



DIGGING UP THE PAST

Write, Sing, March, and Fight for Freedom

Welcome to volume 2, issues 3-4 of *Digging up the Past*. Spring and Summer bring with them a number of critical historical events. June is the month of Juneteenth, the Stonewall Riots, and the birth of Gwendolyn Brooks. Here at WSU, we celebrate with educational events such as movies, lunch-time quiz-outs, and more. As historians, of course we are excited to commemorate June 29th, the day when Carter G. Woodson, the founder of Black History Month, was awarded the prestigious Spingarn Medal.



Spingarn Medal. Image from Black Past, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/naacp-spigarn-medal-1914/>.

It was in the spring month of April, 1910, that the National Urban League (NUL) was founded. Among its founders was George Edmund Haynes, the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Columbia University. Throughout the Great Migration, the NUL helped newcomers to northern cities find housing and jobs; in the twenties and thirties, under the direction of Eugene Kinckle Jones, it expanded its social work and fought Jim Crow in urban areas and the nation at large.¹ By the twentieth century, it had become one of the strongest voices for racial justice in the U.S. Today, the NUL continues to work for a more just society. You can find its reports online at <https://nul.org/>.

It is not a coincidence that the NUL and the NAACP were both founded in the early twentieth century, for the early twentieth century was a time of flourishing for Black political and cultural organizing. The rise of Harlem, as a cultural center, also occurred at this time. Like the political movements of the era, the Harlem Renaissance grew in visibility from the nineteen-teens into the nineteen-thirties, as more Black citizens moved north in what is now known as the Great Migration.² As will be addressed in Minerva Hayes’s article at the close of this issue, a Black LGBTQI+ culture emerged from this space of activism. That culture included drag balls and flourished until, as we moved into the mid-twentieth century, a more conservative politics of respectability came to dominate national Black and white political organizing. Yet the rights that so many of us have today

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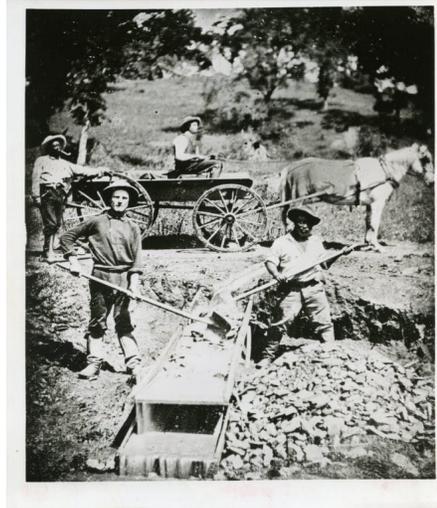
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¹ Susan D. Carle, *Defining the Struggle: National Organizing for Racial Justice, 1880-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 236-248; Feliz L. Armfield, *Eugene Kinckle Jones: The National Urban League and Black Social Work, 1910-1940* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2011). For more information on the Urban League, see Nancy J. Wiess, *The National Urban League, 1910-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974). *Defining the Struggle* and *The National Urban League* are available at WSU’s Holland Library.

² For more on the Black and LGBTQI+ movidas of the Harlem Renaissance, see Simon Dickel, *Black/Gay: The Harlem Renaissance, the Protest Era, and Constructions of Black Gay Identity in the 1980s and 90s* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011).

Southerners who might claim them as escaped slaves.³ For Black Californians, life in the State of California was one of danger and struggle.

Building a Community:



Miners at Spanish Flat, California, 1852, Miriam Matthews Photograph Collection, MS 19, African American Museum and Library at Oakland, Oakland Public Library. Image available at <https://d4804za1f1gw.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/100/2021/10/Miners-at-Spanish-Flat-El-Dorado-County-670x826.jpg> and used in accordance with and included in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107.

Despite the dangers brought by the 1852 law, African Americans were able to create community and opportunities for themselves in California. Black miners labored alongside Latin American, Chicano, Chinese, and European and Euro-American miners. They avoided mines where southerners labored, and most institutions, including businesses and restaurants, were integrated. Unfortunately, by 1860 this changed as Euro-Americans established segregated institutions, a race-stratified labor force, and unequal access to resources. African Americans, in turn, began networking with other racialized minorities to create safe spaces. Equally important, by networking with African American communities throughout the U.S. West, they were able to engage in local, state, and federal legal battles.⁴ The diverse class, education, and skill backgrounds that African Americans brought with them enabled them to challenge the racial barriers Euro-American imposed on them.

³ Stacey L. Smith, "Remaking Slavery in a Free State: Masters and Slaves in Gold Rush California," *Pacific Historical Review* 80, no. 1 (2011): 31, 54-55, JSTOR database; Delilah L. Beasley, "Slavery in California," *Journal of Negro History* 3, No. 1 (1918): 38, 40-41. JSTOR database.

⁴ Taylor, 85-87; Lapp, 89.

In 1851, in Sacramento, for example, the Reverend Bernard Fletcher founded the first African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in the U.S. West. Other churches soon followed in San Francisco and in smaller cities such as Napa. All of the churches held Sunday schools, and many of them grammar schools and libraries.⁵ With the rise of Black institutions in California's cities, most Black families preferred to live in urban areas; single men remained in rural districts and mining areas – as did mixed-race families.⁶

A Matter of Civil and Human Rights:



A portrait of the Rev. Daniel Blue hanging on the walls of St. Andrews African Methodist Episcopal Church. *Photo by Asaf Ehsanipour/KQED.* Image available online at KQED News, <https://www.kqed.org/news/11818409/how-the-founder-of-californias-first-black-church-fought-its-last-known-slavery-case> and included in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107.

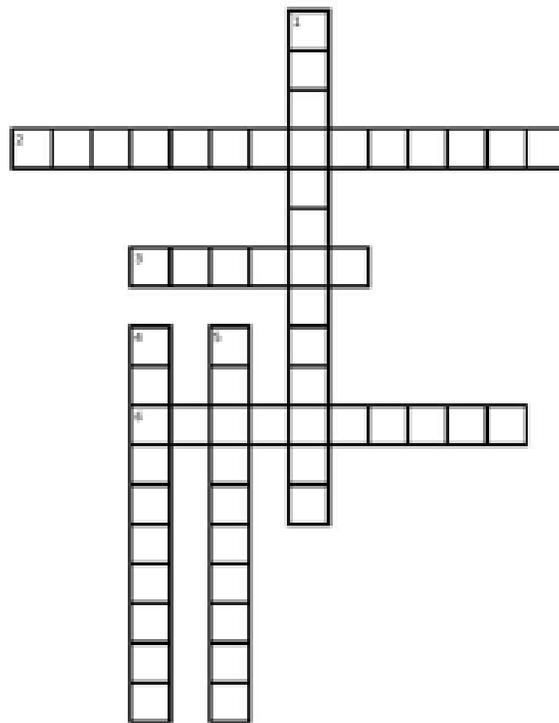
The Rev. Daniel Blue hosted the first Convention of the California Colored Citizens.

Just four years after the founding of the first AME church, a small handful of Black businessmen organized the First State Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of California. By then the Rev. Daniel Blue was the minister at AME and welcomed the convention to use the church. While the convention excluded women from voting, it did not exclude them from influence. As will be discussed below, the convention's accomplishments proved formidable. The convention was a response to violence and discrimination against African Americans in the West. Increased violence and discrimination convinced Black leaders that a statewide convention could not be delayed. In 1851, in San Francisco, a Black businessman by the name of Lester was assisting a white customer at his shoe store. The white customer had a disagreement with Lester and brutally beat him with a cane, then fled the store—stealing a pair of boots.

⁵Taylor, 87-88; Lapp, 89-91.

⁶Lapp, 86-87.

Before 1865: Black Freedom Struggles



Down:

- 1. the first Black newspaper in the West
- 4. The city where the first A.M.E. Church was found in the West.
- 5. In 1855 this minister welcomed a Black rights convention to his church.

Across:

- 2. Throughout 1850s African Americans met to fight against this.
- 3. Before the Civil War enslaved people fled to this country seeking freedom.
- 6. A political meeting held to achieve specific goals:

Digging This Day

April 4, 1968: While in Memphis, Tennessee, supporting a march for striking Memphis sanitation workers, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968), is assassinated (TBH).

April 5, 1911: 100,000 to 500,000 people march in New York City to attend the funeral of seven unidentified victims of the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire that occurred late March that same year (NWAH).

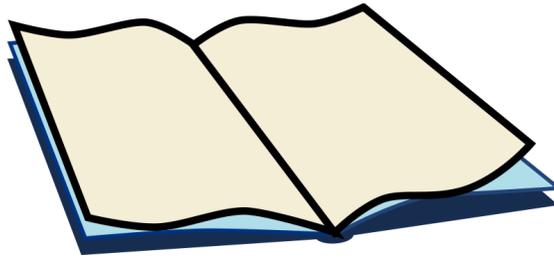


Demonstration of Protest and Mourning for Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire of March 25, 1911, Department of Labor, Historian's Office. In the early twentieth century, women's blouses were called "shirtwaists." Immigrant women and girls from Southern and Eastern Europe worked long hours in crowded factories sewing shirtwaists that were then sold to working-class and middle-class women. When a fire broke out at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, there were no safety measures in place to protect workers, and 146 people died in the fire. After the tragedy, workers and supporters protested for stronger worker protections (read more at <https://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/story/fire.html>).

May 13, 1969: The Brown Berets begin publication of a monthly paper called *La Causa*. Following the lead of the Black Panthers, they also institute programming that addresses food, housing, unemployment, and education within the barrios (UW).

May 31, 1909: The National Negro Committee (now NAACP) holds its first conference in New York. (TBH).

June 7, 1917: Birthday of Gwendolyn Brooks, first Black poet to win the Pulitzer Prize. Brooks published her first poem, "Eventide" at the age of 13. She also served as Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress (TBH).



Further Reading

- Boyd, Nan Alamilla. *Wide-Open Town : A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. ProQuest Ebook Central. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2132055225/bookReader?accountid=14902>.
- Funk, Mason. *The Book of Pride: LGBTQ Heroes Who Changed the World*. New York: Harper One, 2019.
- McGrody, Ellen. *Pioneers of LGBTQ+ Rights: The History of the LGBTQ+ Rights Movement*. New York: Rosen Publishing, 2019.
- Prager, Sarah. *Queer, There, and Everywhere: 23 People Who Changed the World*. New York: Harper, 2017.
- Stryker, Susan. *Transgender History*. Berkeley: Seal Press, 2008.

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Summer History Quiz—
All answers can be found in this edition of
Digging up the Past!

This A.M.E minister hosted the “First State Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of California” in his church:



Quotable Past:

Who wrote “A misinformed people is a subjugated people”?

In what year did the Stonewall Riots take place?



In the 1860s, two Black newsmen, Phillip A. Bell and Peter Anderson, founded this newspaper (Bell was also a political activist):

This is the place in Harlem, New York, where (some historians believe) drag balls originated:



Bring your answers to the
Department of History
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LOADED HISTORY MUG!