

PROFILE



ALEX HALEY, Who Found His Roots

As a boy in Henning, Tennessee, Alex Haley's grandmother would tell him stories about the family. Some of her stories went back to her grandparents and great-grandparents. She even told him fascinating stories about a man called "The African." Alex was intrigued with these vivid stories. He envisioned the river "Kanby Bolongo" and how the African was caught, beaten and chained. The African was dragged onto a slave ship and brought to America.

Alex grew up hearing wonderful stories which remained with him all through his adult life. Born in Ithaca, New York, in 1921, he

grew up in Henning. After high school graduation, he joined the U.S. Coast Guard. He left behind his two younger brothers. It was while in the Coast Guard that he taught himself to write. He began by writing fancy letters for his friends. These letters would go to their special girlfriends. The letters got so much response, he refined his skills even more. He was asked to write other official materials and became Chief Journalist.

In 1959, when he retired after twenty years, he started to write for magazines. Haley did serious, extensive interviews for *Playboy* and other magazines. Then, he began his 12-year journey into researching his family history. This literary journey took him back to Africa, where he talked with his relatives from six generations. There in the village of Juffure, this descendant of "The African" of long ago saw Kunta Kinte's (the African's) descendants.

Haley traced his family genealogy for a dozen years. "Roots," his book, is the saga of his ancient family, their forced trip to America, slavery and the resentment and struggles it caused. "Roots," published in 1976, also tells how his family survived the horrors of slavery and Reconstruction and became educated people.

In 1977, the book was made into a television mini-series. The ABC-TV series reached millions of viewers and Alex Haley became a folk hero. Both the book and the television series inspired many to discover their own roots.

When Alex Haley died in 1992, America and the world lost a diligent researcher, a compassionate human being and a generous, humble personality.

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GENERAL RICHARD L. JONES
U. S. Ambassador, National
1884 - 1975

General Richard L. Jones, former U. S. Ambassador to Liberia and retired Illinois Army National Guard commander, died in 1975 at the age of 81. A graduate of the University of Cincinnati, General Jones studied law at the University of Illinois. He served the armed forces during World War I as a lieutenant in the military police. In World War II, Jones was a special services officer and was awarded the Legion of Merit medal. He was appointed ambassador to Liberia by President Eisenhower in 1955, and served in that post until 1959.



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