



Heritage Newsletter

California African American Genealogical Society

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California African American Genealogical Society
P.O. Box 8442
Los Angeles, CA 90008-0442

General Membership Meetings
Third Saturday monthly at 11:45am (dark July and August)

Mayme Clayton Library and Museum (MCLM)
4130 Overland Ave., Culver City, CA 90230-3734
(Old Culver City Courthouse across from VA building)

2014 Board of Directors
Dr. Edna Briggs – President
Ronald Higgins – Immediate Past President
Ronald Batiste – First Vice President
Carolyn Conway – Second Vice President /Membership
Cartellia Bryant – Corresponding Secretary
Open – Recording Secretary
Christina Ashe – Treasurer
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Website – www.caags.org

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Monica Maurasse – Newsletter Editor
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Open – Volunteer Chairman

President's Message

Black History Month: A Walk Down Memory Lane
By Dr. Edna Briggs



Carter G. Woodson

Black History Month is an annual observance in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom for remembrance of important people and events in the history of the African diaspora. In the United States and Canada it is celebrated annually in February and in the United Kingdom in October.

In 1926, Carter G. Woodson and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History announced the second week of February to be "Negro History Week." This week was chosen because it coincided with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (Feb 12) and Frederick Douglas (Feb 14). The primary purpose was to encourage the coordinated teaching of the history of American Blacks in the nation's public schools.

The expansion of Black History Week to Black History Month was first proposed by the leaders of the Black United Students at Kent State University in February 1969, and was first celebrated there in 1970. In 1976, as part of the United States Bicentennial, the expansion of Negro History Week to Black History Month was officially recognized by the U.S. Government. President Gerald Ford spoke about urging Americans to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected

Neither the newsletter editor nor CAAGS guarantees publication of any submission. Submissions for the newsletter are due by the third Saturday of each month. Please email your submissions or inquiries to CAAGS@hotmail.com

accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.”

Black History Month sparks an annual debate about the continued usefulness and fairness of a designated month dedicated to the history of one race. Some people have concerns about black history being delegated to a single month, and the “hero worship” of some of the historical figures.

Morgan Freeman, a critic of Black History month, has said, “I don’t want a black history month. Black history is American history.” Freeman also argues that there is no White History Month, because white people do not want their history relegated to just one month.

At this point, it is fairly safe to conclude that Mr. Freeman’s thinking is not likely to overtake that of Carter G. Woodson and the Black United Student at Kent State University in the near future.

You are invited to share your thoughts in a letter to the editor.

2015 Calendar of Events

February 21

CAAGS Board meeting, 10 am - 11:30 am
Beginner/Intermediate Classes, 11:45 am - 12:45 pm
General membership meeting/Guest Speaker, 1-3

March 14

13th Annual Discover Your Roots Conference - Open a Window To The Past. Historians, family history researchers, genealogists and other experts will host presentations and conduct specialized classes focusing on a diverse range of American American genealogy subjects. Pre-registration before Feb. 20th \$30 (includes box lunch). Visit discoveryourroots.org or call (800) 533-2444.

March 21

CAAGS Board meeting, 10 am - 11:30 am
Beginner/Intermediate Classes, 11:45 am - 12:45 pm
General membership meeting/Guest Speaker, 1-3

** Calendar is subject to change without notice*

Membership Renewal

If you haven’t done so, please renew your CAAGS membership for 2015. Current members whom have not renewed by March 2015 will be dropped from our roster.

CAAGS Cookbook

A copy of “Recipes to Remember” would make an excellent gift for birthdays or any other celebration. If you would like to purchase a copy(s), inquire at the general meeting, contact any Board member or info@caags.org.

Family Search Library, LDS Church in West Los Angeles. Please call 310-474-9990 if you need more information

3-day Intensive Family History Training Courses 8:00-5:00 p.m.

March 17-19: BEGINNING

April 14-16: BEGINNING

Introduction to Family Tree - 10:00 a.m.

March 7 May 9

April 11 June 13

Family Tree Sources/Memories - 10:00 a.m.

March 21 May 16

April 18 June 20

How DNA Is Reshaping How We See Ourselves — and Our History

National Geographic Published November 16, 2014

Many of our traits and decisions are shaped by our ancestors, author says. Scientists have identified five different genes that contribute to the way our faces are structured, says author.

In her early 20s, Christine Kenneally discovered something about her Australian forebears that upended her sense of identity and family history. In her new book, *The Invisible History of the Human Race: How DNA and History Shape Our Identities and Our Futures*, she explores the power of DNA to reveal secrets in our past and predict our future.

Talking from her home in New York, she explains how even the moistness of our earwax is encoded in our genes, why our decisions are not entirely our own, and how the genetic imprint of distant historical events like slavery can shape attitudes today.

I kept circling around this memory from when I was in grade two, about eight years old. Our teacher explained what a family tree was. I was completely bewitched by this idea. I thought it was magical that you could see these lines through your family—who came from whom.

So I ran home excitedly to ask my parents what the names of my grandparents were. I was really surprised by their response. They were not happy about it. In fact, they were kind of indignant. Their attitude was: What business is it of your teacher to ask these sort of things?

Many years later, when I was in my early 20s, we were having a conversation around the kitchen table, and my father told us that the person we thought of as our grandfather was really *his* grandfather. And that the woman he'd grown up thinking was his sister was really his mother. And that he didn't know who his father was. It was an incredibly significant moment in our lives. Not for the reasons I think my father feared. He came from a generation when illegitimacy was a terribly shameful thing. But this was the late 20th century. We didn't have any of those feelings. But we did feel this shuddering in our identity. The thing we'd always thought was true was not true. That's what connected with me with these questions I had about how our identities are built—what gets passed down to us over the years. And what can you ever really know?

We have this vision of ourselves as completely in control of who we are in any one moment, as essentially creating ourselves—at least once we've become adults.

But there are many traits we have and many decisions we come to that are shaped by paths we've taken in our lives and by paths our ancestors have taken.

Evolution really is a past-dependent process. What exists now has evolved from what came before. This principle also applies to our personal history, our family history, and biology, because our genes are passed down to us.

“Genealogy is bunk,” you quote one science writer as saying. But that doesn't seem to stop more and more people searching out their ancestors.

That's absolutely right. And that's because people who are searching out their ancestors are onto something. That was one of the most fascinating parts of writing this book. When I first started talking about it to people, I kept coming up against this attitude, which was very perplexing to me, because genealogy is one of the most popular hobbies in the world.

At the same time there's this widely held notion that genealogy is a ridiculous, self-indulgent pastime. I think that comes from a few different things. First I think it comes from the misuse of genealogy and our ideas of inheritance. Not just in the eugenics of Nazi Germany. Many other countries had ideas about lineage and

genealogy, and biology, which they believed made them superior to others. Some pockets of the world are also still very much class-based, and people don't want to return to that.

There's also a notion in America whereby we want to see ourselves as completely in charge of who we are. We don't want to think of ourselves as having been shaped by the past.

One of the most fascinating things in your book was the idea that the legacy of historical events like slavery or the Black Death can shape our ability to trust people—and the success of a society. Tell us about the work of Nathan Nunn.

Nathan Nunn is a pioneer among a group of economists who are using big data to look at the impact of historical events on attitudes of today. With another economist, Leonard Wantchekon, he conducted this incredible study whereby they looked at levels of interpersonal trust in Africa today.

They asked if slavery had any kind of impact. What they found was that there was a correlation between regions where more slaves were taken and lower levels of trust today.

Wantchekon is a Princeton economist now, but he grew up in Benin, West Africa, one of the main slave exporting centers. And when the results of their research became known in Benin, there was a huge response. Many people got in touch with him and gave him these heartfelt acknowledgments that he'd identified something that was real—and was shaping their lives today.

We think of a country like the U.S. as a melting pot where people from different cultures blend together by adopting the values of their new homeland. But your research shows that immigrants often reproduce old values even their ancestors have left behind.

Absolutely. The myth of American independence as complete abandonment of the Old World is not true. People very much bring the Old World with them. One study looked at how many children women from different cultures were likely to have.

And what they discovered was that they're influenced by the numbers of children their grandparents had, by the choices their grandparents made, even if they've never met those grandparents or been back to the Old World.

Obviously, their grandparents' children, their own parents, bring those values with them, and it influences their life choices. I love that, because we think of these choices as so personal and so completely independent. They're choices you make by yourself or with your partner. But no matter what you tell yourself, what your grandparents were up to also seems to affect you too.

You say that "the moistness of our earwax can be traced to a single letter within a single gene"!

[Laughs] Much of the shape of our body comes directly from our genome. But we're just starting to work that out. Earwax is a single genetic marker. But a lot of our physical traits will be shaped not just by one marker or in one gene but by many genes working together.

The genetics of the face is fascinating. You know when you see someone who looks like someone else, but you can't quite put your finger on it? Well in the last year or two scientists have identified five different genes that clearly contribute, though not necessarily exclusively, to the way our faces are structured.

And I think we're going to know so much more about inheritance through the ages and be able to understand our own myths about inheritance once we fully understand the genetics of the face.

One of the most touching scenes in the book is when your whole family does a DNA test together. What did you find out about yourselves?

My husband's mother had died young, of a particularly devastating form of multiple sclerosis. And throughout my husband's life, in the back of his mind, had been this question: Would he also develop this disease and perhaps pass it to our children?

So, the first thing he looked at was whether he had the genetics associated with multiple sclerosis. Luckily, as far as current knowledge goes, he does not. It was a huge relief to him. This burden, which he didn't even realize he'd been carrying for all this time, had suddenly lifted.

You use the phrase "the politics of DNA"—how information we discover may shatter our illusions about ourselves or our cultural heroes. Give us some examples.

There are stories about people who do their genetic genealogy and expose some secret in their family that can potentially be very distressing. So there's this idea that your genome is a kind of Pandora's box. Be careful looking inside, you never know what might come out.

But as I did my research and spoke to many people who have done this, I felt there were many more stories of positive discovery and revelation, and a willingness to embrace the complications that come up when we look into our past. Genetic genealogy may be the most efficient way that we have now of uncovering secrets, but the distress comes from the secrets, not the method with which they are revealed.

The most famous case in American history is, of course, Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings. It's an incredibly important story for American history and for genetics. What DNA tests showed was that Jefferson had fathered many of Sally Hemings's children, something which had been denied for a very long time. And it was denied because people had paid attention to the stories told by white landowners, not the stories told by slaves. The slaves had been telling these stories for a long time. But no one was listening. The genetics proved that it really had happened, and that it wasn't uncommon at the time.

**Southern California Genealogical Society and Family
Research Library Lunch and Learn Series**

417 Irving Drive, Burbank, California 91504
818-843-7247

Saturday February 14, 2015

Doors open at 12 noon

Lunch - 12 noon to 1p.m.- Sit, chat, and share your genealogy stories and questions while eating your brown bag lunch.

Learn - 1:00 p.m. to 4:45 p.m. with questions and answers
Speaker - Charlotte M. Bocage

1:00 - 2:15 p.m. **I Thought I Was Organized, So Don't Do What I Did!**

2:15 - 3:30 p.m. **Why and How to Source Your Documents**

3:45 - 4:45 p.m. **Getting Ready for A National Archives Research Trip**

These three presentations explain the need for and the types of forms, a simple filing system, and other genealogical paraphernalia. You will avoid the sin of incomplete sourcing by organizing your source citations. The mini lecture will prepare you for our field trip to the National Archives on March 7th or a visit to any repository.

The library will not be open for research. Times are approximate. Any questions please contact Charlotte rubymoon01@yahoo.com