BlackTwitter" has become a powerful force for political activism, lightning-fast cultural commentary—and a place to just hang out

BY JENNA WORTHAM • ILLUSTRATION BY ADRIAN FRANKS



In July 2013, a 32-year-old writer named Alicia Garza was sipping bourbon in an Oakland bar, eyes on the television screen as the news came through: George Zimmerman had been acquitted by a Florida jury in the killing of Trayvon Martin, an African-American teenager. As the decision sank in, Garza logged onto Facebook and wrote, "Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter." Garza's friend Patrisse Cullors wrote back, closing her post with the hashtag "#Blacklivesmatter."

Though it began on Facebook, the phrase exploded on Twitter, electrifying digital avenues where black users were already congregating to discuss the issues and narratives that are often absent from the national conversation. A year later Black Lives Matter had become a series of organized activist movements, with Twitter its lifeblood. Since that first utterance, the phrase "Black Lives Matter" has been tweeted 30 million times on Twitter, the company says. Twitter, it can be said, completely changed the way activism is done, who can participate and even how we define it.

Black Twitter, as some call it, is not an actual place walled off from the rest of social media and is not a monolith; rather, it's a constellation of loosely formed multifaceted communities created spontaneously by and for black Twitter users who follow or promote black culture. African-Americans use Twitter in higher concentrations than white Americans, according to the Pew Research Center on American Life, which found in 2014 that 22 percent of online African-Americans used Twitter, compared with 16 percent of online whites.

But there's more, much more, to black Twitter than social justice activism. It's also a raucous place to follow along with "Scandal," have intellectual debates about Beyoncé's latest video or share jokes. "These were conversations that we were having with each other, over the phone or in the living room or at the bar," said Sherri Williams, a communications professor at Wake Forest University who has studied the impact of black Twitter. "Now we're having those conversations out in the open on Twitter where other people can see them."

It's not controversial to point out that ever since Twitter was created in 2006, it has changed the way people, millions of them, get their news, share information—and launch movements, particularly during the opening days of the Arab Spring, in 2010, and Occupy Wall Street, in 2011. While those early actions proved the social network's ability to organize or rally protesters, they also revealed the difficulty of sustaining a movement after the crowds went away. The activism of black Twitter, by contrast, is more continuous, like a steady drumbeat, creating a feedback loop of online actions and offline demonstrations. Most important, it has led to ways—if slowly—of translating social awareness into real change.

Take "#OscarsSoWhite," a thread started in January 2015—and reignited this year—by an attorney turned journalist named April Reign, who noted that the Oscar nominations did not include one person of color in the four major acting categories. The hashtag became national news, and sparked action from black directors like Spike Lee and actors like Jada Pinkett Smith, who boycotted the event. Chris Rock made it a central theme of his opening monologue, and the Academy pledged to double the number of minorities, including women of color, in its ranks by 2020.

The ability of interactive digital platforms to record and broadcast events, as well as fact-check what news media say, has created a potent counterbalance to traditional news reporting. This summer, after five police officers were killed during a Black Lives Matter protest march in Dallas, Twitter users quickly exonerated a person who had been identified by police as a suspect—Mark Hughes, an African-American protester, who had been legally carrying a rifle at the scene, consistent with Texas gun laws. Two hours after the Dallas Police Department tweeted a photo of Hughes as a person of interest, users were posting photos and videos that showed him without the gun when the actual shooting was underway.

> **"These were conversations that we were** having with each other, **over the phone or in the living room or at the bar."**

In the past, sorting out such a dangerous official misidentification would have taken days of separate individuals writing letters to newspapers and police, and the wrong might not have been corrected even then. But with Twitter, the record was set straight out in the open while TV crews were still covering the incident. Nowadays, outraged citizens can simply tweet, and in no time thousands or millions of comments are voiced, if not heard. These shifts may seem minor, but they are, in fact, critical. The proximity of the once-powerless to the very powerful is radical.

When news outlets covering the fatal shooting of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge this July used a mug shot of him from several years before, black Twitter users revived the campaign #IfTheyGunnedMeDown. The hashtag originated after Michael Brown was killed in 2014 by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, and outlets covering his death published a photograph of him scarfing at the camera. Horrified by the implication in that choice—that Brown may have deserved to be shot—many black Twitter users sprang into action and began circulating a copy of his high school graduation photo, a defiant rebuttal to the narrative taking form around the 18-year-old college-bound kid. Soon, Twitter users were posting their own paired photos—one wholesome, one menacing—speculating which image the press would use "#IfTheyGunnedMeDown." Likewise, the Twitter activism after the Baton Rouge killing called out the media representation of black shooting victims, and the way black bodies are criminalized not only during their lives, but in their afterlives as well.

Perhaps most significant, black Twitter—and the Black Lives Matter activists who famously harnessed it—have created a truly grassroots campaign for social change unlike anything in history. Black Past, an online historical archive, notes that while "Black Lives Matter drew inspiration from the 1960s civil rights movement . . . they used newly developed social media to reach thousands of like-minded people across the nation quickly to create a black social justice movement that rejected the charismatic male-centered, top-down movement structure that had been the model for most previous efforts." #BlackLivesMatter has emphasized inclusivity to ensure that lesbian, gay, queer, disabled, transgender, undocumented and incarcerated black people's lives matter too. This approach is prismatically different from what the old era of civil rights activism looked like. And the result has been to elevate the concerns of the people in those groups, concerns often ignored by mainstream media outlets before the movement.

For all its power as a protest medium, black Twitter serves a great many users as a virtual place to just hang out. There is much about the shared terrain of being a black person in the United States that is not seen on small or silver screens or in museums or best-selling books, and much of what gets ignored in the mainstream thrives, and is celebrated, on Twitter. For some black users, its chaotic, late-night chat party atmosphere has enabled a semi-private performance of blackness, largely for each other. It has become a meeting place online to talk about everything, from live-tweeting the BET Awards show to talking about the latest photograph of America's first family, the Obamas. And a lot of this happens through shared jokes. In 2015, the wildly popular #ThanksgivingWithBlackFamilies let users highlight the relatable, often comical moments that take place in black households around the holidays.

What Twitter offers is the chance to be immersed and participate in a black community, even if you don't happen to live or work in one. As Twitter allows you to curate who shows up in your stream—you only see the people you follow or seek out, and those they interact with—users can create whatever world of people they want to be a part of. Black Twitter offers a glimpse into the preoccupations of famous black intellectuals, academics and satirists. Where else could you see the juxtaposition of comments from the producer Shonda Rhimes, the critic Ta-Nehisi Coates, the actress Yara Shahidi (of "Black-ish") and the comedian Jessica Williams, all in a single stream?

Still, it's the platform's nature to mix their observations with those of everyday folk. Most social networks, including Facebook, Snapchat and Myspace, prioritize interactions that are largely designed to take place among small handfuls of people you just met or already know. Bridges between communities are few, which means that randomness is rare, as is the serendipity that connects strangers in new ways. "Most social networks are about smaller conversations," said Kalev Leetaru, a senior fellow at George Washington University who studies social media. "Twitter is the only one where everyone is in one giant room where people are trying to shout over each other." And this particularity of Twitter has made it an ideal megaphone for its black users.

More often than not, the point is irreverence. In July, following the news that Melania Trump had lifted portions of the speech that Michelle Obama gave in 2008 during the Democratic National Convention, the actor Jesse Williams tweeted "Ain't I a woman?"—the title of a famous speech by Sojourner Truth—to his 1.6 million followers with the hashtag #FamousMelaniaTrumpQuotes. Twitter caught fire with jokes about what else Melania had plagiarized, like Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream," or "In West Philadelphia born and raised," from the theme song to "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air." The comedian W. Kamau Bell tweeted, "YOU'RE FIRED!"

> **This** newest generation **of the civil rights movement is defined by an inability to look away.**

Though most users of black Twitter may revel in the entertainment, the medium's role in advancing the cause of social justice is the thing that most impresses historians and other scholars. Jelani Cobb, professor of journalism at Columbia University, said that it's as vital as television was to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. This newest generation of the movement is defined by an inability to look away and a savvy about the power of images to effect change. Long before we had the videos to prove it, we knew what happened when black people came into contact with the police. Technology has made this actuality intimate, pushed it into our Twitter (and Facebook) feeds so that we are all forced to bear witness. People watching the grisly videos can't escape the conclusion that if you are black, you are treated differently. Still, despite the power of those images, if past cases of police abuse are any guide, there's little reason to think there will be official consequences.

Leetaru, the researcher, cautions against expecting too much from a social media platform alone. "People think of social media as a magic panacea—if we can get our message out there, then everything changes," he said. "Even with mainstream media, you don't change the world with a front-page article." Historically speaking, "You think about the laws that we talk about today, the laws that are on the books? It was engaging the political system and getting those laws on the books that actually enacted the change."

What black Twitter has done is alter the terms of the game. It's proven itself a nimble, creative, provocative way to talk about race and inequality and culture. Sure, there is still much more to be done, but Twitter has made this a national conversation, and that's a good start. ○

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Making a Way Out of No Way

From curating Chuck Berry's Missouri to doing for Chicago's Stockyards what Ken Burns did for baseball, Bob Greene has made a career out of finding the stories that are hiding in plain sight.

BY CARRIE A. RICKEY ■ ILLUSTRATIONS BY LARRY ROSENTHAL

In July 2000, I began the great adventure by driving from Chicago to Columbia, Missouri, to meet Chuck Berry. I'd been hired by the University of Missouri to curate the archive of the rock-and-roll pioneer's papers. I'd never met Berry, but I'd heard he was a difficult man to work for, and I was eager to learn his ways. I had agreed to become the founding director of the university's Chuck Berry Archive, and I was determined to make it a success—as a professional, and also as a fan. I'd been a huge fan of his since I was a kid.

I'd been working at the archive for a year and a half, but numerous offers (boxes of documents) had been made, and Berry's aide Joe Edwards and I had set two other premises on the road: Pueblo, Colorado. Today, we'd travel to the St. Louis suburbs to pick up the first of the boxes that would be shipped to Columbia. I'd never been to Missouri before, and I was excited to see it.

I then went to the building's security office and informed them that I was the archivist for the Chuck Berry collection. They had been expecting me.

I called back to the Charlie, the Murderous Saxophonist building, and Berry's assistant Joe Edwards answered. I told him I was downstairs, and he said he'd be down momentarily. I waited in the lobby, and when Edwards arrived, he was accompanied by a man I'd never met before. He was introduced as Berry's attorney. At that moment, I realized that no one was ready prepared for this moment, not the Murderous Saxophonist, not the attorney, and not me.

Processing Assistant Tim Wagner in the classroom that housed the archive's first collection of Chuck Berry papers, which arrived in Columbia, Missouri, in 2000.

The Murderous Saxophonist, which was also known as number 3139, will formally welcome the public into the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., on September 24. The 400,000-square-foot building, which is perched on a five-acre site on the National Mall, is known and dodging some of the more than 20,000 media that the art collected over the years. Its 3,500 objects will be displayed in the museum's 12 exhibition spaces, which are organized around the themes community, culture, and freedom and history and creativity.

The museum was born out of a century of effort and bipartisan efforts to commemorate African American history in the nation's capital. It was a dream that was championed by John Lewis, the civil rights leader and longtime congressman who died in September. In 2003, Senator Edward Kennedy introduced legislation legislation for a memorial celebrating "the legacy of slavery and the contributions of African Americans to the United States."

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Construction in 2016 of the museum's five-story Corona Building.

I was fascinated by history before I was old enough to spell the word. My parents and grandparents were history buffs, and I remember sitting on the floor and pulled out a book with a photograph of a Union soldier. I was mesmerized by the soldier's face. I was mesmerized by the soldier's face. I was mesmerized by the soldier's face

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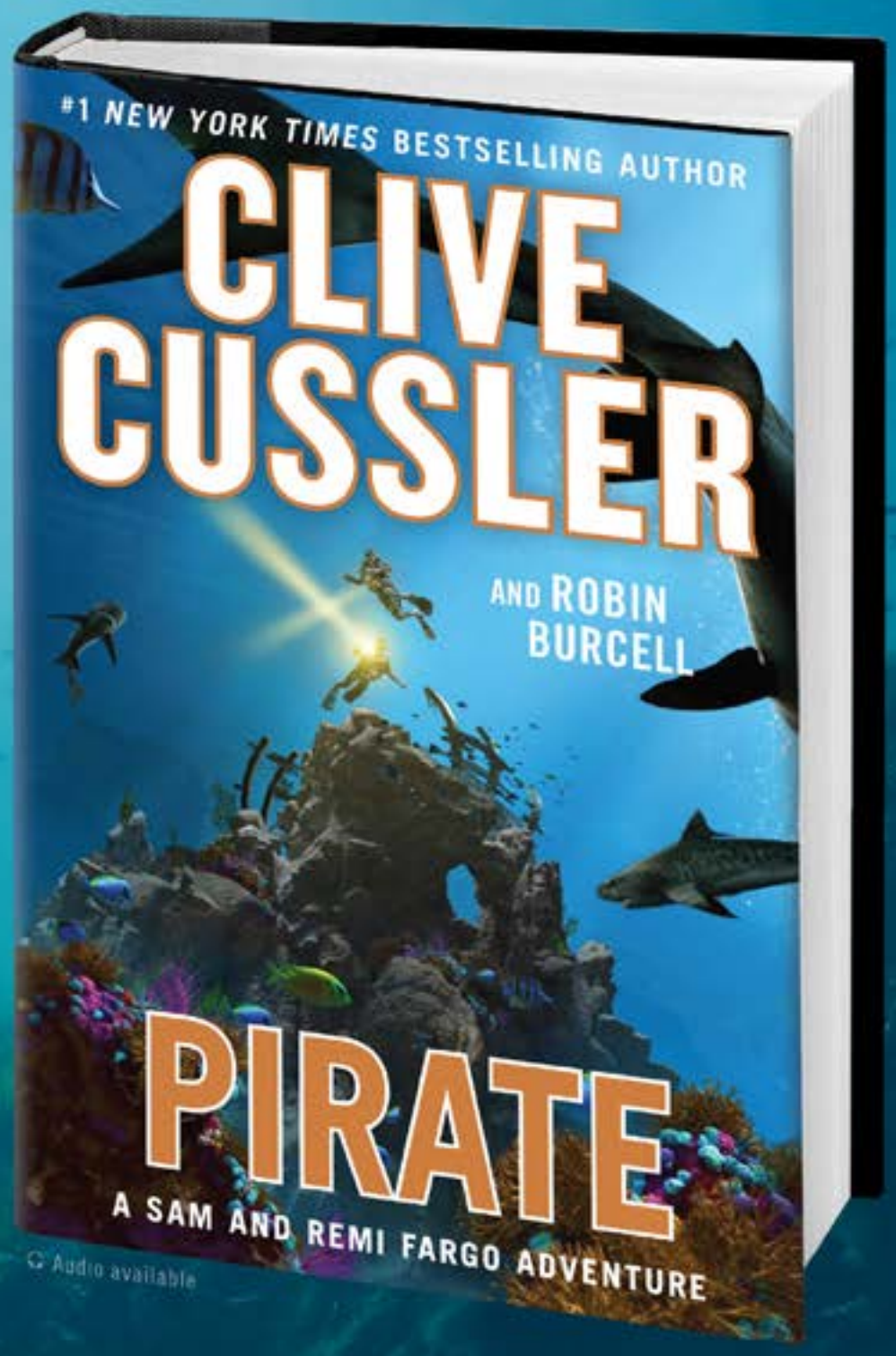

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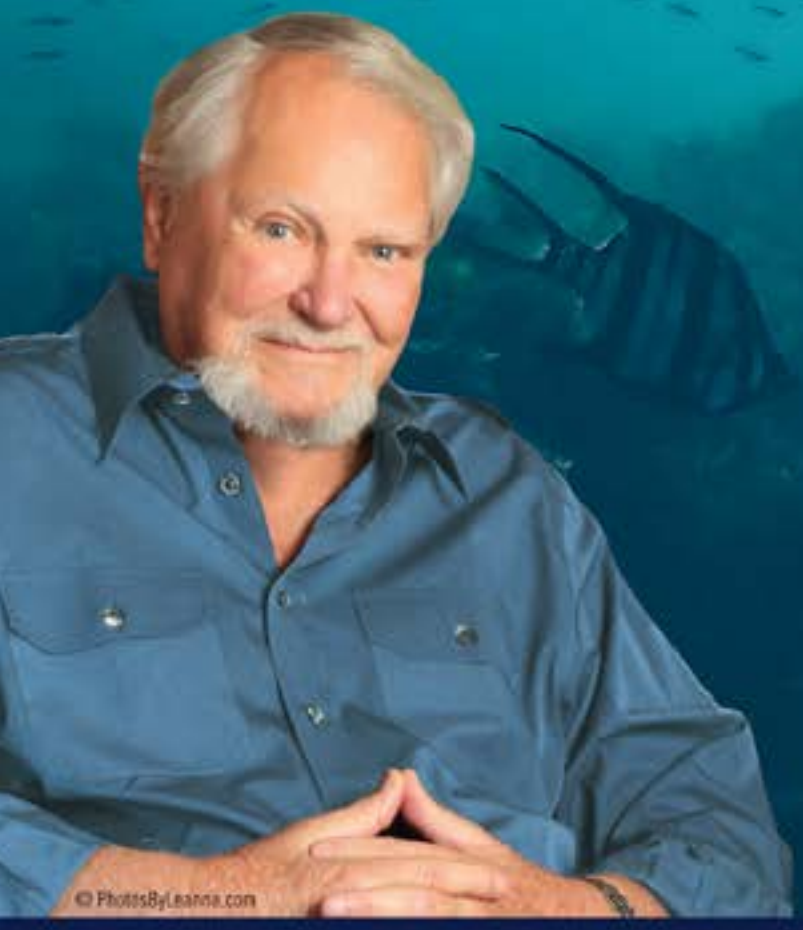

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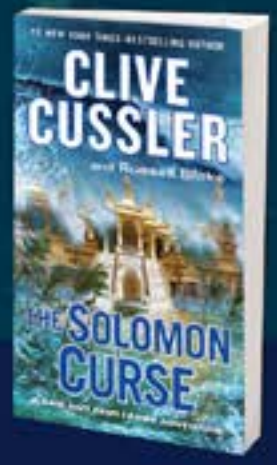

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BLACK IN AMERICA

The Road to Freedom

by Isabel Wilkerson

It was the greatest migration in U.S. history. And when millions of African-Americans fled the South in search of a better life, they remade the nation in ways that are still being felt

In 1963, the American mathematician Edward Lorenz, taking a measure of the earth's atmosphere in a laboratory that would seem far removed from the social upheavals of the time, set forth the theory that a single "flap of a sea gull's wings" could redirect the path of a tornado on another continent, that it could, in fact, be "enough to alter the course of the weather forever," and that, though the theory was then new and untested, "the most recent evidence would seem to favor the sea gulls."

At that moment in American history, the country had reached a turning point in a fight for racial justice that had been building for decades. This was the year of the killing of Medgar Evers in Mississippi, of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, of Gov. George Wallace blocking black students at the schoolhouse door of the University of Alabama, the year of the March on Washington, of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and his "Letter From a Birmingham Jail." By then, millions of African-Americans had already testified with their bodies to the repression they had endured in the Jim Crow South by defecting to the North and West in what came to be known as the Great Migration. They were fleeing a world where they were restricted to the most menial of jobs, underpaid if paid at all, and frequently barred from voting. Between 1880 and 1950, an African-American was lynched more than once a week for some perceived breach of the racial hierarchy.

"They left as though they were fleeing some curse," wrote the scholar Emmett J. Scott, an observer of the early years of the migration. "They were willing to make almost any sacrifice to obtain a railroad ticket and they left with the intention of staying."

The migration began, like the flap of a sea gull's wings, as a rivulet of black families escaping Selma, Alabama, in the winter of 1916. Their quiet departure was scarcely noticed except for a single paragraph in the *Chicago Defender*, to whom they confided that "the treatment doesn't warrant staying." The rivulet would become rapids, which grew into a flood of six million people journeying out of the South over the course of six decades. They were seeking political asylum within the borders of their own country, not unlike refugees in other parts of the world fleeing famine, war and pestilence.

Until that moment and from the time of their arrival on these shores, the vast majority of African-Americans had been confined to the South, at the bottom of a feudal social order, at the mercy of slaveholders and their descendants and often-violent vigilantes. The Great Migration was the first big step that the nation's servant class ever took without asking.

"Oftentimes, just to go away is one of the most aggressive things that another person can do," wrote John Dollard, an anthropologist studying the racial caste system of the South in the 1930s, "and if the means of expressing discontent are limited, as in this case, it is one of the few ways in which pressure can be put on."

The refugees could not know what was in store for them and for their descendants at their destinations or what effect their exodus would have on the country. But by their actions, they would reshape the social and political geography of every city they fled to. When the migration began, 90 percent of all African-Americans were living in the South. By the time it was over, in the 1970s, 47 percent of all African-Americans were living in the North and West. A rural people had become urban, and a Southern people had spread themselves all over the nation.

Merely by leaving, African-Americans would get to participate in democracy and, by their presence, force the North to pay attention to the injustices in the South and the increasingly organized fight against those injustices. By leaving, they would change the course of their lives and those of their children.

They would become Richard Wright the novelist instead of Richard Wright the sharecropper. They would become John Coltrane, jazz musician instead of tailor; Bill Russell, NBA pioneer instead of paper mill worker; Zora Neale Hurston, beloved folklorist instead of maidservant. The children of the Great Migration would reshape professions that, had their families not left, may never have been open to them, from sports and music to literature and art: Miles Davis, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, August Wilson, Jacob Lawrence, Diana Ross, Tupac Shakur, Prince, Michael Jackson, Shonda Rhimes, Venus and Serena Williams and countless others. The people who migrated would become the forebears of most African-Americans born in the North and West.

The Great Migration would expose the racial divisions and disparities that in many ways continue to plague the nation and dominate headlines today, from police killings of unarmed African-Americans to mass incarceration to widely documented biases in employment, housing, health care and education. Indeed, two of the most tragically recognizable descendants of the Great Migration are Emmett Till, a 14-year-old Chicago boy killed in Mississippi in 1955, and Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old Cleveland boy shot to death by police in 2014 in the city where his ancestors had fled. Their fates are a reminder that the perils the people sought to escape were not confined to the South, nor to the past.

The history of African-Americans is often distilled into two epochs: the 246 years of enslavement ending after the close of the Civil War, and the dramatic era of protest during the civil rights movement. Yet the Civil War-to-civil rights axis tempts us to leap past a century of resistance against subjugation, and to miss the human story of ordinary people, their hopes lifted by Emancipation, dashed at the end of Reconstruction, crushed further by Jim Crow, only to be finally, at long last, revived when they found the courage within themselves to break free.

A little boy boarded a northbound train with his grandmother and extended family, along with their upright piano and the rest of their worldly possessions, stuffed inside wooden crates, to begin their journey out of Mississippi. It was 1935. They were packed into the Jim Crow car, which, by custom, was at the front of the train, the first to absorb the impact in the event

He missed his mother, who would not be joining them on this journey. He did not know when he would see her again.

of a collision. They would not be permitted into the dining car, so they carried fried chicken and boiled eggs to tide them over for the journey.

The little boy was 4 years old and anxious. He'd overheard the grown-ups talking about leaving their farm in Arkabutla, to start over up north. He heard them say they might leave him with his father's people, whom he didn't know. In the end they took him along. The near abandonment haunted him. He missed his mother, who would not be joining them on this journey; she was away trying to make a stable life for herself after the breakup with his father. He did not know when he would see her again.

His grandfather had preceded them north. He was a hard-working, serious man who kept the indignities he suffered under Jim Crow to himself. In Mississippi, he had not dared stand up to some white children who broke the family's wagon. He told the little boy that as black people, they had no say in that world. "There were things they could do that we couldn't," the boy would say of the white children when he was a grown man with gray hair and a son of his own.

The grandfather was so determined to get his family out of the South that he bought a plot of land sight unseen in a place called Michigan. On the trip north, the little boy and his cousins and uncles and aunts (who were children themselves) did not quite know what Michigan was, so they made a ditty out of it and sang it as they waited for the train. "Meatskin! Meatskin! We're going to Meatskin!"

They landed on freer soil, but between the fears of abandonment and the trauma of being uprooted from his mother, the little boy arrived with a stutter. He began to speak less and less. At Sunday school, the children bellowed with laughter whenever he tried. So instead, he talked to the hogs and cows and chickens on the farm, who, he said years later, "don't care how you sound."

The little boy went mute for eight years. He wrote down the answers to questions he was asked, fearing even to introduce himself to strangers, until a high school English teacher coaxed him out of his silence by having him read poetry aloud to the class. That boy was James Earl Jones. He would go on to the University of Michigan, where he abandoned pre-med for theater. Later he would play King Lear in Central Park and Othello

on Broadway, win Tony Awards for his performances in *Fences* and in *The Great White Hope* and star in films like *Dr. Strangelove, Roots, Field of Dreams* and *Coming to America.*

The voice that fell silent for so long would become among the most iconic of our time—the voice of Darth Vader in *Star Wars*, of Mufasa in *The Lion King*, the voice of CNN. Jones lost his voice, and found it, because of the Great Migration. "It was responsible for all that I am grateful for in my life," he told me in a recent interview in New York. "We were reaching for our gold mines, our freedom."

The desire to be free is, of course, human and universal. In Amer-ica, enslaved people had tried to escape through the Underground Railroad. Later, once freed on paper, thousands more, known as Exodusters, fled the violent white backlash following Reconstruction in a short-lived migration to Kansas in 1879.

But concentrated in the South as they were, held captive by the virtual slavery of sharecropping and debt peonage and isolated from the rest of the country in the era before airlines and interstates, many African-Americans had no ready means of making a go of it in what were then faraway alien lands.

By the opening of the 20th century, the optimism of the Reconstruction era had long turned into the terror of Jim Crow. In 1902, one black woman in Alabama seemed to speak for the agitated hearts that would ultimately propel the coming migration: "In our homes, in our churches, wherever two or three are gathered together," she said, "there is a discussion of what is best to do. Must we remain in the South or go elsewhere? Where can we go to feel that security which other people feel? Is it best to go in great numbers or only in several families? These and many other things are discussed over and over."

The door of escape opened during World War I, when slowing immigration from Europe created a labor shortage in the North. To fill the assembly lines, companies began recruiting black Southerners to work the steel mills, railroads and factories. Resistance in the South to the loss of its cheap black labor meant that recruiters often had to act in secret or face fines and imprisonment. In Macon, Georgia, for example, a recruiter's license required a $25,000 fee plus the unlikely recommendations of 25 local businessmen, ten ministers and ten manufacturers. But word soon

spread among black Southerners that the North had opened up, and people began devising ways to get out on their own.

Southern authorities then tried to keep African-Americans from leaving by arresting them at the railroad platforms on grounds of "vagrancy" or tearing up their tickets in scenes that presaged tragically thwarted escapes from behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War. And still they left.

On one of the early trains out of the South was a sharecropper named Mallie Robinson, whose husband had left her to care for their young family under the rule of a harsh plantation owner in Cairo, Georgia. In 1920, she gathered up her five children, including a baby still in diapers, and, with her sister and brother-in-law and their children and three friends, boarded a Jim Crow train, and another, and another, and didn't get off until they reached California.

They settled in Pasadena. When the family moved into an all-white neighborhood, a cross was burned on their front lawn. But here Mallie's children would go to integrated schools for the full year instead of segregated classrooms in between laborious hours chopping and picking cotton. The youngest, the one she had carried in her arms on the train out of Georgia, was named Jackie, who would go on to earn four letters in athletics in a single year at UCLA. Later, in 1947, he became the first African-American to play Major League Baseball.

Had Mallie not persevered in the face of hostility, raising a family of six alone in the new world she had traveled to, we might not have ever known his name. "My mother never lost her composure," Jackie Robinson once recalled. "As I grew older, I often thought about the courage it took for my mother to break away from the South."

Mallie was extraordinary in another way. Most people, when they left the South, followed three main tributaries: the first was up the East Coast from Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas and Virginia to Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York and Boston; the second, up the country's central spine, from Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee and Arkansas to St. Louis, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit and the entire Midwest; the third, from Louisiana and Texas to California and the Western states. But Mallie took one of the farthest routes in the continental U.S. to get to freedom, a westward journey of more than 2,200 miles.

African-Americans fled on foot and by car, bus and ferry, but most commonly by train, where they were seated up front in the Jim Crow car, closer to the engine's smoke and cinders.

The trains that spirited the people away, and set the course for those who would come by bus or car or foot, acquired names and legends of their own. Perhaps the most celebrated were those that rumbled along the Illinois Central Railroad, for which Abraham Lincoln had worked as a lawyer before his election to the White House, and from which Pullman porters distributed copies of the *Chicago Defender* in secret to black Southerners hungry for information about the North. The Illinois Central was the main route for those fleeing Mississippi for Chicago, people like Muddy Waters, the blues legend who made the journey in 1943 and whose music helped define the genre and pave the way for rock 'n' roll, and Richard Wright, a sharecropper's son from Natchez, Mississippi, who got on a train in 1927 at the age of 19 to feel what he called "the warmth of other suns."

In Chicago, Wright worked washing dishes and sweeping streets before landing a job at the post office and pursuing his dream as a writer. He began to visit the library: a right and pleasure that would have been unthinkable in his home state of Mississippi. In 1940, having made it to New York, he published *Native Son* to national acclaim, and, through this and other works, became a kind of poet laureate of the Great Migration. He seemed never to have forgotten the heartbreak of leaving his homeland and the courage he mustered to step into the unknown. "We look up at the high Southern sky," Wright wrote in *12 Million Black Voices*. "We scan the kind, black faces we have looked upon since we first saw the light of day, and, though pain is in our hearts, we are leaving."

Zora Neale Hurston arrived in the North along the East Coast stream from Florida, although, as was her way, she broke convention in how she got there. She had grown up as the willful younger daughter of an exacting preacher and his long-suffering wife in the all-black town of Eatonville. After her mother died, when she was 13, Hurston bounced between siblings and neighbors until she was hired as a maid with a traveling theater troupe that got her north, dropping her off in Baltimore in 1917. From there, she made her way to Howard University in Washington, where she got her first story published in the literary magazine *Stylus* while working odd jobs as a waitress, maid and manicurist.

As migrants filled Northern factories (Buckeye Steel Castings Company in Columbus, Ohio), groups offering social services handed out advertising cards (next page).

She continued on to New York in 1925 with $1.50 to her name. She would become the first black student known to graduate from Barnard College. There, she majored in English and studied anthropology, but was barred from living in the dormitories. She never complained. In her landmark 1928 essay “How It Feels to Be Colored Me,” she mocked the absurdity: “Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry,” she wrote. “It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It’s beyond me.”

She arrived in New York when the Harlem Renaissance, an artistic and cultural flowering in the early years of the Great Migration, was in full bloom. The influx to the New York region would extend well beyond the Harlem Renaissance and draw the parents or grandparents of, among so many others, Denzel Washington (Virginia and Georgia), Ella Fitzgerald (Newport News, Virginia), the artist Romare Bearden (Charlotte, North Carolina), Whitney Houston (Blakeley, Georgia), the rapper Tupac Shakur (Lumberton, North Carolina), Sarah Vaughan (Virginia) and Althea Gibson (Clarendon County, South Carolina), the tennis champion who, in 1957, became the first black player to win at Wimbledon.

Swept Up in America's Great Migration

A new look at the massive shift that changed the face of the country

by 5W Infographics • research by Isabel Wilkerson • additional reporting by Rachelle Hampton

ACTIVISM

1 Ella Baker Left for NY at 24 in 1927; worked odd jobs before NAACP.
2 Martin Luther King Jr. First moved north at 19 to enroll in seminary in PA.
3 Huey P. Newton Toddler when migrated with parents to CA in 1940s.
4 Malcolm X His GA-born preacher and activist father moved family often.

ARTS

5 Romare Bearden Parents' Harlem home became a salon for luminaries.
6 Jacob Lawrence His mother was from rural VA; he was born in NJ in 1917.
7 Gordon Parks Sent to MN at 14; later, moved to Chicago and New York.

BUSINESS

8 Berry Gordy Motown founder's GA-born dad had a construction business.
9 Oprah Winfrey Born to a single teenage mother, she moved at age 6.

EDUCATION

10 Lonnie G. Bunch III His grandfather left for NJ in 1910, later became a dentist.
11 Michael Eric Dyson The scholar's mother had picked cotton in AL.
12 Darlene Clark Hine Truck driver's daughter is an expert in black history.
13 Nell Irvin Painter Historian's family moved in '42 when she was an infant.
14 Cornel West A CA school is named for his mother, a teacher and principal.

ENTERTAINMENT

15 Diahann Carroll Her SC-born father was a NY train conductor.
16 James Earl Jones Sent at age 4 to live on a MI farm with his grandparents.
17 Queen Latifah She's from NJ, but her mother, a teacher, is from the South.
18 Spike Lee Musician dad and arts teacher mom left for Brooklyn in '50s.
19 Chris Rock Moved with parents as an infant; mom became social worker.
20 Denzel Washington Father was a VA-born minister, mother from GA.

LITERATURE

21 James Baldwin Grandson of a slave, he was born in Harlem in 1924.
22 Gwendolyn Brooks First black Pulitzer Prize winner, moved at 6 weeks.
23 Ralph Ellison Age 22 when he struck out for Harlem in 1936.
24 Lorraine Hansberry Playwright's father was from MS, mother from TN.
25 Langston Hughes Set out at 13 with mother and stepfather in 1915.
27 Zora Neale Hurston Made her way up the East Coast starting in 1917.
Toni Morrison Parents separately fled South to OH. Father worked 3 jobs.
28 August Wilson Grandparents walked 400 miles; his mother followed.
29 Richard Wright Moved from MS to TN before going north in 1927, at 19.

MUSIC

30 Louis Armstrong New Orleans-born jazz legend moved at 21, in 1922.
31 Mary J. Blige Born in NY, she was also reared in her parents' home state.
32 George Clinton Moved with family in early '50s, at 10. Formed a band in '55.
33 Nat King Cole Four when he moved in 1923. Father was a Baptist preacher.
34 John Coltrane Left for Philly at 16 with his mother, a tailor and domestic.
35 Sean "P. Diddy" Combs Great-great-grandfather was a slave in SC.
36 Miles Davis His AR-born father was an affluent dentist and social activist.
37 Duke Ellington In 1886, NC-born father went to DC at age 7.
38 Ella Fitzgerald Left VA with her mother as a young girl in the 1920s.
39 Aretha Franklin Father, a sharecropper, became a pastor.
40 Marvin Gaye His father, a preacher, was from KY; his mother, from NC.
41 Jimi Hendrix Grandparents journeyed to the Northwest in 1915.
42 Whitney Houston Grandparents sold their farm to move to NJ.
43 Michael Jackson His mother, from AL, moved in 1936; his father left AR.
44 Thelonious Monk Age 4 when the family moved. Mother cleaned offices.
45 Leontyne Price Opera great was 17 when she left for college in 1944.
46 Prince All four grandparents and his father hailed from Louisiana.
47 Smokey Robinson Father, from AL, and mother, from TN, migrated as kids.
48 Diana Ross Mother moved from AL in '36. Father, a boxer, from WV in '37.
49 Tupac Shakur Mother, a Black Panther and activist, had left NC.
50 Sarah Vaughan Carpenter father and laundress mother migrated in WWI.
51 Muddy Waters Around 30 when he went north from the Delta in 1943.
52 Maurice White Struck out for Chicago after high school in the '50s.
53 Stevie Wonder AL-born mother was a seamstress and, later, songwriter.

POLITICS

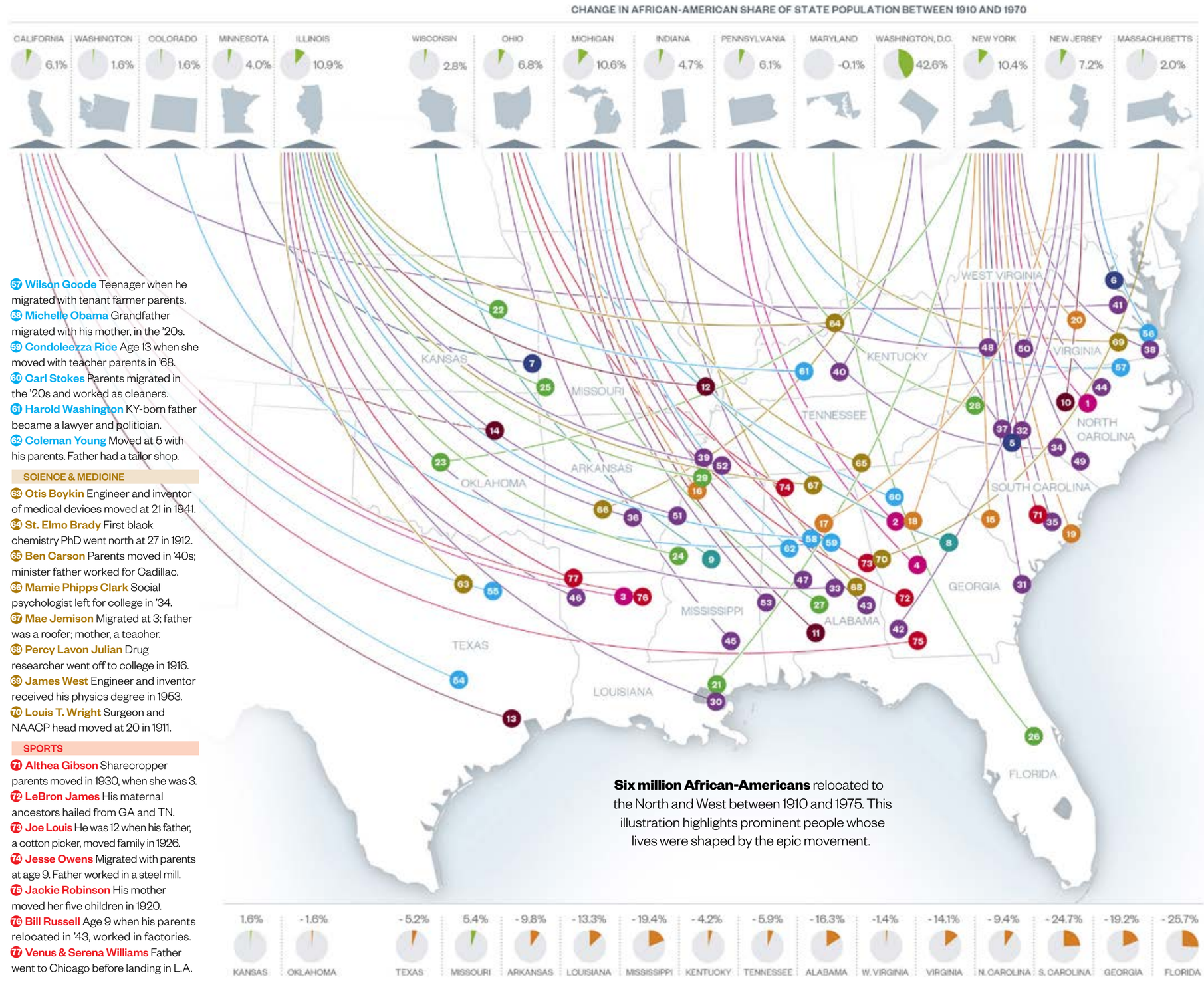
55 Tom Bradley Family picked cotton in AZ during trip west. Bradley was 6.
56 Willie Brown Left behind segregated TX high school in '51 for college in CA.
David Dinkins Father moved in '25; was a barber and real estate broker.
57 Wilson Goode Teenager when he migrated with tenant farmer parents.
58 Michelle Obama Grandfather migrated with his mother, in the '20s.
59 Condoleezza Rice Age 13 when she moved with teacher parents in '68.
60 Carl Stokes Parents migrated in the '20s and worked as cleaners.
61 Harold Washington KY-born father became a lawyer and politician.
62 Coleman Young Moved at 5 with his parents. Father had a tailor shop.

SCIENCE & MEDICINE

63 Otis Boykin Engineer and inventor of medical devices moved at 21 in 1941.
64 St. Elmo Brady First black chemistry PhD went north at 27 in 1912.
65 Ben Carson Parents moved in '40s; minister father worked for Cadillac.
66 Mamie Phipps Clark Social psychologist left for college in '34.
67 Mae Jemison Migrated at 3; father was a roofer; mother, a teacher.
68 Percy Lavon Julian Drug researcher went off to college in 1916.
69 James West Engineer and inventor received his physics degree in 1953.
70 Louis T. Wright Surgeon and NAACP head moved at 20 in 1911.

SPORTS

71 Althea Gibson Sharecropper parents moved in 1930, when she was 3.
72 LeBron James His maternal ancestors hailed from GA and TN.
73 Joe Louis He was 12 when his father, a cotton picker, moved family in 1926.
74 Jesse Owens Migrated with parents at age 9. Father worked in a steel mill.
75 Jackie Robinson His mother moved her five children in 1920.
76 Bill Russell Age 9 when his parents relocated in '43, worked in factories.
77 Venus & Serena Williams Father went to Chicago before landing in L.A.



Six million African-Americans relocated to the North and West between 1910 and 1975. This illustration highlights prominent people whose lives were shaped by the epic movement.

From Aiken, South Carolina, and Bladenboro, North Carolina, the migration drew the parents of Diahann Carroll, who would become the first black woman to win a Tony Award for best actress and, in 1968, to star in her own television show in a role other than a domestic. It was in New York that the mother of Jacob Lawrence settled after a winding journey from Virginia to Atlantic City to Philadelphia and then on to Harlem. Once there, to keep teenage Jacob safe from the streets, she enrolled her eldest son in an after-school arts program that would set the course of his life.

Lawrence would go on to create "The Migration Series"—60 painted panels, brightly colored like the throw rugs his mother kept in their tenement apartment. The paintings would become not only the best-known images of the Great Migration but among the most recognizable images of African-Americans in the 20th century.

Yet throughout the migration, wherever black Southerners went, the hostility and hierarchies that fed the Southern caste system seemed to carry over into the receiving stations in the New World, as the cities of the North and West erected barriers to black mobility. There were "sundown towns" throughout the country that banned African-Americans after dark. The constitution of Oregon explicitly prohibited black people from entering the state until 1926; whites-only signs could still be seen in store windows into the 1950s.

Even in the places where they were permitted, blacks were relegated to the lowest-paying, most dangerous jobs, barred from many unions and, at some companies, hired only as strike breakers, which served to further divide black workers from white. They were confined to the most dilapidated housing in the least desirable sections of the cities to which they fled. In densely populated destinations like Pittsburgh and Harlem, housing was so scarce that some black workers had to share the same single bed in shifts.

When African-Americans sought to move their families to more favorable conditions, they faced a hardening structure of policies and customs designed to maintain racial exclusion. Restrictive covenants, introduced as a response to the influx of black people during the Great Migration, were clauses written into deeds that outlawed African-Americans from buying, leas-

At one point a "literally howling" neighborhood mob descended on the home to throw bricks and broken concrete, narrowly missing her head.

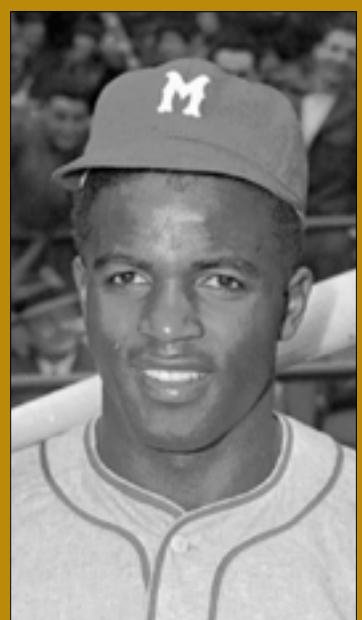
ing or living in properties in white neighborhoods, with the exception, often explicitly spelled out, of servants. By the 1920s, the widespread use of restrictive covenants kept as much as 85 percent of Chicago off-limits to African-Americans.

At the same time, redlining—the federal housing policy of refusing to approve or guarantee mortgages in areas where black people lived—served to deny them access to mortgages in their own neighborhoods. These policies became the pillars of a residential caste system in the North that calcified segregation and wealth inequality over generations, denying African-Americans the chance accorded other Americans to improve their lot.

In the 1930s, a black couple in Chicago named Carl and Nannie Hansberry decided to fight these restrictions to make a better life for themselves and their four young children. They had migrated north during World War I, Carl from Mississippi and Nannie from Tennessee. He was a real estate broker, she was a schoolteacher, and they had managed to save up enough to buy a home.

They found a brick three-flat with bay windows in the all-white neighborhood of Woodlawn. Although other black families moving into white neighborhoods had endured firebombings and mob violence, Carl wanted more space for his family and bought the house in secret with the help of progressive white real estate agents he knew. He moved the family late in the spring of 1937. The couple's youngest daughter, Lorraine, was 7 years old when they first moved, and she later described the vitriol and violence her family met in what she called a "hellishly hostile 'white neighborhood' in which literally howling mobs surrounded our house." At one point a mob descended on the home to throw bricks and broken concrete, narrowly missing her head.

But not content simply to terrorize the Hansberrys, neighbors then filed a lawsuit, forcing the family to move out, backed by state courts and restrictive covenants. The Hansberrys took the case to the Supreme Court to challenge the restrictive covenants and to return to the house they bought. The case culminated in a 1940 Supreme Court decision that was one of a series of cases that together helped strike a blow against segregation. But the hostility continued.



Lorraine Hansberry later recalled being "spat at, cursed and pummeled in the daily trek to and from school. And I also remember my desperate and courageous mother, patrolling our household all night with a loaded German Luger, doggedly guarding her four children, while my father fought the respectable part of the battle in the Washington court."

In 1959, Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun*, about a black family on Chicago's South Side living in dilapidated housing with few better options and at odds over what to do after the death of the patriarch, became the first play written by an African-American woman to be performed on Broadway. The fight by those who migrated and those who marched eventually led to the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which made such discriminatory practices illegal. Carl Hansberry did not live to see it. He died in 1946 at age 50 while in Mexico City, where, disillusioned with the slow speed of progress in America, he was working on plans to move his family to Mexico.

The Great Migration laid bare tensions in the North and West that were not as far removed from the South as the people who migrated might have hoped. Martin Luther King Jr., who went north to study in Boston, where he met his wife, Coretta Scott, experienced the depth of Northern resistance to black progress when he was campaigning for fair housing in Chicago decades after the Hansberrys' fight. He was leading a march in Marquette Park, in 1966, amid fuming crowds. One placard said: "King would look good with a knife in his back." A protester hurled a stone that hit him in the head. Shaken, he fell to one knee. "I have seen many demonstrations in the South," he told reporters. "But I have never seen anything so hostile and so hateful as I've seen here today."

Out of such turmoil arose a political consciousness in a people who had been excluded from civic life for most of their history. The disaffected children of the Great Migration grew more outspoken about the worsening conditions in their places of refuge. Among them was Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little in 1925 in

In the migration's early years, 500 people a day fled to the North. By 1930, a tenth of the country's black population had relocated. When it ended, nearly half lived outside the South. Left, from top: James Earl Jones; Jackie Robinson; Zora Neale Hurston; and Ella Baker.

Omaha, Nebraska, to a lay minister who had journeyed north from Georgia, and a mother born in Grenada. Malcolm was 6 years old when his father, who was under continuous attack by white supremacists for his role fighting for civil rights in the North, died a violent, mysterious death that plunged the family into poverty and dislocation.

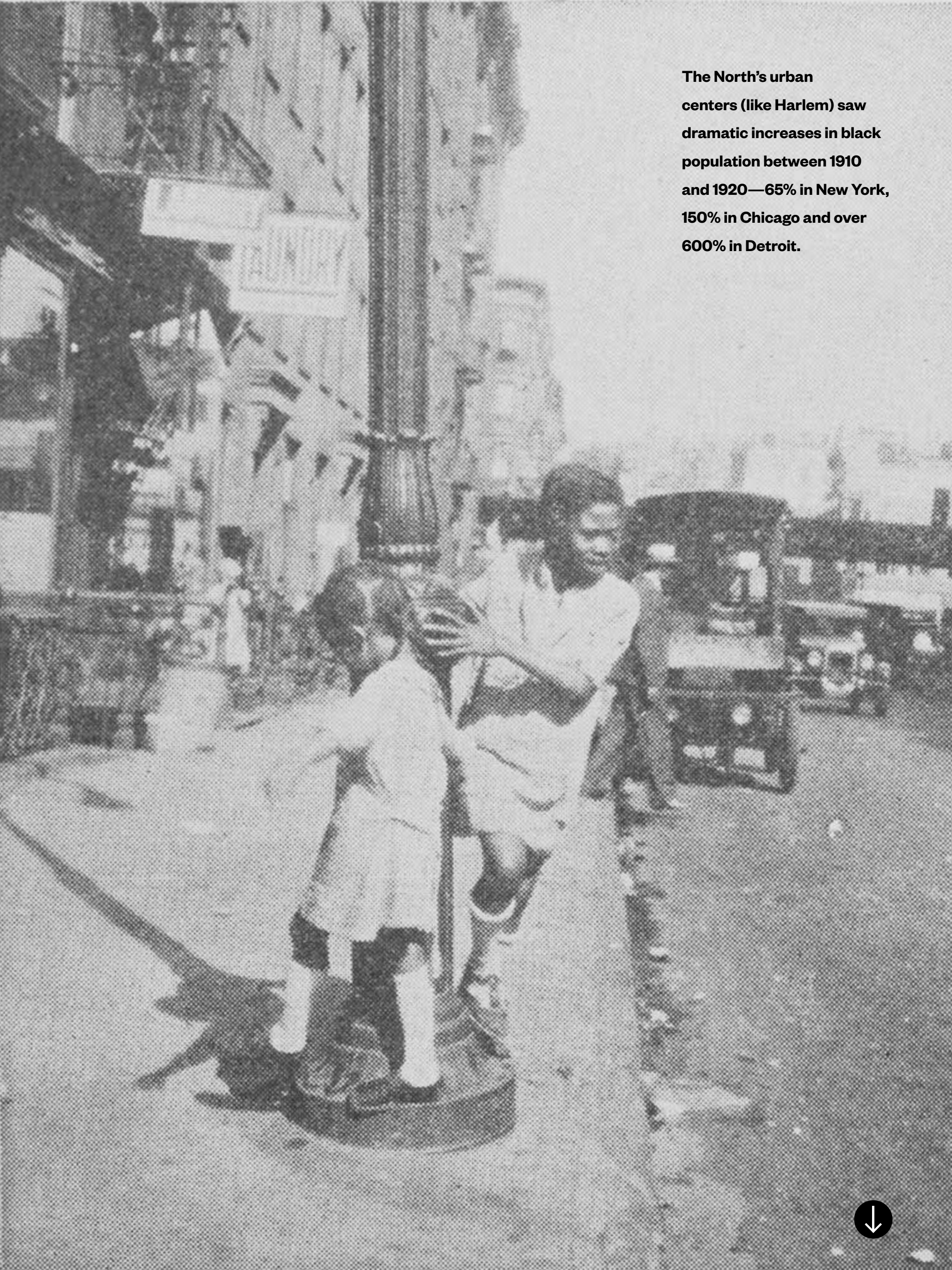
Despite the upheaval, Malcolm was accomplished in his predominantly white school, but when he shared his dream of becoming a lawyer, a teacher told him that the law was "no realistic goal for a n-----." He dropped out soon afterward.

He would go on to become known as Detroit Red, Malcolm X and el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz, a journey from militancy to humanitarianism, a voice of the dispossessed and a counterweight to Martin Luther King Jr. during the civil rights movement.

At around the same time, a radical movement was brewing on the West Coast. Huey Newton was the impatient son of a preacher and itinerant laborer who left Louisiana with his family for Oakland, after his father was almost lynched for talking back to a white overseer. Huey was a toddler when they arrived in California. There, he struggled in schools ill-equipped to handle the influx of newcomers from the South. He was pulled to the streets and into juvenile crime. It was only after high school that he truly learned to read, but he would go on to earn a PhD.

In college he read Malcolm X and met classmate Bobby Seale, with whom, in 1966, he founded the Black Panther Party, built on the ideas of political action first laid out by Stokely Carmichael. The Panthers espoused self-determination, quality housing, health care and full employment for African-Americans. They ran schools and fed the poor. But they would become known for their steadfast and militant belief in the right of African-Americans to defend themselves when under attack, as had been their lot for generations in the Jim Crow South and was increasingly in the North and West.

Perhaps few participants of the Great Migration had as deep an impact on activism and social justice without earning the commensurate recognition for her role as Ella Baker. She was born in 1903 in Norfolk, Virginia, to devout and ambitious parents and grew up in North Carolina. After graduating from Shaw University, in Raleigh, she left for New York



The North's urban centers (like Harlem) saw dramatic increases in black population between 1910 and 1920—65% in New York, 150% in Chicago and over 600% in Detroit.

in 1927. There she worked as a waitress, factory worker and editorial assistant before becoming active in the NAACP, where she eventually rose to national director.

Baker became the quiet shepherd of the civil rights movement, working alongside Martin Luther King Jr., Thurgood Marshall and W.E.B. DuBois. She mentored the likes of Stokely Carmichael and Rosa Parks and helped to create the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee—the network of college students who risked their lives to integrate buses and register blacks to vote in the most dangerous parts of the South. She helped guide almost every major event in the civil rights era, from the Montgomery bus boycott to the march in Selma to the Freedom Rides and the student sit-ins of the 1960s.

Baker was among those who suggested to King, then still in his 20s, that he take the movement beyond Alabama after the success of the bus boycott and press for racial equality throughout the South. She had a keen understanding that a movement would need Southern origins in order for participants not to be dismissed as "Northern agitators." King was at first reluctant to push his followers in the aftermath of the taxing 381-day boycott, but she believed that momentum was crucial. The modern civil rights movement had begun.

Baker devoted her life to working at the ground level in the South to organize the nonviolent demonstrations that helped change the region she had left but not forsaken. She directed students and sharecroppers, ministers and intellectuals, but never lost a fervent belief in the power of ordinary people to change their destiny. "Give light," she once said, "and people will find the way."

Over time, as the people of the Great Migration embedded themselves in their cities, they aspired to leading roles in civic life. It could not have been imagined in the migration's early decades that the first black mayors of most major cities in the North and West would not be longtime Northerners, as might have been expected, but rather children of the Great Migration, some having worked the Southern fields themselves.

The man who would become the first black mayor of Los Angeles, Tom Bradley, was born on a cotton plantation in Calvert, Texas, to sharecroppers Crenner and Lee Thomas Bradley. The

In the same time frame, black-owned businesses in the U.S. jumped from 5,000 to 70,000, as new opportunities arose. Above: a moving company in Cleveland.

family migrated to Los Angeles when he was 7 years old. Once there his father abandoned the family, and his mother supported him and his four siblings working as a maid. Bradley grew up on Central Avenue among the growing colony of black arrivals from the South. He became a track star at UCLA and later joined the Los Angeles police force, rising to lieutenant, the highest rank allowed African-Americans in the 1950s.

Seeing limits on his advancement, he went to law school at night, won a seat on the city council, and was elected mayor in 1973, serving five consecutive terms.

His name would become a part of the political lexicon after he ran for governor of California in 1982. Polls had overestimated support for him due to what was believed to be the reluctance of white voters to be truthful with pollsters about their intention to vote for his white opponent, George Deukmejian. To this day, in an election involving a non-white candidate, the discrepancy between polling numbers and final outcomes due to the misleading poll responses of white voters is known as the "Bradley Effect." In the 1982 election that Bradley had been favored to win, he lost by a single percentage point.

Still, he would describe Los Angeles, the place that drew his family out of Texas, as "the city of hope and opportunity." He said, "I am a living example of that."

The story of African-Americans on this soil cannot be told with-out the Great Migration. For many of them, the 20th century was largely an era of migrating and marching until freedom, by law and in their hearts, was won. Its mission over, the migration ended in the 1970s, when the South had sufficiently changed so that African-Americans were no longer under pressure to leave and were free to live anywhere they chose. From that time, to the current day, a new narrative took hold in popular thought that has seized primarily on geographical census data, gathered every ten years, showing that since 1975 the South has witnessed a net increase of African-Americans, many drawn (like other Americans) to job opportunities and a lower cost of living, but also to the call of their ancestral homeland, enacting what has come to be called a "reverse migration."

The phrase and phenomenon have captured the attention of demographers and journalists alike who revisit the trend after each

new census. One report went so far as to describe it as "an evacuation" from the Northern cities by African-Americans back to the place their forebears had fled. But the demographics are more complex than the narrative often portrayed. While hundreds of thousands of African-Americans have left Northern cities, they have not made a trail to the farms and hamlets where their ancestors may have picked cotton but to the biggest cities of the South—Atlanta, Houston, Dallas—which are now more cosmopolitan and thus more like their Northern counterparts. Many others have not headed South at all but have fanned out to suburbs or smaller cities in the North and West, places like Las Vegas, Columbus, Ohio, or even Ferguson, Missouri. Indeed, in the 40 years since the migration ended, the proportion of the South that is African-American has remained unchanged at about 20 percent—far from the seismic impact of the Great Migration. And so "reverse migration" seems not only an overstatement but misleading, as if relocating to an employer's Houston office were equivalent to running for one's life on the Illinois Central.

Richard Wright relocated several times in his quest for other suns, fleeing Mississippi for Memphis and Memphis for Chicago and Chicago for New York, where, living in Greenwich Village, barbers refused to serve him and some restaurants refused to seat him. In 1946, near the height of the Great Migration, he came to the disheartening recognition that, wherever he went, he faced hostility. So he went to France. Similarly, African-Americans today must navigate the social fault lines exposed by the Great Migration and the country's reactions to it: white flight, police brutality, systemic ills flowing from government policy restricting fair access to safe housing and good schools. In recent years, the North, which never had to confront its own injustices, has moved toward a crisis that seems to have reached a boiling point in our current day: a catalog of videotaped assaults and killings of unarmed black people, from Rodney King in Los Angeles in 1991, Eric Garner in New York in 2014, Philando Castile outside St. Paul, Minnesota, this summer, and beyond.

Thus the eternal question is: Where can African-Americans go? It is the same question their ancestors asked and answered, only to discover upon arriving that the racial caste system was not Southern but American.

The natural next step in this journey is not simply moving to another state but moving fully into the mainstream of American life.

And so it was in these places of refuge that Black Lives Matter arose, a largely Northern- and Western-born protest movement against persistent racial discrimination in many forms. It is organic and leaderless like the Great Migration itself, bearing witness to attacks on African-Americans in the unfinished quest for equality. The natural next step in this journey has turned out to be not simply moving to another state or geographic region but moving fully into the mainstream of American life, to be seen in one's full humanity, to be able to breathe free wherever one lives in America.

From this perspective, the Great Migration has no contemporary geographic equivalent because it was not solely about geography. It was about agency for a people who had been denied it, who had geography as the only tool at their disposal. It was an expression of faith, despite the terrors they had survived, that the country whose wealth had been created by their ancestors' unpaid labor might do right by them.

We can no more reverse the Great Migration than unsee a painting by Jacob Lawrence, unhear Prince or Coltrane, erase *The Piano Lesson*, remove Mae Jemison from her spacesuit in science textbooks, delete *Beloved*. In a short span of time—in some cases, over the course of a single generation—the people of the Great Migration proved the worldview of the enslavers a lie, that the people who were forced into the field and whipped for learning to read could do far more than pick cotton, scrub floors. Perhaps, deep down, the enslavers always knew that. Perhaps that is one reason they worked so hard at such a brutal system of subjugation. The Great Migration was thus a Declaration of Independence. It moved those who had long been invisible not just out of the South but into the light. And a tornado triggered by the wings of a sea gull can never be unwound. O

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Objects of Power

From tragic beginnings to achievements that changed the world, from the evil of a slave ship to the funky beauty of a Prince song, the epic story of African-Americans is embodied in the new national museum's artifacts, illuminated here by leading thinkers and artists

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
Wendel A. White

The Revolutionary

Angela Davis Poster • 1971

Activist, scholar, former Black Panther supporter, Angela Y. Davis appeared on countless posters after her 1970 arrest for an alleged role in the killing of a California judge in a courtroom hostage-taking. The 16 months Davis spent in jail before she was acquitted sparked protests worldwide, a cause célèbre that made her a pop culture sensation and an icon of the black power movement. “Her leadership, conviction and intellect ignited the hearts and minds of millions to fight against structural racism,” says Opal Tometi, a co-founder of Black Lives Matter. “Her living legacy uplifts people daily.”

We Have Seen

View from the window of the 16th Street Baptist Church, September 15, 1963, Birmingham, Alabama

by Natasha Trethewey

The process of making a stained glass window begins with the artist's sketch, known in medieval times as the "vidimus" (Latin for "we have seen"). *The History of Stained Glass,* by Virginia Chieffo Raguin

Because they must have wanted the symbol
of their gospel visible to all, not only

to those inside the sanctuary, and perhaps
to show that the savior watches over them

both in and out of church, the congregation
chose the painting, not on canvas, but

stained glass: Christ the Good Shepherd
in a window facing east. In the aftermath

you could have seen, from a hole in the window,
what a photographer captured: a sign

on the building across the street, the word
Liberty, its brutal irony in 1963, or

the dark windows two stories above
the shattered body of a car, the street

strewn with debris, the slick helmets of police
catching the sun—how it all seems

crowded together, a flat perspective.
In the short depth of field, everything

is compressed into the ruined tableau.
If you could look beyond it—

the palimpsest of wreckage—you might see
what should have been: a street scene

in which the parked firetruck is moving
through the grainy light, headed elsewhere;

the few onlookers, framed in the windows,
leaning out as if only to catch a breath

of air; the men on the street below them
going about the business of the day as if

it were any other; and in the middle ground,
a man raising a camera to capture

something we might have never had reason
to see. Instead, his lens must find

the wounded church, the mangled remains
of windows, the twisted armatures—

rosettes dangling from each gnarled grasp. And,
as if to remind us of the angels, how

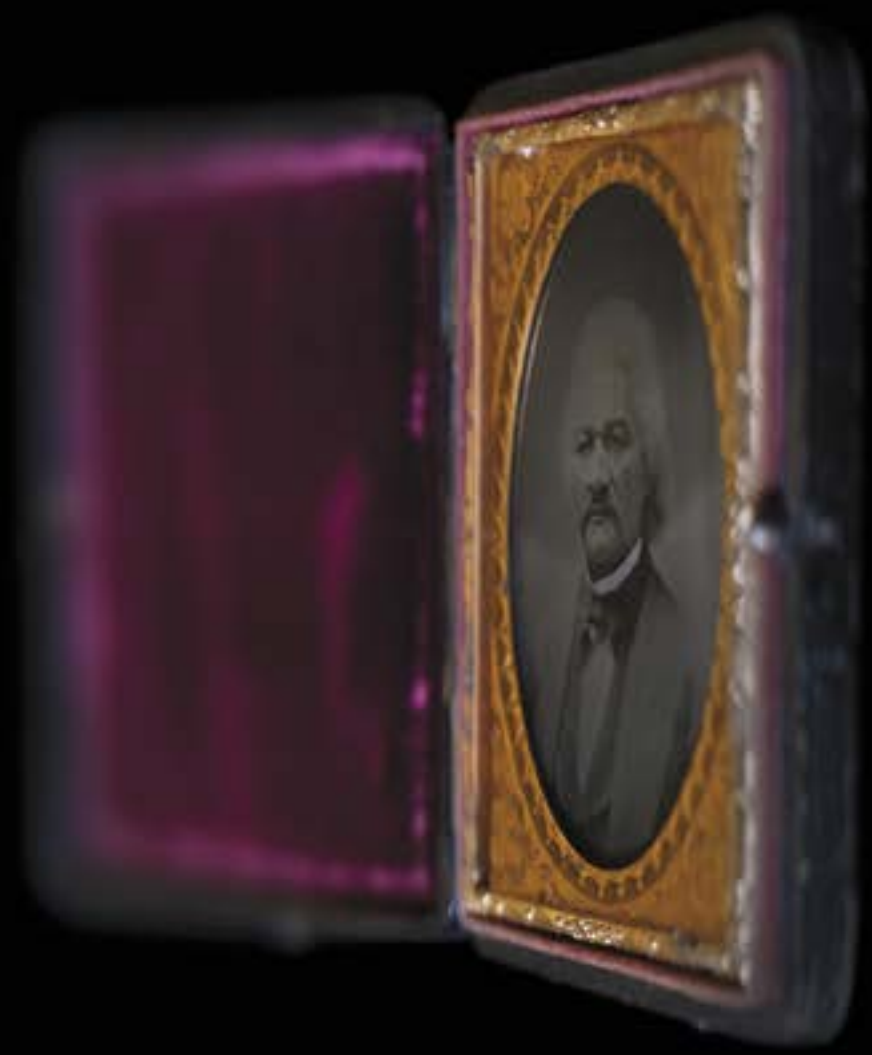
they might walk, unknown, among us,
as if to remind us of the martyred girls—

like Addie Mae Collins, her face no longer a face
her sister could recognize—Jesus

too, the window, his body left nearly intact
but faceless, after the blast.

The bomb blast that killed four girls shattered every window but one. This stained glass rosette was preserved by a white activist.

The Face of a New America



Ambrotype of Frederick Douglass • c. 1855-65

Frederick Douglass was such a prolific journal-ist and author, such a tireless orator and statesman, such an eloquent crusader for racial justice and the full emancipation of women, that we remember him now as a man of words. But in his time, he was also one of this country's most attentive and foresighted proponents of photography. This formerly enslaved abolitionist, who was denied U.S. citizenship for most of his life, was the most widely photographed American of the 19th century.

This is no accident, for as the scholar John Stauffer has pointed out, Douglass came of age as a freedman when photography was also coming of age. "For nothing is this age more remarkable than for the multitude, variety, perfection and cheapness of its pictures," he said in an 1865 lecture, one of several he gave on photography. He prized this new medium's potential to bring "focus" to the "vast sea of humanity" by depicting people accurately, and he was quick to recognize its power to reshape how people viewed one another. For Douglass, photography was a powerful instrument of racial uplift, one that could challenge the racist caricatures of black people that pervaded the United States and beyond with images that communicated black humanity, self-worth and achievement. He sat for some 160 photographic portraits between 1841, when he was in his early 20s, and 1895, the year he died, and he helped ensure that his image was widely published. His extensive writings about photography transformed ideas about the perception of the black body in art and photography.

In this ambrotype, a glass-plate image made with a technology popular in the 1850s and '60s, Douglass presents himself as a mature, dignified, masculine black subject—and as something of a trendsetter in fashion and grooming. The image is undated, but the subject, Stauffer notes, began sporting a walrus mustache around 1864 and kept it until around 1873.

by Deborah Willis

Defying Gravity

Tuskegee Airmen WWII flight suit worn by Lt. Col. Woodrow W. Crockett • 1944

"When I was growing up in the 1960s, I always believed I would go into space. I had this confidence because I knew about the accomplishments of other African Americans before me, from Harriet Tubman to Thurgood Marshall. The Tuskegee Airmen of World War II, the first black military pilots, were a crucial part of that legacy.

Imagine flying dangerous missions against a foreign military and returning to a base where prisoners of war were afforded more privileges than you, a U.S. officer! But the approximately 1,000 Tuskegee airmen excelled in the face of this pressure. They carried out hundreds of successful missions escorting bomber planes to safety.

The Airmen weren't the only heroes in that story. I am just as awed by Willa Brown, an African-American pilot who trained a number of future Tuskegee Airmen and helped lobby for their admission into the U.S. Army Air Corps. I am also inspired by Katherine Johnson, an African-American research mathematician who calculated the trajectory for Alan Shepard, the first American in space. Before John Glenn set off on his 1962 Friendship 7 mission, he personally asked for Johnson to check the computers' math.

by Mae Jemison
as told to Jennie Rothenberg Gritz

With all these achievements in mind, I would have expected dozens of African-Americans, both women and men, to go into space before I did. But there was resistance. In 1962, when Capt. Ed Dwight, an Air Force test pilot, was chosen as the first African-American astronaut trainee, it sparked so much controversy he was 'reassigned.' It wasn't until 1983 that Guion 'Guy' Bluford became the first African-American in space.

It still astonishes me that when I boarded the shuttle *Endeavour* in 1992, I was the first woman of color from any country to go into space. One of the most affecting moments in my life was flying back to Chicago O'Hare after my spaceflight. At the gate were more than 20 distinguished older black men in red blazers. Former Tuskegee Airmen, they were there to welcome me home, telling me how proud they were of me."

Breaking Barriers

Bus station waiting room sign, Birmingham, Alabama • c. 1957

In the summer of 1961 more than 400 people participated in the Freedom Rides, a movement to challenge the failure to comply with the Supreme Court rulings that outlawed segregated transportation facilities in the South. I was one of the original 13 Freedom Riders—seven African-Americans and six whites—who attempted to travel on Greyhound buses from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans in peaceful protest. I remember signs just like this one that read 'white waiting' and 'colored waiting' in Greyhound bus stations in Birmingham, Montgomery and other parts of the South.

We were harassed, beaten and jailed throughout that summer. On one leg of that trip my seatmate, a young white man from Connecticut, and I attempted to enter one of these so-called white waiting rooms in a small town called Rock Hill, South Carolina, about 25 miles from Charlotte. We were attacked by a group of white men who were members of the Klan. They beat us and left us lying in a pool of blood. The local officials came up and asked if we wanted to press charges. We said no, that we believed in the way of peace, the way of love, the way of nonviolence.

The Freedom Rides were probably, during that period, among the most dangerous aspects of the civil rights movement. To get on buses traveling through the South was very dangerous. It was dangerous, but it worked. By November 1, 1961, these segregated waiting room signs were gone.

I didn't like seeing those signs that said 'white waiting,' 'colored waiting,' 'white men,' 'colored men,' 'white women,' 'colored women.' I wanted to do whatever I could to help bring them down.

Growing up, I would always ask my mother and father, my grandparents, my great-grandparents to explain racial discrimination to me and they would tell me sometimes, 'That's the way it is. Don't get in the way, don't get in trouble.' But Dr. King and Rosa Parks inspired me to get in the way and to get in trouble."

by John Lewis
as told to Katie Nodjimbadem

A Doll That Looks Like Me

Toys used in landmark studies of the impact of racism on children • 1968

When I was young, my siblings and I used to gather around our black-and-white television for Saturday morning cartoons. Our shows were interrupted by commercials for Slinkys, Lionel Trains and my own favorite: the Crissy doll. The Crissy doll had a rope of hair coming out the back of her head. By pressing her stomach, the excited girls in the commercials could make it cascade past her knees. Although the ads didn't show it, Crissy came in both black and white.

There was no question which doll I'd choose. As a child of the 1970s, I was growing up with the black power movement in the pocket of my cutoff dungarees. On *Sesame Street,* Jesse Jackson made us repeat, "I am somebody!" The T-shirts we wore had slogans like Black Is Beautiful, Kiss Me I'm Black and Black Pride. The first black congresswoman, Shirley Chisholm, had recently run for president.

My mother grew up in the very different world of the Jim Crow South, around the time Kenneth and Mamie Clark brought their white and black dolls to segregated classrooms. The African-American psychologists were based in New York (Kenneth was the first African-American tenured professor in the City College system) and they wanted to know how segregation affected black students. How did these children define beauty, intelligence, their own brown selves? They found that children at segregated schools tended to assign more positive characteristics to white dolls and negative ones to black dolls.

"I guess you all would pass the doll tests," my mother would say proudly when we asked for the black Crissy doll. She told us that her only doll for years had been a black Raggedy Ann made by a neighbor. Even when other dolls showed up in the house, that first one had remained her most adored. As an adult, she wore her hair in an Afro and carried a red, black and green hair pick in her bag.

Still, those commercials reminded us of the places where we didn't exist—for one, in the minds of ad executives when they chose which doll to present. Rather than shake our self-esteem, though, this helped us form our much-needed double-consciousness. We knew our own dolls waited for us, smiling out from dark faces. We knew we were powerful, beautiful and bright.

The Clarks' findings still pain me. But they served as testimony in *Brown v. Board of Education*. In that way, those children of segregation ended up having a voice more powerful than they could have imagined. I want to reach into the past and pull them into now, saying, *Look at how you changed the world.*

by Jacqueline Woodson

The Art of Protest

Mirror Casket, created after the killing of Michael Brown, Ferguson, Missouri • 2014

It is art object, performance, and political statement evoking a pivotal moment in the long history of the struggle for social justice in the United States. Collaboratively produced by seven artists and activists involved in the protests that erupted in the aftermath of the August 2014 police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, the coffin-shaped, mirror-clad casket reflects the work that finally placed police violence in black communities on mainstream U.S. political agendas.

It was first carried on the shoulders of protesters/pallbearers through the streets of Ferguson following news of the decision not to indict Darren Wilson, Michael Brown's killer, in October 2014. On a march from the site of Brown's death to the police station, the casket confronted law enforcement officers, activists, journalists, and spectators with their reflected images, some whole, some fractured through shattered glass, communicating the message that we are all implicated in the processes of racist state violence—and that we all bear the responsibility to end it.

by Angela Y. Davis

In its inaugural exhibition, *Mirror Casket*, created by De Andrea Nichols, Damon Davis, Marcis Curtis, Sophie Lipman and others, embodied a theme of that day's demonstration: "Funeral Procession of Justice." But while this sculpture quite literally conveyed the notion that justice is dead, it also illustrated the idea that people's robust demands for racial justice are very much alive.

The mirrors, in fact, serve as an apt metaphor for new technologies of communication in 21st-century movements against state violence. The rapidly accumulating archive of video images of police killings, from surveillance cameras (Tamir Rice) to bystanders' cellphones (Eric Garner) and police dash cameras (Laquan McDonald) is helping to shift popular consciousness. These images have helped to focus the world's gaze on the brutality of racism.

Mirror Casket marks this contemporary moment, when the state has finally been compelled to acknowledge the link between its repressive apparatuses and racism. Smartphones and body cameras have become the looking glass compelling the recognition that black lives matter. And *Mirror Casket* demands more powerful and far-reaching forms of justice. We will have to reimagine policing and punishment and ultimately will have to remake our democracy.

Angela Y. Davis, an activist and writer, is a Distinguished Professor Emerita at UC Santa Cruz.

Freedom Fighter

Harriet Tubman's shawl, a gift from Queen Victoria • c. 1897

"In my home I keep framed historical list-ings of slaves' names, ages and prices. Sometimes, in my meditative moments, I speak their names aloud to remind myself from where I've come. That's a part of me. There's not a day I don't see it. America flourished because of the African-American contribution.

When I look at the whole story of slavery, I'm drawn to those who survived it and those who dared to dream bigger than their front yard—who dared to say, 'I can and will do better than this,' even while they could see nothing beyond the master's plantation. For me, Harriet Tubman, the former slave, Underground Railroad conductor and Union spy, represents the quest for freedom in the face of one of the most devastating and despicable systems imaginable. Thirteen times she risked her life to venture back into slave territory; she led some 70 people out. She embodies the will to survive and the hope for a better life—because she believed she had the right to a better life—which is everything America stands for. I'm carried by the strength and spirit of my ancestors such as Tubman. I ask myself: If they could fight for freedom with nothing, knowing nothing and understanding nothing about how the world worked, then what can I do?

by Oprah Winfrey
as told to Katie Nodjimbadem

During her Diamond Jubilee year, 1897, Queen Victoria of England sent Tubman this shawl to honor her work. The value of the shawl, as I see it, is not so much that it came from the queen, but rather that Tubman's hands have touched it, and therefore her spirit has touched it. I think of objects in an emotional, spiritual context; I think of where she would have worn this shawl and what she would have felt when she had it on. I think of her as a person and not just a monument.

As for the contentious decision to place Tubman on the $20 bill? It is done, y'all! Harriet has spoken."

PHOTOGRAPH FROM THE COLLECTION OF NMAAHC / PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY WENDEL A. WHITE

Witness to Truth

Inkwell owned by James Baldwin • mid-20th century

James Baldwin spent his last 17 years at a stone villa in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, France. The house, partially demolished, stands on a wide plot overlooking the Mediterranean. I was lucky enough to peer into a room he called his "torture chamber." He returned to it night after night to wrestle with America and compose more than a few of the finest—and truest—sentences in the modern English language. He wrote longhand on legal pads. "How can one say that freedom is taken, not given," he asked in *No Name in the Street*, "and that no one is free until all are free?"
–Thomas Chatterton Williams, author of Losing My Cool

Captured in Africa

Iron shackles, likely for a slave ship • 18th or early 19th century

If these shackles could speak, they would say it took the resources of an entire society to create slave ships. Every shipboard item pointed to not only the financiers but also the merchants who prepared barrels of salted beef and the workers who created tools of restraint. A medical device adapted for the trade, the speculum oris, was used to force open the mouths of slaves who refused to eat. Everyone in slave trading societies, even those who never owned a slave, was implicated. No one in a country that profited from traffic in slaves was innocent. *–Charles Johnson, author of* Middle Passage

Riders in the Storm

Hurricane Katrina door, Broadmoor neighborhood, New Orleans • 2005

The first door was my mother's. It is made of some kind of hollow metal, painted white, with a shiny door knocker that no one uses. The doors inside her house are also hollow, but made of wood, and in the way of all trailer doors, they are inadequate in muting sound. Thin, insubstantial. On the day I learned that Hurricane Katrina was barreling over the ocean, eating the miles between the Caribbean and the Gulf Coast, I was sitting on my mother's floor, watching the news, eyeing the scrawled neon path of that giant storm and my mother's thin doors.

The second door was my grandmother's. Around midmorning on August 29, the water began to rise in her one-story brick house. Once it began, it would not stop. The storm surge from the DeLisle Bayou swept through the house, determined to clutch and carry all in its wake. Bibles, photographs, birth certificates, shoes, porcelain angel figurines, people. When the water reached our thighs, we had to make a decision. Swim out into the storm to our remaining cars, or climb in the attic and risk drowning. We swam through her silver door, out into the waiting embrace of the storm. Power lines cracked. Trees snapped. We cowered in the water: helpless things adrift in a shallow sea.

by Jesmyn Ward

The third was a car door. I swam to my black Camry, which had not been swept away by the water, and sat in the driver's seat. My sister, six months pregnant, climbed in the passenger seat. We'd had six cars at the beginning of the storm. Now two spun lazily in the water, and we were down to four. The plan was to head north, fleeing the rushing waters of the bayou. But the storm surge cared nothing for plans. It picked my car up, first the right tires, then the left. Lifted it like a boat. I tried the door, but the water pinned it shut. Both doors would not open. I rolled down the driver and passenger windows at once, and I told my sister this: Charine, jump out of the window. We did. I swam against the push of the eddied brown water and put my hand at my sister's back to help her along as her belly cut the water. My grandmother stood on a small rise in the distance, waving us to her, even as the branches broke and flew, even as the storm forced her down with its wide hand, trying to sweep her from the earth. Her face calm, her palms frantic.

The fourth door, painted dark green, belonged to a neighbor. We sat in a high field in our remaining cars for most of the storm until the surge receded enough for us to drive to my town's main intersection. Our neighbors had braved the storm four or five times in a small open boat to visit the homes closest to the bayou, where people had been forced to their roofs, to trees, to escape the water. They'd ferried these people back to their home, offered them a roof to shield them, a floor to sit upon: shelter. When they saw us at the intersection, our cars rocking on their wheels in the wind, they stood out on their porch and waved us inside.

In the years after Hurricane Katrina, on the Gulf and in New Orleans, there was a multitude of doors. In time, all were marked, signaling what had transpired during the storm. We know what happened behind those doors. I was lucky. My doors opened; I lived.

Sign of the Times

Protest placard, March on Washington • August 28, 1963

The day before the March on Washington, I was in Atlanta with my wife. I had come back from Birmingham. We went to Birmingham because the situation was desperate. There were 60-something unsolved bombings of homes in '61 and '62. [The Rev.] Fred Shuttlesworth's church had been bombed three times: in [1956, 1958 and] 1962. Every demonstration you almost had to expect you might be killed with all of these bombings taking place. But we had made progress. We felt that we didn't need to be going to Washington. This was going to be a hot day in the sun. We were tired!

Dr. King called and said: 'Look, this is important. You all need to be here. Come on, we have a hotel room set up for you.' Most of us were staying in the Willard Hotel. He was working on his speech in the suite the FBI [later] had bugged. He'd scratch out three or four words to not only get the sound, the meaning, but the right rhythm to it.

I was out there at the Washington Monument at eight o'clock in the morning. There was nobody there. Gradually, people began marching from the train station, and then buses were coming in from cities as far as Chicago, New York and Boston. The unions in Philadelphia and New York made these police brutality signs.

I was looking around, watching the crowd. We were afraid that somebody would try to disrupt the march—start a fight, a ruckus. Our staff scattered through the crowds, making sure that no trouble came about. Once [officials in Washington] realized they were not going to stop the march, they began to cooperate with little things, like Port-a-Potties. You're going to have [a quarter-] million people out there—you need rows and rows of toilets. There were as many white people there as there were blacks. That was not true in the South, you see. There was white institutional support. We had the support of the government. We weren't going to abuse it.

I felt very good about the march. But it dragged on and on. You could hear the speakers all the way back to the Washington Monument. Out from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, we had about 30 rows of chairs for the celebrities. A who's who of Hollywood: Burt Lancaster and Harry Belafonte and Paul Newman and Frank Sinatra. Sidney Poitier, as well.

When Dr. King spoke, it pulled everybody together. He said, 'America has given the Negro people a bad check.' He was making the transition from race to poverty. This transformed us almost immediately into an integrated national movement on freedom and rights. I had a sudden realization: This was the right thing to do."

by Andrew Young
as told to Max Blau

Endless Invention

Tambourine from Prince's "Nude Tour" • 1990

Every time I joined Prince onstage, something new and dynamic would happen. His music had no boundaries and his impact on the entertainment industry was profound. He was influenced by soul, rock, pop, gospel, jazz, funk, classical, R&B and more. In "The Glamorous Life," a song we co-wrote, he used masterfully hidden Latin influences to make the listener move and feel in particular ways. He was always looking forward, working to expand his knowledge and understanding. He pushed every boundary of art and challenged every concept of the way things were "supposed" to be, in music and life. *–Musician Sheila E., longtime Prince collaborator*

Voice Command

Malcolm X's tape recorder, Mosque #7, Harlem • 1960

"The most important book I've ever read was *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. In English class, seventh or eighth grade, at Rothschild Junior High School, Brooklyn. It rocked my world. At that age, I didn't know that I was a filmmaker, or even had the notion of making a film based on it. Malcolm's speaking style? Black Baptist preacher: He grew up in the church. His legacy will live forever, the same as Dr. King. Malcolm they painted as the bad guy. But he's an oracle. Both men were moving toward the same goals. They just had different routes." *–Filmmaker Spike Lee, as told to Jeff MacGregor*

Road Trip

Cab Calloway's home movies of Haiti • c. 1951

Jazz musician Cab Calloway, known for his quick scat and signature lyric "hi de hi de ho," earned his musical reputation during the golden era of jazz as he led one of the most successful big bands in the 1930s and '40s. As the big band era faded, he traveled with a small group of musicians to gigs as far away as the Caribbean and South America. A 16-millimeter motion picture film, discovered in an archival collection donated to the museum by Calloway's daughter, documents a circa 1951 trip the singer took with his wife and band to Haiti. —*Katie Nodjimbadem*

Pretty Thing

Bo Diddley's felt hat • 1992

Among the fathers of rock 'n' roll, Bo Diddley popularized one of the genre's signature beats: three strokes/rest/two strokes. From his beat to his wild dance moves to his homemade square-shaped guitar, Diddley was truly his own performer. Incorporating African rhythms and the blues with his unique guitar strokes, Diddley helped shape rock 'n' roll for generations of musicians after him, including the Rolling Stones. He sported this black felt hat throughout the last 15 years of his career and during his last performance, in 2007. *—Katie Nodjimbadem*

A Rare Gift

Flute custom-made for the virtuoso Blind Tom • c. 1879-84

Thomas Greene Wiggins, born enslaved in Georgia in 1849, was blind, almost certainly autistic—and a musical prodigy. He memorized songs after hearing them once; he could play a piece on the piano, then turn his back to the keyboard and play it again, each hand taking the other's normal part. From age 9 until he died 50 years later, he dazzled audiences worldwide, billed as Blind Tom. In 1865, with slavery ending, a judge granted custody of Blind Tom to the man who had owned him, James Bethune; the musician's fees—hundreds of thousands of dollars—went to Bethune's family. This flute was one of the few things Blind Tom owned. *—T.A. Frail*

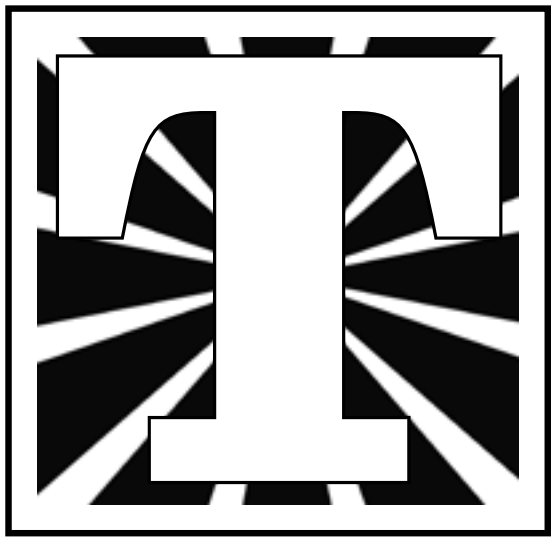
Once 2,000 square miles in Virginia and North Carolina, the swamp today is perhaps one-tenth that size.

BLACK IN AMERICA

HELL AND HIGH WATER

Deep in the Great Dismal Swamp, a maverick archaeologist discovers traces of a mysterious refuge for runaway slaves

by **RICHARD GRANT** • photographs by **ALLISON SHELLEY**



HE WORSE IT GETS, as I wade and stumble through the Great Dismal Swamp, the better I understand its history as a place of refuge. Each ripping thorn and sucking mudhole makes it clearer. It was the dense, tangled hostility of the swamp and its enormous size that enabled hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of escaped slaves to live here in freedom.

We don't know much about them, but thanks to the archaeologist hacking through the mire ahead of me, we know they were out here, subsisting in hidden communities, and using almost nothing from the outside world until the 19th century. The Dismal Swamp covered great tracts of southeast Virginia and northeast North Carolina, and its vegetation was far too thick for horses or canoes. In the early 1600s, Native Americans fleeing the colonial frontier took refuge here, and they were soon joined by fugitive slaves, and probably some whites escaping indentured servitude or hiding from the law. From about 1680 to the Civil War, it appears that the swamp communities were dominated by Africans and African-Americans.

During more than ten years of field excavations, archaeologist Dan Sayers has recovered 3,604 artifacts at an island located deep inside the swamp.

Thigh deep in muddy water, wearing Levis and hiking boots rather than waterproof waders like me, Dan Sayers stops to light a cigarette. He's a historical archaeologist and chair of the anthropology department at American University in Washington, D.C., but he looks more like an outlaw country singer. Long-haired and bearded, 43 years old, he habitually wears a battered straw cowboy hat and a pair of Waylon Jennings-style sunglasses. Sayers is a Marxist and a vegan who smokes nearly two packs a day and keeps himself revved up on Monster Energy drinks until it's time to crack a beer.

"I was such a dumb-ass," he says. "I was looking for hills, hummocks, high ground because that's what I'd read in the documents: 'Runaway slaves living on hills. . . .' I had never set foot in a swamp before. I wasted so much time. Finally, someone asked me if I'd been to the islands in North Carolina. Islands! That was the word I'd been missing."

"It is certainly not the type of place that you would make a choice to live in, unless you needed a place to hide."

The Great Dismal Swamp, now reduced by draining and development, is managed as a federal wildlife refuge. The once-notorious panthers are gone, but bears, birds, deer and amphibians are still abundant. So are venomous snakes and biting insects. In the awful heat and humidity of summer, Sayers assures me, the swamp teems with water moccasins and rattlesnakes. The mosquitoes get so thick that they can blur the outlines of a person standing 12 feet away.

In early 2004, one of the refuge biologists strapped on his waders and brought Sayers to the place we're going, a 20-acre island occasionally visited by hunters, but completely unknown to historians and archaeologists. Before Sayers, no archaeology had been done in the swamp's interior, mainly because conditions were so challenging. One research party got lost so many times that it gave up.

When you've been toiling through the sucking ooze, with submerged roots and branches grabbing at your ankles, dry solid ground feels almost miraculous. We step onto the shore of a large, flat, sun-dappled island carpeted with fallen leaves. Walking toward its center, the underbrush disappears, and we enter a parklike clearing shaded by a few hardwoods and pines.

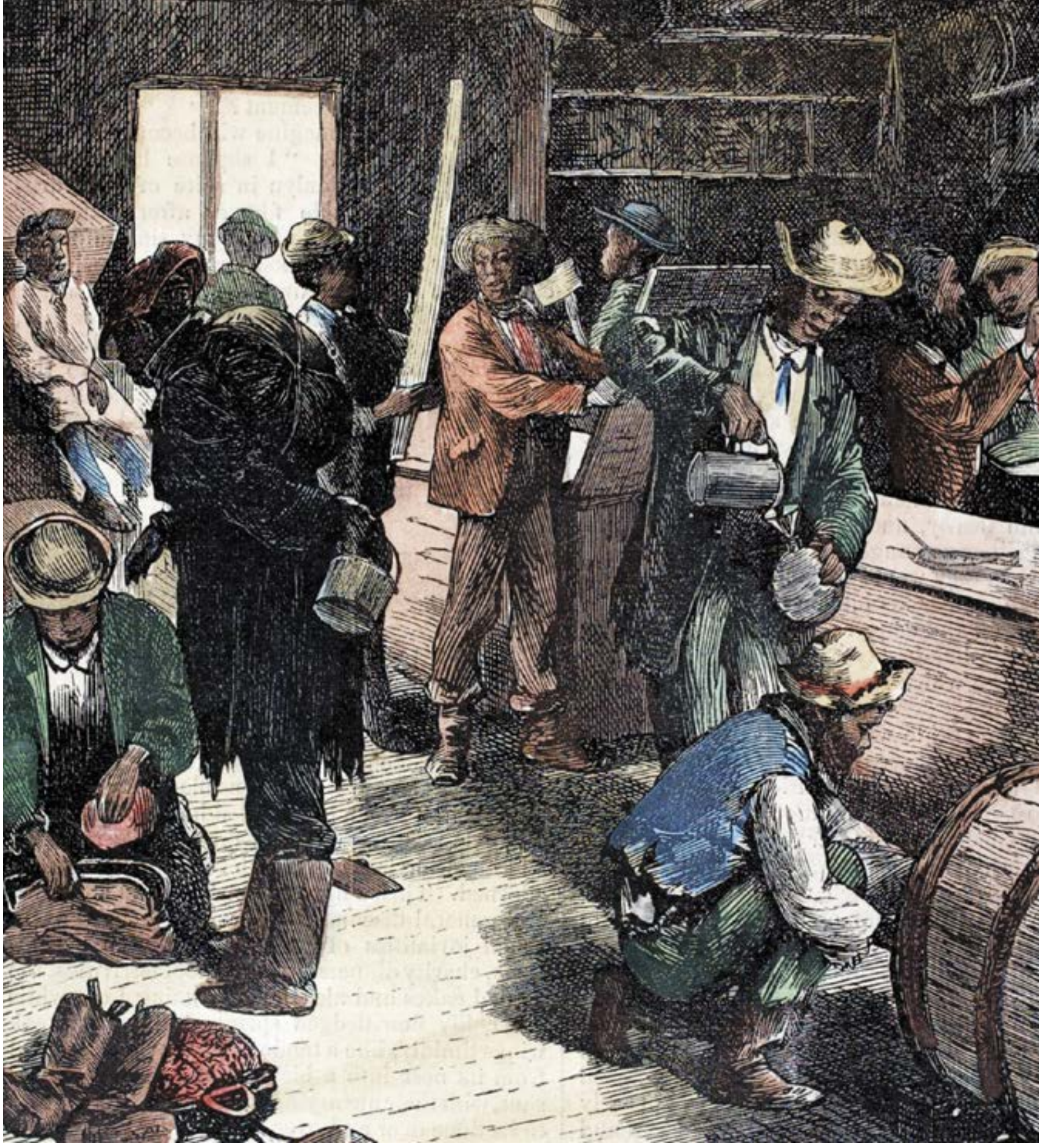
"I'll never forget seeing this place for the first time," recalls Sayers. "It was one of the greatest moments of my life. I never dreamed of finding a 20-acre island, and I knew instantly it was livable. Sure enough, you can't put a shovel in the ground anywhere on this island without finding something."

He has named his excavation areas—the Grotto, the Crest, North Plateau and so on—but he won't name the island itself. In his academic papers and his 2014 book, *A Desolate Place for a Defiant People*, Sayers refers to it as the "nameless site." "I don't want to put a false name on it," he explains. "I'm hoping to find out what the people who lived here called this place." As he sifts the earth they trod, finding the soil footprints of their cabins and tiny fragments of their tools, weapons and white clay pipes, he feels a profound admiration for them, and this stems in part from his Marxism.

"These people performed a critique of a brutal capitalistic enslavement system, and they rejected it completely. They risked everything to live in a more just and equitable way, and they were successful for ten generations. One of them, a man named

Charlie, was interviewed later in Canada. He said that all labor was communal here. That's how it would have been in an African village."

Wherever Africans were enslaved in the world, there were runaways who escaped permanently and lived in free independent settlements. These people and their descendants are known as "maroons." The term probably comes from the Span-



After the Civil War, timbering opened up the swamp (an 1873 store, above, served loggers). Sayers has been unable to find accounts of departure from this purgatory: "Until we hear from their descendants, or discover a written account, we'll never know details of the exodus."

ish *cimarrón,* meaning feral livestock, fugitive slave or something wild and defiant.

Marronage, the process of extricating oneself from slavery, took place all over Latin America and the Caribbean, in the slave islands of the Indian Ocean, in Angola and other parts of Africa. But until recently, the idea that maroons also existed in North America has been rejected by most historians.

"In 2004, when I started talking about large, permanent maroon settlements in the Great Dismal Swamp, most scholars

"Archaeology is my activism. By bringing a resistance story to light, you hope it gets into people's heads."

thought I was nuts," says Sayers. "They thought in terms of runaways, who might hide in the woods or swamps for a while until they got caught, or who might make it to freedom on the Underground Railroad, with the help of Quakers and abolitionists."

By downplaying American marronage, and valorizing white involvement in the Underground Railroad, historians have shown a racial bias, in Sayers' opinion, a reluctance to acknowledge the strength of black resistance and initiative. They've also revealed the shortcomings of their methods: "Historians are limited to source documents. When it comes to maroons, there isn't that much on paper. But that doesn't mean their story should be ignored or overlooked. As archaeologists, we can read it in the ground."

Sayers first heard about the Dismal Swamp maroons from one of his professors at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. They were smoking cigarettes after class in late 2001. Sayers proposed to do his dissertation on the archaeology of 19th-century agriculture. Stifling a yawn, Prof. Marley Brown III asked him what he knew about the maroons of the Great Dismal Swamp and suggested this would make a more interesting dissertation project. "It sounded great," says Sayers. "I had no idea what I was getting into."

He started doing archival research on the Great Dismal Swamp. He found scattered references to maroons dating back to the early 1700s. The first accounts described runaway slaves and Native Americans raiding farms and plantations, and then disappearing back into the swamp with stolen livestock. In 1714, Alexander Spotswood, the colonial lieutenant governor of Virginia, described the Dismal Swamp as a "No-man's-land," to which "Loose and disorderly people daily flock." Since Africans and African-Americans were not referred to as "people" in the records of 18th-century Virginia, this suggests that poor whites were also joining the swamp communities.

In 1728, William Byrd II led the first survey into the Great Dismal Swamp, to determine the Virginia/North Carolina boundary. He encountered a family of maroons, describing them as "mulattoes," and was well aware that others were watching and hiding: "It is certain many Slaves Shelter themselves in this Obscure Part of the World. . . . " Byrd, an aristocratic Virginian, loathed his time in the swamp. "Never was rum, that cordial of

life, found more necessary than it was in this dirty place."

From the 1760s until the Civil War, runaway slave ads in the Virginia and North Carolina newspapers often mentioned the Dismal Swamp as the likely destination, and there was persistent talk of permanent maroon settlements in the morass. British traveler J.F.D. Smyth, writing in 1784, gleaned this description: "Runaway negroes have resided in these places for twelve, twenty, or thirty years and upwards, subsisting themselves in the swamp upon corn, hogs, and fowls....[On higher ground] they have erected habitations, and cleared small fields around them."

The most comprehensive work that Sayers found was a 1979 dissertation by an oddball historian named Hugo Prosper Leaming. He was a white Unitarian minister and civil rights activist who managed to get accepted into a Black Muslim temple in Chicago and wore a fez with his Unitarian robes. Leaming surveyed local and state records related to the Dismal Swamp, and scoured unpublished local histories, memoirs and novels for references to maroons. In his dissertation, later published as a book, he presents a detailed account of maroon history in the swamp, with a list of prominent chiefs and vivid descriptions of Africanized religious practices.

"His interpretations are stretchy, but I like the book, and it was useful on the history," says Sayers. "When it came to the archaeology, I had nothing. I didn't know where to look, or what to look for. So I decided to survey the swamp, find the high ground and dig there."

The most useful map was a digital representation of the swamp's vegetation. It showed clusters of tree species that typically grow on higher, drier ground. To help him get into these areas, Sayers recruited young, energetic assistants and armed them with machetes and loppers. "I remember one day in particular," he says. "There were four of us and we went at it with everything we had, just sweating bullets. In eight hours, we made 200 feet. The brush was so thick it would have taken us a week to get there, so we gave up."

On the edge of the swamp, where sites were more accessible, Sayers found some artifacts that clearly suggested maroons. But it wasn't until he saw the island that he felt the rush of a big discovery. He went back to his professors with a timetable. In

Inside the densely forested swamp today, says Sayers, "There are at least 200 habitable islands. There may have been thousands of maroons here."

12 weeks, he would identify the key sites, complete the shovel tests and perform his excavations. Then he'd be ready to write his dissertation.

"It was probably the greatest underestimation in the history of archaeology," he says. "Instead of 12 weeks, it took three eight-month sessions. Then I spent five more summers excavating with my students in field schools."

All the excavation sites at the nameless site are now filled in and covered over. Apart from some water catchment pits with fire-hardened floors, there's not much he can show me. But Sayers is an expressive talker and gesticulator, and as he walks me around the island, he conjures up clusters of log cabins, some with raised floors and porches. He points to invisible fields and gardens in the middle distance, children playing, people fishing, small groups off hunting. Charlie, the ex-maroon interviewed in Canada, described people making furniture and musical instruments.

"There were hardships and deprivations, for sure," he says. "But no overseer was going to whip them here. No one was going to work them in a cotton field from sunup to sundown, or sell their spouses and children. They were free. They had emancipated themselves."

On the outside wall of Dan Sayers' office at American Univer-sity is a large photograph of Karl Marx, and a flier for Great Dismal Black IPA beer. Inside, the office has a comfortable, masculine, lived-in feel. There's an old pith helmet hanging on the wall, and a *Jaws* poster, and the front page of a newspaper announcing Obama's election. In the bookshelves are the entire works of Karl Marx.

I ask him how his Marxism influences his archaeology. "I think capitalism is wrong, in terms of a social ideal, and we need to change it," he says. "Archaeology is my activism. Rather than go to the Washington Mall and hold up a protest sign, I choose to dig in the Great Dismal Swamp. By bringing a resistance story to light, you hope it gets into people's heads."

When ideological passion drives research, in archaeology or anything else, it can generate tremendous energy and important breakthroughs. It can also lead to the glossing over of inconvenient data, and biased results. Sayers has concluded that there were large, permanent, defiant "resistance communities" of maroons in the Great Dismal Swamp. Is there a danger that he's over-interpreted the evidence?

"Historical archaeology does require interpretation," he says. "But I always imagine what my worst critic is going to say, or want as evidence, and I've done a decent enough job to convince my academic peers on this. There's a few who don't buy it. The show-me-the-money historians don't see much money."

He takes me down the hall to his laboratory, where soil samples are stacked in plastic bags on high shelving units and hundreds of artifacts are bagged, numbered and stored in metal cabinets. I ask to see the most important and exciting finds. "In one sense, this has been the most frustrating archaeology project imaginable," he says. "We haven't found much, and everything is small. On the other hand, it's fascinating: These soils are completely undisturbed. You're scratching the surface of an undiscovered world."

Archaeological finds from the swamp—some of which will be permanently displayed at the National Museum of African American History and Culture—include (above) clay used to fill chinks between logs or branches of a long-vanished wood cabin. Below, from left: head and partial stem of a machine-cut nail; tobacco-pipe fragment; a flake or chip of glass.

In order to date these soils, and the traces of human occupation left in them, Sayers used a combination of techniques. One was the law of superposition: Layers of undisturbed soil get older as you dig deeper. Also, artifacts found in them, arrowheads, pottery and manufactured items like nails, can be dated through the collective knowledge of historical archaeologists, based on the objects' style and attributes. The third technique was optically stimulated luminescence, or OSL.

"We collected soil samples without exposing them to sunlight and sent them to a lab," he explains. "They can measure when these grains of sand last saw sunlight. Normally, historical archaeological projects don't need to use OSL because there are documents and mass-produced artifacts. It's a testament to how unique these communities were in avoiding the outside world."

Before 1660, most people at the nameless site were Native Americans. The first maroons were there within a few years of the arrival of African slaves in nearby Jamestown in 1619.

After 1680, Native American materials become scarce; what he identifies as maroon artifacts begin to dominate.

Sayers pulls out a stone arrowhead about an inch long, one side chipped away to form a tiny curved knife or scraper. "In the interior of the swamp, there was only one source of stone," he says. "Tools left behind by indigenous Americans. Maroons would find them, modify them, and keep using them until they were worn down into tiny nubs."

Nothing was more exciting than finding the footprints of seven cabins at the nameless site, in the 1660-1860 range. "We know from documents that maroons were living in the swamp then. There's no record of anyone else living there. It is certainly not the type of place that you would make a choice to live in, unless you needed to hide."

He pulls out a disk of plain, earth-colored Native American pottery, the size of a large cookie. "Maroons would find ceramics like this, and jam them down into the post holes of their cabins, to shore them up. This is probably the largest item we've found." Then he shows me a tiny rusted copper bead, perhaps worn as jewelry, and another bead fused to a nail. The artifacts keep getting smaller: flakes of pipe clay, gunflint particles from the early 19th century, when the outside world was pushing into the swamp.

"Everything we've found would fit into a single shoe box," he says. "And it makes sense. They were using organic materials from the swamp. Except for the big stuff like cabins, it decomposes without leaving a trace."

Seven miles away from American University, at the new National Museum of African American History and Culture, an exhibit about the maroons of the Great Dismal Swamp is scheduled to go on view. For the curator Nancy Bercaw, it presented an unusual challenge. "The ethos here is that objects should speak for themselves," she says, talking over coffee in her office. "Dan Sayers generously gave us ten objects. They are reworked pebbles, shims for post holes, tiny fragments of stone from an unnamed island. Some of them look like grains of sand."

Artifact 1 is a white clay tobacco-pipe fragment, 12 millimeters long. There is a small chunk of burnt clay, a five-millimeter piece of flattened lead shot, a quartz flake, a British gunflint chip (circa 1790), a shard of glass, a nail head with a partial stem.

An ancient arrowhead, about 6,000 to 6,500 years old, was reworked by swamp inhabitants in the 17th or 18th century as a knife blade.

They are not the sort of objects, in other words, that catch the eye or speak for themselves. Her solution was to mount some of them in jewel cases like priceless treasures.

The exhibit is in the 17,000-square-foot Slavery and Freedom gallery, in a section about free communities of color. "Traditionally, we've studied the institution of slavery, not enslavement as it was lived," she says. "Once you start looking at our history through an African-American lens, it really changes the focus. Maroons become much more significant."

The largest community of American maroons was in the Great Dismal Swamp, but there were others in the swamps outside New Orleans, in Alabama and elsewhere in the Carolinas, and in Florida. All these sites are being investigated by archaeologists.

"The other maroon societies had more fluidity," says Bercaw. "People would slip off down the waterways, but usually maintain some contact. The Dismal Swamp maroons found a way to remove themselves completely from the United States, in the recesses of its geography."

On a cool cloudy morning in the Great Dismal Swamp, Sayers parks his vehicle by a long straight ditch full of black water. He sips his Monster, and sucks fire into a cigarette. The ditch arrows through the gloomy swamp to a vanishing point in the far distance.

"This is Washington Ditch, a somewhat unique monument to brutality and entrepreneurship," he says. George Washington was the first to see economic opportunity in the vast coastal swamp south of Norfolk, Virginia. In 1763, he formed a company with fellow investors to drain the swamp, exploit its timber resources and dig canals for transportation. This is the first canal, completed in the late 1760s, and excavated by slaves.

"Imagine it," says Sayers. "Digging, chopping, bailing mud, working in chest-high water. One hundred degrees in summer, full of water moccasins, ungodly mosquitoes. Freezing cold in winter. Beatings, whippings. Deaths were fairly common."

The canal now known as Washington Ditch was the first significant encroachment into the Great Dismal Swamp. More canals were dug. Timber companies cut thousands of acres of Atlantic white cedar, known locally as juniper, and turned it into barrel staves, ship masts and house shingles.

It became more dangerous for maroons because the canals allowed slave-catchers to get into the swamp. But there were also new economic opportunities. Maroons were able to cut shingles for lumber companies that turned a blind eye. Frederick Law Olmsted, who traveled in the South as a journalist before he took up landscape architecture, writing about the maroons in 1856, observed that "poorer white men, owning small tracts of the swamps, will sometimes employ them," and also that maroons were stealing from farms, plantations and unwary travelers.

Olmsted asked if locals ever shot the maroons. "Oh yes," came the reply. "But some on 'em would rather be shot than be took, sir." It's clear that there were two different ways of marooning in the swamp. Those living near the edge of the swamp, or near the canals, had far more interaction with the outside world. In the remote interior, at the nameless site and other islands, there were still maroons who lived in isolation, fishing, farming and trapping feral hogs in the deep swamp muck. We know this from Dan Sayers' excavations and from Charlie the former maroon. He described whole families that had never seen a white man and would be scared to death to see one.

The white residents of Norfolk and other communities near the swamp were terrified of being attacked by the swamp's maroons. Instead, they got Nat Turner's insurrection of 1831—a rebellion of slaves and free blacks in which more than 50 whites were killed and then at least 200 blacks killed in reprisal. Turner was planning to hide in the Dismal Swamp with his followers, recruit the maroons and more slaves, and then emerge to overthrow white rule. But his rebellion was suppressed after two days, and Turner, after two months in hiding, was captured and hanged.

What became of the Dismal Swamp maroons? Olmsted thought that very few were left by the 1850s, but he stayed near the canals and didn't venture into the interior. Sayers has evidence of a thriving community at the nameless site all the way up to the Civil War. "That's when they came out," he says. "We've found almost nothing after the Civil War. They probably worked themselves back into society as free people."

Early in his research, he started interviewing African-Americans in communities near the swamp, hoping to hear family stories about maroons. But he abandoned the side project.

"There's still so much archaeology work to do," he says. "We've excavated only 1 percent of one island."

He's out of Monsters and low on cigarettes. It's time to leave the Great Dismal Swamp and find the nearest convenience store. On a raised gravel road, we pass through a charred expanse of forest, torched by a lightning fire. We skirt the shores of Lake Drummond, the perfect blue lake at the center of the swamp, and drive on through waterlogged cypress trees and stretches where the road is walled in on both sides by thorny brush."I got very comfortable being in the swamp," he says. "Bears would watch me excavating. I ran into huge water moccasins and rattlesnakes as thick around as my thigh. But nothing worse happened than scrapes, bug bites and losing equipment in the muck." Once he was wading to the nameless site with a group of students. A young woman stepped into an underwater hole and disappeared. But she surfaced a moment later, with no damage done. On many occasions, students and other visitors became so entangled in thorn patches that they had to be cut loose. "Nothing happens quickly or easily," he says. "The swamp is a trickster and summertime is really tough. But I love it. The thunderstorms are really something. The sound of the frogs and the insects and the birds, just as the maroons heard it. I love what the swamp has done for me, and I love what it did for them." O

Denver singer Erica Brown performs at the International Blues Challenge's 2016 Women in Blues event.

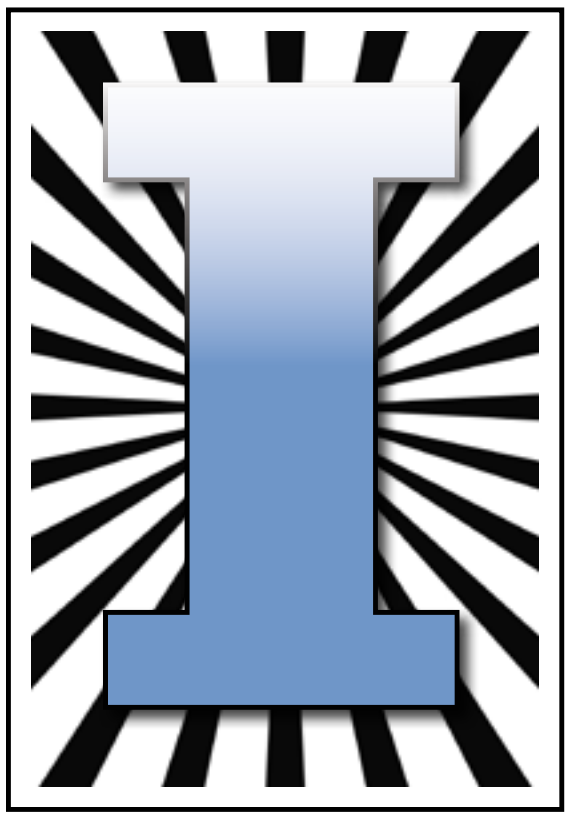
BLACK IN AMERICA

Black and Blues

Is the great African-American music of the rural South really dying? A rollicking visit to a Memphis blues festival strikes a surprising chord

by Touré

photographs by Danny Clinch



It's a Friday afternoon in Memphis and we're in the midst of the 32nd annual International Blues Challenge, at a barbecue joint on the legendary Beale Street, where 150 people are waiting for a musician named Redd Velvet. I have been told she'll be worth the wait, that there may be nothing more important onstage this week. So I'm there when this 40-something black woman walks onstage with a no-frills blue dress and an unmistakably regal bearing. There's no band behind her. No instrument in her hands. It's just her and a mike. She sits. Folks in the audience are still chatting, there's a small din, so Redd looks around the room with piercing eyes, letting you know she's not talking

Redd Velvet (born Crystal Tucker) started her career as a classically trained singer. In her early 40s she moved to Memphis and switched to the blues.

until it's quiet. The flock who came to see her says, "Shhh!" The crowd settles down. With that Redd has set a high bar for herself—if you demand everyone to shut up before you start talking, you'd better have something to say.

"The blues is an antipsychotic to keep my people from losing their minds," she begins. "It started with the moans and groans of agony, the slave roots of it all." Then she sings, "There's a man goin' 'round takin' names! There's a man goin' 'round takin' names!" She shoots us a coldblooded look. "Even their

simplest songs were coded communications such that we could have a conversation and the master would never be the wiser." Those messages didn't stop after Emancipation. She croons the chorus of Jimmy Reed's classic "Big Boss Man": "Big boss man, can't you hear me when I call? / You ain't so big, you just tall, that's just about all." Redd goes on: "If Jimmy Reed had said to his boss, 'I won't put up with this, I'm through,' he would've been dead before dark. Jimmy Reed got people to buy a record where he's saying something he woulda gotten killed for saying in real life. That means the blues is some bad stuff!"

I get it. The whole room has got it now. It's church and theater and history and testifying all at once. And Redd has us in the palm of her hand.

There's no question that Americans revere the blues. Its story is being enshrined in careful, loving ways at the National Blues Museum in St. Louis and the Grammy Museum Mississippi, both of which opened this spring. The mere existence of these two institutions, though, raises the question of whether the blues are now just a thing of the past. "Both personally and professionally I'm fearful that the blues will wind up a historic music form, much like Dixieland and big-band music," says Robert Santelli, the executive director of the Grammy Museum and the author of several books about the blues, including *The Best of the Blues: The 101 Essential Albums*. "It's not that the blues is dying. There's just such a small minority who embrace it in a way that will allow the form to grow and prosper in the 21st century. It's not a music form that has an easy and bright future in 21st-century America."

Tonight on Beale Street the blues is very much alive. The street buzzes with music from every direction, and fans jump between bars with names like the Rum Boogie Cafe, Wet Willie's and Miss Polly's Soul City Cafe. There's gumbo, fried chicken, ribs and cold beer everywhere. And right now in almost every spot on Beale Street there's a stage filled with bluesmen and women doing their thing. Over 200 acts have flown in from around the world to compete for prize packages that include cash, studio time, and a slew of gigs including the Legendary Rhythm and Blues Big Easy Cruise, the Daytona Blues Festival, the Hot Springs Blues Festival, Alonzo's Memorial Day Picnic and more. These are potentially game-changing prizes for small acts. It's a serious competition.

The Israeli-born singer, guitarist and songwriter Bat-Or Kalo made it to the semifinals of the International Blues Challenge this year, representing the Topeka Blues Society.

One night, around 11, I watch my eighth act of the evening—Roharpo the Bluesman, an older black man with long curly hair, a loose-fitting tan suit, a black T-shirt and a fedora. He's from a Baton Rouge family of gospel and blues musicians, and he's got a big voice and the bluesman's weary-but-still-keepin'-on-keepin'-on look. He stalks the stage, taking his time, working his way through an energetic "The Blues Is My Business," while sweating and roaring.

"The blues is spiritual to me," Roharpo tells me on the sidewalk afterward, peering at me through his rimless glasses. "It's supposed to deal with one's inner self. As the bluesman has experienced certain things, he must be able to display that out to the next individual. And that individual should be able to feel what the bluesman is throwing back at him. You say, I know about that. I've been there."

From the beginning, the blues merged the sounds of enslaved people with the sounds of their oppressors. "The blues is born out of the a cappella music of Africa and the music that blacks created as slaves, which manifested as field hollers, mixed together with the European folk music they learned from the slave owners," says Bing Futch, who won the solo/duo guitar category in the 2016 International Blues Challenge, "as well as some of the music that was coming out at that time."

As a music form, the blues has certain distinct features. The melody usually goes up and down a six-note scale. (If you're starting on a C, that scale would go C, E flat, F, G flat, G, B flat, C.) The lyrics tend to follow what's known as an AAB pattern, with the first line of each verse repeating itself: "The thrill is gone, the thrill is gone away / The thrill is gone, the thrill is gone away." The "B" line usually answers or resolves whatever is in the "A" line: "You know you done me wrong, baby, and you'll be sorry someday."

The blues also evokes a particular response in the listener, says Susan Rogers, an associate professor at the Berklee College of Music: "Rock arouses and pumps up; it is intense and rebellious. R&B soothes and often seduces; its lyrics tend to be externally focused. Blues is more introspective and complex; its lyrics tend toward describing one's internal state."

During the 20th century, this melancholy music was the

Players at the International Blues Challenge, clockwise from top left: Oakland native Terrie Odabi; Patrick Mosser of the band Eight O'Five Jive; Ben Hunter, half of a first-place-winning duo; and Colorado blues prodigy Grace Kuch.

sound of the rural South. "The blues came out of the life of struggle," says Barbara Newman, the president and CEO of the Blues Foundation, a nonprofit that serves as an umbrella for more than 175 blues organizations around the world. "It came out of what was going on in the Delta, whether it was weather or slavery and sharecropper lives that were difficult." The emancipated slaves who created it were known as "songsters": traveling musicians who played standards and new songs.

Players at the International Blues Challenge: former Coast Guard commander Bobby "BlackHat" Walters (top); Indianapolis blueswoman Queen Delphine (bottom).

Their music found its way into juke joints—black-operated establishments in the Southeast United States. (The word *joog* means rowdy in Gullah, the creole of lowland South Carolina and Georgia.) Legends like Jelly Roll Morton, Ma Rainey and W.C. Handy all reported hearing the music for the first time around 1902.

The word "blues" first appeared on sheet music in 1908, with the publication of "I Got the Blues." The composer, ironically, was a Sicilian-born barber—he later told an interviewer that he came up with the song after wandering the levee in New Orleans and hearing "an elderly Negro with a guitar playing three notes." In 1920, Mamie Smith made the genre's first vocal recording, a piece called "Crazy Blues." It sold over a million copies in its first year. During the 1930s and '40s, the folklorist Alan Lomax traveled through the Mississippi Delta, interviewing and recording blues players wherever he could find them, from churches to

Ray "Binky" Lampano Jr. performs with his band Lampano Alley. He was an alternative rock musician in Manila before he embraced the blues in the 1990s.

prisons. Many of these musicians never made another recording. Some, including Lead Belly and Muddy Waters, went on to have huge careers.

While the music business was eager to sell so-called "race records," the motivation for many artists and listeners was the need to transcend very difficult lives. Think of "(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue," composed in 1929 by Fats Waller and made famous by Louis Armstrong, and, of course, Billie Holiday's haunting 1939 song about lynching, "Strange Fruit." "This is music made by any means necessary," says Matt Marshall, the publisher of *American Blues Scene* magazine. "Guys often talked about making their first guitar out of baling wire from the side of their house. Talk about needing to get the music out of you! Imagine taking part of the small place where you live and making it into your instrument!"

By the 1950s, Southern oppression was pushing millions of blacks to leave and move to New York, Chicago, St. Louis and other major cities. (See "The Road to Freedom," p. 38.) As black America became more urban, the music changed. For many, it became about electric blues, the sort of music made by Howlin'

It's clear that this music now belongs to the world. "Doesn't matter if it came from America or Europe or Mother Africa or anywhere."

Wolf, Muddy Waters and Jimmy Reed, all Mississippians who moved to Chicago during the Great Migration.

Around this time the songs became tamer. Racially charged songs like "Strange Fruit" largely disappeared, as did the racy lyrics. "There were tons of sexual double-entendre songs that came out in the '30s and '40s," says Brett Bonner, the editor of *Living Blues* magazine. "Those were sung by African-Americans for African-American audiences. For the most part they were thinly veiled but you can find some really filthy stuff—Bull Moose Jackson's 'Big Ten Inch Record.' Or 'Let Me Play With Your Poodle' by Tampa Red. A lot of that faded away as the industry became more and more aware of a white audience."

The audience was, in fact, becoming whiter. During the civil rights era, music executives started using the term "rhythm & blues" to market "race records" to more Northern, urban, upwardly mobile blacks. Before long, black record-buyers were leaving classic blues behind and moving on to the soul music of Motown and the funk of James Brown. A group of white baby boomers took over as the blues' core audience.

Some of these fans were musicians themselves, and they turned the stripped-down music into arena rock, complete with extended guitar solos. This raised new questions: When Led Zeppelin sings "Babe I'm Gonna Leave You" or Jack White plays a resonator guitar, can it be called the blues? "Everyone draws their own lines on this," says Bonner. "And in truth they are all fairly fuzzy. For me it all loops back around to the artist's ties, or lack of ties, to the culture that created the musical form." In fact, when *Living Blues* founders Jim O'Neal and Amy van Singel launched the magazine in 1970, they wrote this into the editorial policy: "The blues by definition was and always will be black American working-class music." (Like Bonner, O'Neal and van Singel are white.)

At the same time, Bonner notes that some black artists play up their working-class connections in order to impress white audiences. "Albert King used to wear a three-piece suit when he played," Bonner says. "By the time we got to the 1990s, Albert King showed up in bib overalls. He knew what people wanted to see and what their image of the blues was. It was a guy who had strolled in out of the fields." That rural blues culture has not existed for quite some time. "People still do blues tourism

Bassist Byron Crenshaw was a college freshman in January when he entered the Memphis competition with his band Darell Christopher & The Ingredients.

looking for that life, that guy on the front porch, picking cotton, coming home and picking up his acoustic guitar. But nowadays in the Delta that guy riding around in the field, he's got a GPS."

Part of what once made the blues so powerful was its response to racism. Players sang about oppression and marginalization, giving black people a space to deal with their pain. This was a core part of what the blues did for its listeners, too—it was meant to heal. In many ways, Americans in the post-Obama age are living lives that are very different from the ones our grandparents had in the Jim Crow South. But songs like "Strange Fruit" still resonate when we hear about black civilians killed by police.

There's also the question of who gets the credit, and the money, when white performers make blues their own. "The way I see it," says James McBride, the musician and journalist who wrote the memoir *The Color of Water*, "the influence of African-American music has been so strong in American society. But the musicians themselves who created it have suffered and died in anonymity."

In my experience, though, white blues musicians and scholars tend to be aware of these racial politics and acknowledge the music's history. The Rolling Stones may incorporate blues influences, but they talk endlessly about the artists who inspired them. Jack White made a generous donation to create an interactive exhibit at the National Blues Museum in St. Louis. You can see the same sense of passion and mission among the folks who organized festivals like the International Blues Challenge and the Chicago Blues Festival.

Perhaps the musician most associated with the blues nowadays is Gary Clark Jr., a 32-year-old singer and guitarist from Austin, Texas. I saw him onstage last summer in Brooklyn at the AfroPunk Fest as the sun was dipping down in the sky. He's got a powerful onstage aura, and his electrified blues was like a transporter to another time and space. "When I'm performing," Clark told me later, "I'm just trying to reach that other level where you're kind of just levitating and you disappear for a minute." The music was raw, soulful, muscular and hypnotic. It incorporated elements of rock, funk, and neo-soul, but it followed the traditional six-note scale, with classic bluesy lyrics about waking up hung over on a New York sidewalk, or falling "in love with a woman who's in love with a man that I can't be."

Clark, who is African-American, got his start playing with Jimmie Vaughan, one of two white brothers who helped redefine the blues during the 1980s. (The other one, Stevie Ray Vaughan, died in a helicopter crash in 1990.) His big break came in 2010 when Eric Clapton invited him to play at the Crossroads Guitar Festival. Clark has since played with artists as wide-ranging as Alicia Keys and the Foo Fighters.

The truth is, if the blues is going to carry into the next generation, the genre has to be open to musicians from all backgrounds. "Right now Alligator Records is essentially a break-even proposition," said Bruce Iglauer, who founded the blues-based label 45 years ago. "We can survive at our present level, but growth is very hard. I have to fill out all this paperwork so we can get microscopic payments from yet another streaming service." Iglauer says the 2015 death of B.B. King—the genre's most recognizable player—left the blues without a face. It's unclear who will take his place. "With his death I think we've entered into a new era."

Older blues musicians are eagerly grooming young artists. At the International Blues Challenge, I met Radka Kasparcova, a white 18-year-old guitarist with long blond hair. She told me she was at a Buddy Guy show in her native Philadelphia area in 2014 when Guy asked if anyone in the crowd could play the guitar. She raised her hand high. "He was like, 'Oh yeah? Show me,'" she said. "I went up on stage with him!" They played three songs together. "It was amazing! There is so much sound and emotion on the stage." She says that's the day she really learned how to play. "I started listening differently," she told me. "Basically, when I played music before I was just playing notes, but when you're playing the blues, you have to really feel it."

I also met Grace Kuch, a 12-year-old singer and guitarist whose parents drove from Colorado to Memphis so she could perform at the blues challenge. Kuch was the youngest player at the National Women in Blues showcase, a little white girl who stood sweetly onstage in front of her band. Even though she's too young to know the rough edges of life that the blues describes, she's obviously in love with the music. Her mom told me about the time they drove to the Pinetop Perkins Foundation Workshop in Clarksdale, Mississippi—hallowed ground in blues circles. Grace fell asleep on the way there. When she awoke in Clarksdale, she sat up and said, "I feel like I've been here before." She swears that she really did experience a deep sense of déjà vu, almost as if she'd spent a past life in Clarksdale.

Looking around the International Blues Challenge, it's clear that this music now belongs to the world. One of the first performers I saw there was Idan Shneor from Tel Aviv. He took the stage alone—a tall, lanky, 20-something white boy who resembled a young Ben Affleck. As he sat on a stool, strumming an acoustic guitar, he didn't seem snakebitten the way bluesmen are supposed to, but his voice was soulful and an extended solo showed off his guitar skills. "All my life I am playing guitar," he said later, in broken English that had been tucked away while he sang. "And my real soul is always in the blues." Here on Beale Street, he'd found his tribe. "It feels like home being here," he says. "The blues is everywhere."

An hour later, I saw a Filipino blues band called Lampano Alley, led by the 40-something Ray "Binky" Lampano Jr. He

was thin, smooth and cool as hell, wearing a porkpie hat and a black suit with a Nehru jacket and red buttons, and carrying a blue cane. He had the sound of B.B. King in his throat and the spirit of the blues in his soul and all the little details of performing it at his fingertips. I watched him onstage in front of 100 people, shouting, "I just want to make . . . love to you!"

"It's a life force," he told me outside afterward, leaning on his cane, speechifying for the small crowd that was gathering around to listen. "Doesn't matter where it comes from! Doesn't matter if it came from America or if it came from Europe or Mother Africa or anywhere. If it gets you in the heart, and you let that story move you to the beat, then, man . . . you've got it." The crowd gave a little cheer.

That life force has always defined the blues, and today's best players are still able to tap into it. "I think we're in a day and age where people are performing for the comment section and not performing in that moment," Clark says. "You gotta be in the moment with the audience and with the band, and you gotta hit every single note with passion and conviction and not worry about making a mistake, or what someone's going to say if you don't do something. If you just bring it full on and let everything go, I think that'll resonate with people. You have to be in it for what it is and not what's going to be said after the fact. You can't perform the blues. You got to feel the blues." O

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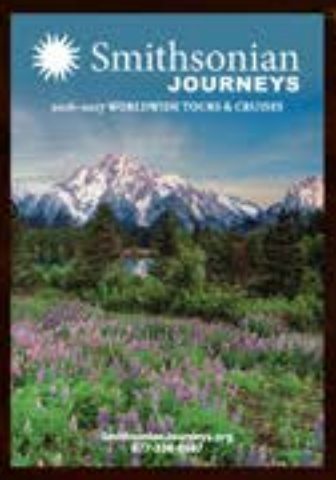

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The Williams Dreamland Theatre, Tulsa, OK, c. 1921

BLACK IN AMERICA

Ask Smithsonian

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY OUR EXPERTS

To mark this month's opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, we interviewed folks visiting the National Mall about what they would like to ask the museum's experts.

What were the best economic opportunities for African-American entrepreneurs during the segregation era?
Kamille Bostick, Charlotte, North Carolina

African-Americans developed business districts where they maintained hotels, banks and restaurants because they were barred from using such institutions in white neighborhoods, says *John Franklin, the museum's director of partnerships and international programs*. The black business district in Tulsa, Oklahoma, fueled by the oil boom in the 1900s, became so prosperous it was called "Black Wall Street." But it was destroyed in a race riot in 1921 that killed some 300 people.

Did any state allow African-Americans to vote before the ratification, in 1870, of the 15th Amendment, which guaranteed the franchise for African-American men?
Sarandon Elliott, Richmond, Virginia

In the first years after the Revolutionary War, says *Bill Pretzer, the museum's senior history curator,* about half of the original 13 states did not legally bar African-American men from voting if they were free and they paid taxes. However, local custom and outright intimidation often prevented them from doing so. But by the mid-19th century, only five states (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts and Rhode Island) out of more than 30 extended the franchise to black men. Iowa and Minnesota did so in 1868.

How early—or late—did African religious beliefs become Americanized or Westernized?
Rachel Fyffe, Portsmouth, Ohio

Although there is evidence that black people attended the Anglican Church as early as 1701, it was during the First Great Awakening, the sweeping religious revival of the 1730s, that large numbers of African-Americans began to embrace the revival of American Protestantism, says *Rex Ellis, associate director of curatorial affairs*. The more personalized, less hierarchical nature of traditional African beliefs aligned with the evangelical nature of the Great Awakening. In the late 1770s, George Lisle, an emancipated slave, became a Christian in his master's church and later started the first African-American Baptist church in Georgia. He is also thought to be the first Baptist missionary to travel overseas.

During the Civil War, African-American soldiers fighting for the Union were initially paid less than their white counterparts. Did they receive lesser rations, too?
Matt and Christina Beaver, Kodiak, Alaska

The distribution of rations to African-American soldiers varied by region and command, says *Krewasky A. Salter, guest associate curator for the military gallery*, and some did receive lesser rations in particular military departments. But in June 1864, Congress equalized the troops' pay (raising black soldiers' net pay from $7 a month to $13), and rations, and supplies and medical care were also expected to be equalized at the same time.

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