Oral History Program examines 'The Great Migration'

The Great Migration of some two million Black people from the south to the north, to the west, and many back again, is thesubject of an Oral History Program of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, now underway.

Much of the true story of this uprooting and mass migration from 1915-1940, is still untold either in the statistics of the census takers or in the historical writings by observers "from the records." gassociation president, EarlE. Thorpe, of North Carolina Central University at Durham, has stated that this program can tap primary sources in gathering data for the enriched treatment of this important episode in American history.

The program is being carried out through projects in six focus cities including Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Columbus, Houston and Los Angeles. In each of these focus cities the persons responsible for th carrying out of the projects include a representative of th local branch of ASALH, and an academic representative who is trained in oral history and a member of the faculty of an institution of higher education.

This arrangement has given opportunity for cooperation between institutions and branches as well as established good standards for the necessary training of interviewers.

The program endeavors to lay a foundation for the humanizing of the story of the Great Migration through "interviewing the witnesses" - those who participated in this episode in our histoyr. Their perceptions, experiences, and reactions will be ascertained in taped interviews and shared through publication of monographs and articles.

Selected tapes and transcripts will be made available in several depositories and libraries. Historians and other researchers will have available a new resource for study, and possibly for finding new materials or new interpretations of old materials.

The national program is funded by ASALH, its branches, higher - ducation institution personnel, and by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Each focus city project is engaged in activities which become model of cooperative endeavours. This cooperation includes ASALH branch officers and members, the academic representative, faculty and institution, community members and institutions such as churches, civic, social, and fraternal organizations. The six ve meant th introduction of interest nd the extension and intensification of interest to others.

The projects have called attention to untapped resources through training programs, have increased the effective use of oral history methods for tapping these resources

Presentations have been made in community meetingsseminars, possible interviewers and interviewees have been identified, training has been afforded for itnd the gathering of basic data on "Black Perceptions of the Great Migration" is underway. In each focus city the ASALH branch is establishing a depository for the taped interviews and transcripts.

Finally, the significant tapes and transcripts will be available for distribution to libraries, historical societies, museums, ets. These will provide an added resource for researchers and historians.

Outreach has been one of the purposes of the program. Nearby and some not-so-near-by) ASALH branches, institutions of secondary and higher education, and organizations have called upon the project personnel for information and aid in introducing and sponsoring oral history activities.

The Atlanta project is being coordinated by Dr. Alexa B. Henderson, secretary-treasurer of the Atlanta Branch of ASALH and associate professor of history at Clark College, and gdr. Hubert B. Ross, Academic Representative, who is professor of sociology and anthropology at Atlanta University.

In addition to the regular functions carried on by other projects, a graduate student at Emory University whodid an oral study for his master's thesis at Atlanta and now assists the Atlanta project in its training program as well as in interviewing.

Also of interest is the fact that in this project Mrs. Kathleen R. Adams, after being interviewed and sharing her extensive and rich knowledge about Atlanta, has become an interviewer and is making considerable contribution in this way.

In Boston, the project is coordinated by James R. Howard, submaster, Medford High School and president of the Boston Branch-ASALH, and Robert C. Hayden, assistant professor, African American Studies Department at Northeastern University, gresearch Consultantt at the Museum of Afro-American History and Columnist for the Boy State Banner.

After holding thir first public meetingseminar at Ebenezer Baptist Church, outreach in this project extended to other churches as well as to such groups as the Franklinaires Social Club, the Highland Park 400 Group, the League of Women for Community SErvice, the Goldennaires Club at Freedom House, the Commission for the Elderly, and the Harriet Tubman House. Significant result of Hayden's articles in the Bay State Banner.

In addition to other media presentations, Lift Every Voice, the program of the Boston Branch, NAACP, over TV Channel 7, allotted a full Sunday program to the Boston-ASALH Oral History Project. The Station is donating the video-tape of the program to the Project.

Among the interviewers trained and active in this project are postal workers, public school teachers, librarians, college students and other lay persons from the community.

Anticipated outreach includes several local colleges, serviceclubs, Afro-American units on the Northside and Southshore and the ASALH Branch at Springfield.

Now in process of fulfillment is a special request from a public library in thestate of New York for outreach to serve "several of our Long Island Oral History Projects so that we can learn the desired mthodology to oe use in a training program geared around Black Oral Hghistory and its applications to our situation out hereon glong Island."

Coordination of the Chicago nds of Dr. Clementine Skinner, assistant principal of the nd president of the Chicago Branch-ASALH , and Marvin E. Goodwin, Sr., assistant professor of history, Kennedy-King College.

Interviewers in the Chicago project come from DuSable Museum an Chapters of three sororities-Delta Sigma Theta, Sigma Gamma Rho and gphi Delta Kappa, along with other community members. Outreach activities have created interest and cooperation from St. John Church-Baptist, Governors State University, University of Chicago, University of Illinois-Circle Campus, International Travelers Association, Westside gnaacp, Newberry Library, and Chicago Public Schools.

A rare and rich experience occurred for interviewers in training and others when Mrs. Philiminia M. von Dickersohn Phillips, 85 years of age, came to Chicgo in 1913, shared her experiences from working in the stock-yards for $12 per week through the efforts of the Urban League giving her the opportunity to learn a trade as a worker, and her integration of a garment factory after her insistence that "the want adthat she had answered had asked for an experienced worker and said nothing about no colored wanted."

In the city of Columbus, Ohio, Dr. Kenneth Hamilton, Academic representative, who is assistant professor, Black Studies Department and History Department, Ohio State University, is assisted by Leonard N. Napper, ASALH Statedirector, and Albert Hawkins, ASALH Branch president. Outreach in this project has included services and cooperation from East High School, the regional organization of ASALH in northern Ohio, the Columbus Art Commission, th Ohio Historical Society, and the Columbus Community Action Program.

It is reported that the initiation of s created interest in other aspects of Black history in this community.

The ASALH-Houston Oral History Project represents acooperative endeavour by Dr. B.A. Turner, coordinator, Minority Manpower Resources Project, Texas Southern University, and Mrs. Mary Wanza, Special Collections LibrarianDirector at Texas Southrn University. Use of television and radio broadcasts has been a part of this program.

In addition to those activities generally carried on by other projects, their Outreach has carried them to Galveston and Waco there interviews will be held and community interest has been aroused. The Ministerial Association, a number of churches, community organizations and other higher education institutons have been activ in support of and participants in the project.

The ASALH-Los Angeles Oral History Project is coordinated by Mrs. Vassie D. Wright, founder, president emeritus and director of th Los Angeles Branch of ASALH (which is also known as the Author's Study Club), and Dr. Charles J. Lang, professor, director of Educational Programs and Audio-Visual Specialist at West Los Angeles College, CulverCity.

In this project, Mrs. Jean Bates ssistant for audio-visual and personnel matters. In this highly nd community persons have special assignments such as Learning Resource Center specialist, coordinating assignments of interviewers, systematized organization of the audio and videotaped interviews.

Percy Luney, agricultural economist, retires at USDA

By Al Sweeney

Many of the numerous retirement affairs can be phony. However, last Friday, some 90 persons turned out at a final salute to one of the finest gentlemen in bureaucratic ranks. It was for real with feeling.

The recipient was Percy Luney, an agricultural economist, who completed 16 years at USDA after serving 10 years with the CIA.

To those of us who knew Luney felt that he was miscast as a federal worker. Certainly he could match formulas with any of theorists who call themselves economists.

A person with a deep interest in the field of agriculture. Yet his unusual talents were buried in USDA's department of civil rights.

It appears that the offices of civil rights in most of the federalagencies are hiring halls for skilled black professionals, who can't earn a decent salary unless they are buried in civil rights.

For many white federal workers the civil rights offices are stacked with whites who have little else to offer, 'except their comPlexion. Many are misfits. While there are some dedicated white civil rights workers to the cause. Which one, it isn't easy to determine.

Still there are a few whites who believe deeply in the civil rights movement and cameout of it.

Luney was one of the black economists who tried to alert the civil rights community to the loss of land ownership of blacks in this nation.

Back in 1910, Blacks owned 20 million acres of land in 20 southern states. Gradually, the loss of black ownership at a rate of 6,000 acres a week over a period 70 years to the point where black ownership in the same states dwindled to 3.5 million acres.

Many blacks lost their land through sheriff sales for failure to pay taxes. Others were lost as members of the family moved to th urban communities of the north and some of heirs wishing to gain some money from the sale of the property through partition proceedings in the local county courts.

In this case, those who were left on the land couldn't buy th entire property, while their cousins sought by Partition their share of the land which meant that it went for far less than value to white owners with access to money.

In many other cases, blacks lost their land by debts to grocer, the feed store or farm supply stores.

As Luney used to tell those who'd listen that blacks were once substantial land holders. He couldn't criticize any person with a small plot of land for not wanting to cash in on it.

But, what happened to the black landowners was that they have been bilked out of their property with very little or sometimes no compensation.

In these days of big agribusiness, small farmers cannot make ends meet unless they have a second job.

There is a trend among the population that finds whites are reversing the migration from the rural areas to the urban communities. Many whites have found city life uninspiring and have headed for the countryside.

While blacks have not joined thereverse migration, some, have found the wide-open spaces to their liking.

Len Watkins, who has an associate on a Cleveland newspaper and later became copy editor of Johnson Publications in Chicago, where his wife also worked in the photo lab, decided to lease the Southside of the Windy City.

Watkins, wife and brood picked up stakes and headed for Arkansas. In a small town called Sunset, Watkins has become the mayor and runs a general store while operating a modest farm. He and his family have found success.

Luney, who was born in Riverton, Ky., received his bachelor's degree from Kentucky State and a master's from the University of Kentucky, doesn't plan to move to a farm.

He plans to teach at one of the local colleges and serve an agricultural consultant. As the nation's biggest industry, agriculture is bigger than General Motors and Ford combined in sales. This indicates itsfinancial impact.

Unfortunately, our black land grant colleges, although they share in funds provided in the agriculture budget, are not pushing the study of agriculture.

Infact our land grant colleges are headed by educators who are bent on turning out studentsfor the traditional fields such as teaching, with dim occupational futures.

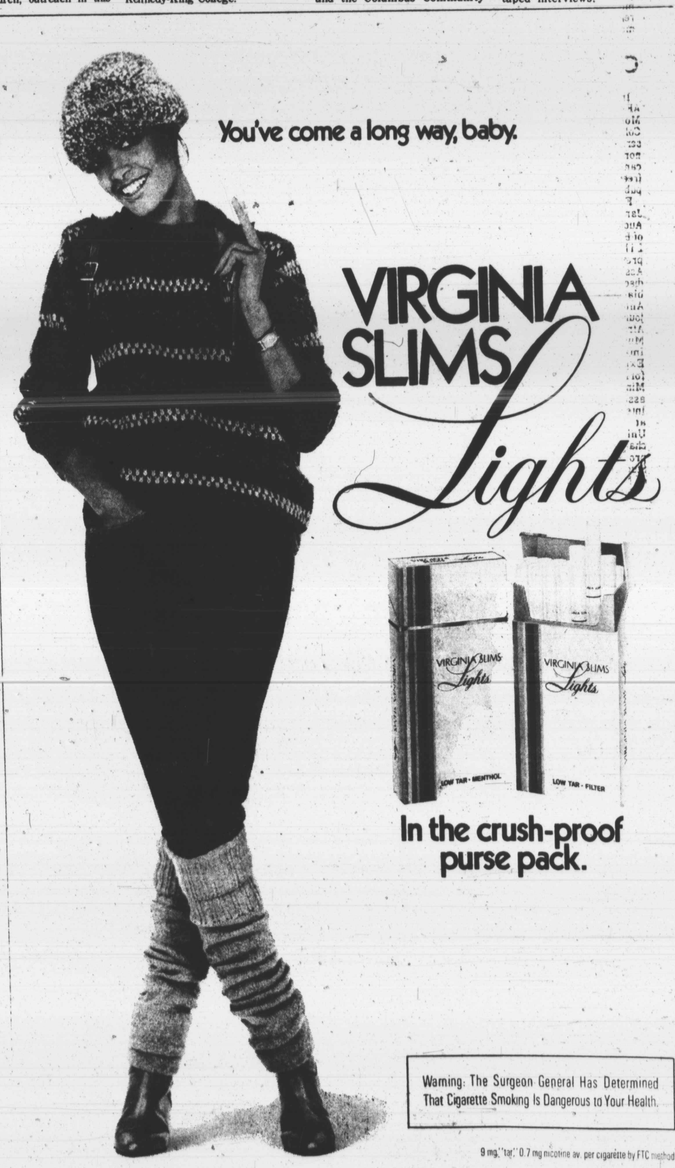
Luney who has seen the potential for young blacks in the agriculture industry is aware of the opportunities for blacks in the international field.

Since the U.S. is feeding the world with its farm products, its soy beans and grain are products that are in demand in the foreign markets.

Especially in the emerging ThirdWorld, black agriculturalists can play a role for the expanding U.S. world market.

While the U.S. has the agriculture supply to counteract its losses in automobile imports and electronic equipment, it must balance the trade by exporting its exhaustive food production.

It's in this area that Luney, the economist, can play a role as an economist and a consultant to some of the Third World nations which could use his vast experience and knowledge in the field of agriculture.



G. JAMES FLEMING

The Al Jolson episode a warning of the times

The attempted Al Jolson Black Face assault on Baltimore is another signal, if such is needed, of how far the wheelers and dealers of our society have NOT progressed in their insensitivity or understanding of the feelings and standards of the "other half of black men and women."

Sometimes it has been lack of sensitivity and understanding of Jews, or Hispanics, or Native Americans, or women always, however, of blacks.

One could have lost all of one's money betting no business or public enterprise in this city, with its majority black population, would have booked an entertainment group featuring the pre-Word War II presentation of blacks caricaturely — jet black face and milk-white lips — and as clowns in words and actions.

Somebody in this town is living in the Dark Ages

Somebody or somebodies do not give a continental about the fact most people in this community, regardless of race or color, have moved forward from desiring this kind of pandering to the lowest emotions.

Somebodies have little respect for the clout of blacks in City Council and State Legislature, and the black representation in the U.S. Congress.

If the Al Jolson mimicry could come and go unchallenged, could "Birth of a Nation" be so far behind?

But, it is as a signal and warning of how safe some racist-minded (at least, thoughtless) people feel these days an Al Jolson black-face comeback is most important. This effrontery would not have been attempted in the 1960s and the early 1970s.

The NAACP was compelled, true to its duty and obligation, to take immediate counter moves to the revue incursion at the local Hilton.

If the hotel management had exercised due caution and concern, the NAACP would not have been pushed to threaten the hostelry with a picket line — against a hotel where blacks spend many thousands of dollars every year.

Can it be the Reagan atmosphere in the land is causing some groups and enterprises to feel free to resort to old insults, old practices against blacks or where blacks are concerned?

This is not an unfair or far-fetched question because there is a good bit of "Follow the Leader" in the general populace.

When Washington appears callous about the poor and the disadvantaged, among whom blacks are largely numbered, it should not be surprising if the cowardly and those wanting to make a quick buck, also exploit the poor and disadvantaged.

As this column recalled not so long ago, similar signals from Washington, during the Woodrow Wilson and Herbert Hoover administrations unleashed much negative sentiment and physical violence against blacks and led to the revitalization of the Ku Klux Klan and its expansion into new strongholds in the North.

The answer of blacks must be a nationwide, deadly serious campaign to register AND vote in every town, city and county; in local and state elections; the coming, 1982 Congressional elections; and the next, 1984 presidential election. Harnessed with such campaign must be support for the NAACP as blacks have never supported it before.

The Al Jolson episode is the handwriting on the wall of how the pendulum is swinging backwards.

Coppin State College observes Black History

In observance of AFRO-American History Month, Coppin State College is sponsoring a series of programs on the northwest Baltimore campus. The lectures are free and open to the public.

February 12, 12 noon, James Weldon Johnson Audiorium — "Images of Black Americans" Dr. Lillian Anthony, president of Anthony Associates, Inc., will discuss the images of the black experience. Dr. Anthony publishes a journal by and about the Afro-American Woman, Museum of Negative Images of the Black Experience. She was formerly Director of Minority Affairs and an associate professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at George Mason University. She is chairman and associate professor of black Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

February 19, 12 noon, James Weldon Johnson Auditorium — "Praxis Pedagogy: Learning That Makes Us Free" Mrs. Cecelia Williams Bryant will be the featured speaker. Mrs. Bryant is currently a doctoral student, Minister to Women at Bethal AME Church in Baltimore, editor of an AME Journal and regular religion broadcaster on the Morgan State radio station. She was born in Yonkers, NY and holds an AA in liberal arts from Elizabeth Seton Junior College in Yonkers, a BA in International Relations and an MA in Political Theory from Boston University and is currently working toward a Ph.D. in Political Science at Howard University. Performance by the Coppin Dancers under the direction of Mrs. Edna Simmons.

February 26, 12 noon, James Weldon Johnson Auditorium — "The Status of Black Students in Higher Education" Dr. Gail Thomas, Research Scientist and Sociologist of Education at the Johns Hopkins University is the assembly speaker. Dr. Thomas is editor of Black Students in Higher Education: Conditions and Experiences in the 1970's. Having published articles in a variety of educational and social science journals on race and sex career and equity issues in higher education, Dr. Thomas is Project Director of research involving primary and secondary data collection and statistical analyses.

For further information on Afro-American History Month, Please call 383-4674.

Dates in Black History

May

5. The Will of Thaddeus Kosciusko, providing for the education of blacks, 1798.
6. Martin R. Delany, army officer and author, born, 1812.
9. John Brown, the martyr, born, 1800.
10. Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, invited to sing before Queen Victoria, 1854.
10. P.B.S. Pinchback, reconstruction
13. Robert Smalls, of South Carolina, dared to take the Planter to the Union Fleet, 1862.
16. Abolition of slavery in Brazil, 1888.
20. Toussaint Louverture, Haitian liberator, born, 1743.
22. Arthur Tappan, abolitionist, born, 1786.
23. Assault of Port Hudson, 1863.

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Tony Brown's Comments

Black Church: History of Liberation

In 1619, 20 Africans were sold as indentured servants in Jamestown, Virginia. It was to be the beginning of a 244-year nightmre for almost all of the Africans that entered or were born in this country.

Slavery for Afro-Americans meant more than just involuntary servitude. It meant that slaveholders used various methods of destroying the religious practices and beliefs of these Africans; it meant not allowing them to communicate in their native tongue or worship their gods.

But, perhaps, most of all it meant the enforcement of an unwritten law that would not allow servants to be taught Christianity because Christians, it was said, could not be held as slaves.

Today, the very thread that keeps millions of Black Americans tied together in belief, the Black Church, possibly has its roots deeply implanted in that denial that occurred over 400 years ago.

Even leadership in the history of Black America has almost always found it candidates in the pulpit. The early Black preacher was an outstanding example of strenght and hope for an oppressed people who considered the church to be the only refuse from an overly racist society. But a racist society wasn't the only thing the church had to deal with.

Affairs concerning church and state have for centuries been a topic of heated controversy. It has divided America deeply in that national legislatures have historically had to address particularly sensitive moral issues such as slavery, marriage and education.

The doctrine of separating church and state had its beginnings as far back as James Madison, who believed the church and state could best function as independent entities. He feared that if they consulted each other, both would eventually become corrupt.

Madison, considered the father of our Constitution, also saw this coalition a hinderance to our political process and one that would ultimately cause the demise of freedom of conscience.

In the Black community, this issue shares the same magnitude. The Black church has grown immensely over the years and has become and integral and now, perhaps, political part of Black life.

Bishop John Hurst Adams of the African Methodist Church is presently Chariman of a 17-million-member coalition called The Congress Of National Black Churches. The Congress was organized as an effort to mobilize the institutional leadership and power of th Black church. Bishop Adams believes that the Black church has historically served the Black community and been the home base of the freedom movement.

He disagrees with the notion that church and politics should be separated. "I don't accept the separation," he explains. "The Black church has always been political in the sense that it has always dealth with issues which cause Black people pain."

The first Black church was said to have founded between 1773-75 at Silver Bluff, South Carolina by a Mr. Palmer, of whom little is known. In 1775, citizens were driven from Savannah by the revolution which sent the church into exile. Shortly after, some members of the Silver Bluff Congregation got together and formed the nucleus of the first Black Baptist church in Savannah.

Andrew Bryan, a Black who later became an influential leader in the church was feared heavily by the slaveholders, who thought his influence would lead to insurrection. Although he never spoke out about the cruelties of slavery, slaves were arrested and beaten if they attended his service. Later, Bryan and his brother Sampson were beaten severely and hauled off to prison.

In the North, however, Whites did not object to independent Black churches and sometimes even encouraged them, especially when th Black population in White churches increased.

In power of obscurity, the Black church is a genuine symbol of Black America. It has given Blacks their most prominent leaders and provided the spiritual food that allowed a people to survive through the ugliest period of this country's history.

Along with this illustrious history, the church has now becom an enormous power that seeks the remedies to the problems of its people. And in view of its strength, the Black church has become a force to be reckoned with.

TONY BROWN'S JOURNAL, the television series, will start on public television Thursday, , on Channel 8 at 8 p.m. It will also be seen on Channel 32, Thursday at 9 p.m. Channel 22, Monday at 10:30 p.m.

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