

# Study black history

Legacies of our proud past require a look

MELOYE MICERE STEWART

In the spirit of Ma'at



**K**ujichagua — self-determination — and the struggle to achieve it, is one of the enduring, conscious threads of our existence.

It is the exhortations of self-determination and our identification with this important value of autonomy, which connects African Americans to the words, examples and inspiration of our historical leaders, from Frederick Douglass, Martin Delaney and David Walker to W.E.B. DuBois, Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Mary McLeod Bethune right up to Fannie Lou Hamer, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. These historical giants all lived self-determined lives, sacrificing their time on earth to leave us a legacy we must now utilize to ensure the future of our race.

The historical legacies of the numerous African American men and women we will honor during Black History Month requires closer study. The critical study of our historical lessons begins with a commitment to reading. In particular, there are a half-dozen documents/books all African American adults and young people need to know. As primary sources, they fill in the knowledge gap deliberately omitted from American history books. As self-determined works, they all provide knowledge of where we have been, where we are and where we need to go.

Briefly, these "must-read" books/documents are W.E.B. DuBois' "The Souls of Black Folks" (1903), Carter G. Woodson's "The Mis-Education of the Negro" (1933), Mary McLeod Bethune's "Last Will and Testament" (1955), "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" with Alex Haley (1965), Martin Luther King's "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community" (1968) and Lerone Bennett's "Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America" (6th edition, 1988). While it will be painful, we should also read at least one slave narrative, e.g., Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, etc., to fully identify with our ancestors of yesterday and to appreciate the miracle of our existence today.

Once you begin reading these race-insightful books, do not be surprised if you feel angry. Welcome the anger, knowing what you feel is the energy of agitation. Agitation is the lifeblood of self-determination, requiring historical knowledge, vision, courage and perseverance. Each of the cited documents embodies the spirit of self-determination, and, if we read and internalize them, we will receive that same energetic, self-determined spirit to propel us to greatness.

The lessons we must learn and share constitute the inside work of consciousness. The work of consciousness must be done individually and collectively within organizations. To ensure the future of our children, we must learn and teach the knowledge of our history.

# Shooting spurred protest

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December 1993 shooting death of a black woman — Windy Gail Thompson — by a Charlotte police officer. The third coffin represented Jake King, who was shot and killed by a police officer in 1989.

African Americans have called for an independent citizens review of police shootings, an independent prosecutor and video cameras in police cars.

Black Monday was coordinated by the Rev. Kojo Nantambu, who also helped coordinate local participation in the Million Man March.

In his speech, Chavis said protesters had gathered "in the spirit of unity and the spirit of self-determination."

"We do not intend to allow the deaths of Jake King, Windy Gail Thompson and James Willie Cooper to be in vain," Chavis said. "We will not forget them."

"There is apartheid in Charlotte, North Carolina," he said, pointing to the skyscrapers anchoring the corners of The Square.

Noting that Charlotte is the financial capital of the southeast and could soon be the financial capital of the nation, Chavis, former executive director of the NAACP, pointed out the lack of black ownership of any of the city's prime real estate.

"Charlotte will not reach its true potential until there is justice for black people," Chavis said. "You can't have a great city when you allow a white police officer to shoot down a black man with his baby beside him in the car."

The Black Monday Coalition which organized the protest will stay together, Chavis said. A citywide follow-up meeting is planned for Feb. 17, he said.

The organization is neither anti-white or anti-semitic, Chavis said in response to complaints that the rally would heighten racial tensions.

"We are pro-black," he said. "There is nothing wrong with a black person being pro-black."

Fess Bradley, a Charlotte writer and activist, said that although there was opposition to the protest from the "power structure" and the traditional black leadership, Monday's



PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Protesters pray during Black Monday ceremonies.

demonstration has historic implications.

"With all the obstacles, to have this many people out two months after Brother Cooper was killed is significant," Bradley said.

Ten-year-old Makeda Nantambu, who stayed home from Irwin Avenue Open School, said the demonstration led by her father was a good idea.

"It is a good chance for black people to get together in unity," Makeda said. "To come together and realize what's going on."

After attending Monday's council meeting, where Chavis and others criticized council

member Don Reid for saying he feared black teenagers, the Black Monday group gathered at Walls Memorial AME Zion Church for a celebration meeting.

Walls Memorial pastor the Rev. Sheldon Shipman had been a supporter of Citizens For Justice and Black Monday, a contrast to the opposition of the Rev. James Samuel, pastor of Little Rock AME Zion Church. That split was mirrored throughout the African American community, but Black Monday supporters declared the effort a success.

# Simpson disappoints

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get his children back and his life somewhat together."

King and other black leaders had implored Simpson to become a role model of sorts to inner-city blacks, perhaps as a volunteer, motivational speaker or fund-raiser. After all, they said, it would be the least he could do in return for the black community's overwhelmingly support of Simpson's innocence.

"So O.J., what are you going to do? Run out of Dodge or do something around here?" King had said during a press conference Oct. 3, 1995, the day Simpson was acquitted of murdering his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman.

King seemed to get his answer in the ensuing weeks as he watched TV coverage of Simpson "showing his great passion for the love of golf and minimum concerns for most other humanistic things."

Another black activist, who also challenged Simpson to help the black community, was also disappointed.

"He hasn't done anything that one can measure because he appears to have ingratiated himself further with the black community for his own benefit," said Dr. James Mays, who runs three inner-city medical clinics.

Indeed, Simpson's most memorable contribution in the past year was a fund-raiser at his Brentwood mansion for a group trying to curb gang violence and domestic abuse.

Simpson held two other fund-raisers in the black community as well — both to raise money for himself. One was at a church in Washington, D.C., charging \$10 per person, and

the other, for \$40 a person, at a casino at the Hollywood Park racetrack.

"My hopes have been deflated," Mays said. "He has not given as much as I feel he was capable of giving."

But Dennis Schatzman, a volunteer for King's civil rights group and a syndicated columnist who has covered the trial, says Simpson deserves a break.

"He's broke, has no job, so what's he going to do?," Schatzman said. "Nobody who's broke and doesn't have a job can do anything for anyone. And we in the black community realize that. It's those in the white community that don't."

An Associated Press poll conducted this month found blacks are far more likely than whites to believe Simpson is innocent, though the gap has narrowed somewhat since the criminal trial verdict.

Now, Simpson is on the verge of another verdict — this time in a civil trial brought by the families of the victims. The jury is expected to begin deliberations Monday or Tuesday to determine whether Simpson is legally responsible — although not criminally guilty — in the deaths.

With cameras barred from the courtroom and his freedom no longer at issue, most Americans say they are not following the civil trial closely.



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