



NATIONAL
BLACK
HERSTORY
TASK FORCE

The Herstorian Newsletter

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Sharon Jordan, Editor

Letter from the President

Since its formation, the National Black Herstory Task Force (NBHTF) has been committed to collecting diverse stories focusing on the lives of women of African descent and their alliances world-wide. The task of rescuing, chronicling and celebrating these long overlook stories remains our first priority. However, we are clear that our work must also include the gathering of unique, thought provoking stories of remarkable yet often misunderstood or disrespected women of color and their alliances.

The NBHTF conferences, workshops, book fairs, newsletters and archives include topics specifically designed to help cultivate climates of diversity and understanding. We ask the presenters and the audience to engage in interactive dialogue. From your letters and other feedback it appears that we are moving in the right direction. In 2000 the NBHTF received a United States Presidential Commission Certificate of Recognition for developing ways to best acknowledge and celebrate the roles and accomplishments of women in American History. We are encouraged by your recognition but we need your participation now to continue the work. I hope you will join us as a member, financial supporter, program attendee and/or volunteer.

Mozella Galloway
President & Co-Founder

National Black Herstory Task Force Conference 2010

Get ready for the *Thirteenth Annual National Herstory Task Force Conference and Awards Banquet* to be held **March 25-28, 2010** in Atlanta. The conference theme is **"Empowering Our Communities: Self-determined, Unified, Resourceful and Educated"**.

The conference will include educating and culturally rich stories. Included will be presentation on the continuing tragedy being played out on the life of the young South African runner, Ms. Caster Semenya; along with thought provoking stories about the challenges and conquest of intersex and transgendered persons; a session on Black women's body imaging; a special session examining the year long national Economic Experiment (EE) and its growing national movement being spurred by its creation. The conference will also include a celebration of the stories of survivors, women who have overcome all types of battering including domestic violence, discrimination and other forms of abuse to save themselves and their families and; finally, a look at the music business from insiders who have worked with such giants as Prince which includes a music celebration. Other highlights of the weekend will be the Annual Awards Banquet and a joint church service at Emory University's Cannon Chapel. The conference will start with plenary sessions on Thursday, March 25th through Friday, March 26th followed by our annual Awards Banquet on Saturday, March 27th then concluding with church services on Sunday March 28, 2010.

More details to come in our quarterly newsletter and website on our upcoming conference and awards banquet. We look forward to seeing you at the conference and awards banquet. **Save the dates: March 25-28, 2010 in Atlanta! See you there!**

If you would like to help this organization, there is a donation form at the back of this newsletter to make a donation. Because we are a non-profit organization, we need your support to succeed. If you have questions about our organization, please feel free to contact Mozella Galloway, President and Co-Founder at info@blackherstory.org or 404-712-9674.

If you would like to be a member, please fill out the membership application at the back of this newsletter or go to the website at www.blackherstory.org. There are several membership levels to choose.

Before the Civil War: African American Women, Slave and Free, Business Enterprises

Juliet E. K. Walker, PhD

Professor, Department of History, Founder/Director Center Black Business History, Entrepreneurship, Technology University of Texas at Austin

In the nation's history, the business participation of Black women began in Colonial America and reflected African survivalisms in gender-based domestic and craft manufacturing activities. In precolonial West and West Central Africa during the era of the transatlantic slave trade, African women participated in the economy at three levels: agricultural production; cottage industry craft manufacturing; and market commodity trading. In addition to agricultural skills in farming and food production, which made African women invaluable as slave laborers, they were also proficient in textile weaving and dyeing, in cloth making as spinners, carders, and weavers; and as seamstresses and quilt makers. Their handicraft skills included basketry, broom, mat, and pottery making. In health care, they demonstrated skills in midwifery and pharmacopeia. The tradition that existed among African women to pursue self-initiated, independent economic activities, derived from those skills, survived the transatlantic passage. From the colonial era on, while these African gender-based agricultural and domestic skills were exploited for profit by slaveholders, these same economic activities also provided the basis for the development of the black woman's tradition of independent business activities.

With their enslavement in America primarily for agricultural labor on plantations and small farms as field hands, domestic services were also extracted from slave women in both town and country, who worked as nurses, washers and ironers, cooks, house cleaners, spinners, and seamstresses. Based on the regimented activities of one group of Rhode Island enslaved women in 1730, who made from 12 to 24 cakes of cheese daily, black women were the nation's first female factory workers. Eventually, these gender-based skills were transformed by slave women who hired their time into income-generating enterprises. The profits earned from their independent economic activities enabled many of these women to purchase freedom for themselves, their children, family members, and friends. Black women purchased real property, which they used not only for housing but also to establish shops. Property ownership* by black women began in the seventeenth century. In Virginia, in the mid-1600s, of the 13

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Words of Wisdom

Ephesians: 6:15 "And your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace."

In verses 10-20 the writer Paul talks about how we are to not just put on the whole armor of God but how to wear it daily. Whenever I read these particular scriptures I'm reminded of what God can do, how powerful he is, and how he can change your life in an instant. Paul the great Roman Army Commander, persecutor of the Jews is now a great defender of the Faith. Having been humbled and broken through his Damascus road experience God rebuilt him to be able to fulfill his purpose; He has a purpose of each one of us.

In our daily lives we are to walk in peace by permitting the sound of our footsteps to bring gladness to others. Let them hear the sound of peace not confusion, the sound of joy not despair, the sound of compassion and kindness, not misunderstanding, jealousy or envy, the sound of LOVE not HATE.

Satan wants to distract us from living in peace by pitting us against one another. But remember our fight should be against principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness not against our sisters and brother. Don't let him push us around ladies! Let's get rid of our stilettos and put on our combat boots. The battlefield is not a good place for wearing stilettos or our fancy jeweled sandals for we may have to bob and weave, stop - drop and roll or maybe the Ali shuffle! So we want to be able to move swiftly and with confidence. But before you do anything please make sure that you have been properly sized because you know how we get when our feet hurt, ladies!

Let's plant our feet securely in the foundation, the WORD of God!

Rev. Claudia Smalls
Associate Minister, Sylvester Baptist Church



The National Black Herstory Task Force meets on the fourth Monday of the month at the Center for Women at Emory University at 6:00 pm.

Before the Civil War: African American Women, Slave and Free, Business Enterprises Continued

property owners in a black settlement, 3 were women. In 1670, Zippora Potter, the free daughter of a slave, purchased both a lot and a house, for which she paid the purchase price in full.

Marketing food, an African commercial survivalism, was the initial economic activity of slave women. Selling farm produce, fruits, vegetables, and sometimes chickens and eggs, as well as handicrafts, baskets, roped rugs, and herbal concoctions, enabled African American women to participate in the economy. Passing on their clever, effective market skills from one generation to the next enabled black women, slave and free, from the seventeenth century on, to quickly dominate the produce retail distribution sector of the South's economy through their trade and marketing activities. Although most slave market women's earnings were minimal, some even acquired freedom. In the early nineteenth century, Aletha Turner, a produce vendor with a market stall, sold the vegetables she raised in a small garden plot in her home in Washington, D.C. In a 25-year period, from the profits made, Turner purchased not only her freedom but that of 22 other slaves.

Aletha Turner was a self-hired slave, an example of slave entrepreneurship. Slave entrepreneurs were slaves who established their own business enterprises. Most were slaves who hired their own time. As independent business proprietors, they assumed the risk and responsibility for the production and/or distribution of their goods and services. Their commercial transactions, marketing, and management operations differed little from those of their free counterparts. Slave entrepreneurs also advertised, negotiated contracts, extended credit, and assumed debts. Their earnings depended as much on customer demand as on the extent of their business acumen, expertise, initiative, productivity, and propriety as businesspeople. Among the more successful antebellum slave entrepreneurs, such as St. Louis dressmaker Elizabeth Keckley, annual profits in the hundreds of dollars were realized.

Yet, while the participation of slaves in the American business community began during the colonial period and was a well-established practice before the American revolutionary era, but the practice of self-hire slaves and slave entrepreneurship was illegal. Slave laws, which imposed economic constraints, were in force throughout the period of slavery, either to discourage competition from self-hired slaves or to limit their "freedom" to pursue self-enriching economic activities. These laws, which made it illegal for slaves "to go at large and trade as freemen," were easily circumvented, particularly in urban areas where many self-hired slaves established businesses. Whether in urban places or rural areas, the self-hire slave system was, as pro-slavery historian Ulrich B. Phillips emphasizes, "too great a public and private convenience to suppress."

Most slave entrepreneurs were urban slaves who found jobs as paid employees. From their wages, they paid their owner for allowing them to hire their own time and saved what remained of their wages as start-up capital to establish a business. As business proprietors, slave entrepreneurs worked only for themselves. Management of their enterprises was independent of the master's direction, control, or supervision. Usually, the enterprises established by slave entrepreneurs were in occupational areas where regular work supervision was impractical and unprofitable. Or, slave entrepreneurs established enterprises in occupational areas shunned by southern whites as demeaning, especially in the food and personal services industries, which provided lucrative areas for business development for self-hired slaves in the food service industry. There were also slave women who hired their own time and established laundry, dressmaking, millinery, hairdressing, nursing, or health care enterprises.

Some women processed and prepared food, which they sold as street vendors and hawkers. They also set up stands, and eventually there were black women who opened fruit and vegetable stores and groceries. Some black women developed specializations in various food services activities, such as bakers and confectioners. These specialized food service enterprises were established in the early eighteenth century and continued throughout slavery. Catering,* however, was the most successful food service enterprise. In Providence, Rhode Island, in 1736, Mary Baroon and her husband, Emanuel Manna, former slaves who purchased their freedom, established a catering business and opened an oyster and alehouse. Venture capital for these enterprises came from the profits made by Mary from her illegal whiskey distillery enterprise.

Black women in the bakery business also achieved some success. In Newport, Rhode Island, "Dutchess" Quamino established a bakery during the Revolutionary War era, and it remained in business until the early twentieth century. In the early nineteenth century, Kathy Ferguson in New York City succeeded as a baker, specializing in wedding cakes. In the antebellum era, Nancy Lenox Remond in Newton, Massachusetts, established an enterprise as a fancy cake maker, whereas her daughter Susan in Salem continued in the business as a pastry cook, confectioner, and small restaurant owner. In Plymouth, North Carolina, Mary A. Lee established a profitable bakery.

By the nineteenth century, black women had not only expanded their food service enterprises but professionalized these businesses, especially in catering, a field that was dominated by men, particularly in the North, but there were black women who also succeeded as caterers. In Cincinnati, Mrs. Kate Jones established a successful catering business; in Charleston, Sally Seymour and Camillia Johnson were the city's leading caterers. In antebellum America, then, black women established enterprises not only in the food services industry as vendors and hawkers but also in the bakery business, catering, food shops, and restaurants. A few established inns, but the majority in this industry were boardinghouse keepers. In addition to establishing shops as grocers and retail merchants, primarily in the sale of small notions, others owned secondhand clothing stores.

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Clay Balls

(author unknown)

A man was exploring caves by the seashore. In one of the caves he found a canvas bag with a bunch of hardened clay balls. It was like someone had rolled clay balls and left them out in the sun to bake. They didn't look like much, but they intrigued the man so he took the bag out of the cave with him. As he strolled along the beach, he would throw the clay balls one at a time out into the ocean as far as he could. He thought little about it until he dropped one of the balls and it cracked open on a rock. Inside was a beautiful, precious stone.

Excited the man started breaking open the remaining clay balls. Each contained a similar treasure.

He found thousands of dollars worth of jewels in the 20 or so clay balls he had left. Then it struck him. He had been on the beach a long time. He had thrown maybe 50 or 60 of the clay balls with their hidden treasure into the ocean waves. Instead of thousands of dollars in treasure, he could have taken home tens of thousands, but he just threw it away.

It's like that with people. We look at someone, maybe even ourselves, and we see the external clay vessel. It doesn't look like much from the outside. It isn't always beautiful or sparkling so we discount it. We see that person as less important than someone more beautiful or stylish or well known or wealthy. But we have not taken the time to find the treasure hidden inside that person by God.

There is a treasure in each and every one of us. If we take the time to get to know that person, and if we ask God to show us that person the way He sees them, then the clay begins to peel away and the brilliant gem begins to shine forth.

May we not come to the end of our lives and find out that we have thrown away a fortune in friendships because the gems were hidden in bits of clay.

May we see the people in our world as God sees them.

Before the Civil War: African American Women, Slave and Free, Business Enterprises Continued

The occupations of free black women were listed in various federal, state and municipal censuses; but because only one occupation was listed for an individual in a census, the extensive kinds of independent self-employment business activities developed by antebellum free blacks are obscured, especially since many antebellum blacks in business participated in a diversity of enterprises. In Rhode Island, Elleanor Eldridge (1785–1865) was invariably listed in the census as a domestic or as “keeping house.” Yet she was involved in a diversity of enterprises including soap manufacturing, “Matrass [sic] Mak[ing],” and in partnership with her sister, “white-washing, papering, and painting”—occupations usually limited to men. Eldridge used her profits to purchase two lots, where she constructed a house for \$1,700 that she used for rental property.

Dressmaking shops were especially profitable, especially those owned by black women who also specialized in fashion design. Some black women were successful owners of hair care enterprises or companies that manufactured hair care products. Health care services were also important areas of self-employment. In Petersburg, Virginia, former slave woman Amelia Gallé inherited a bathhouse in 1819, which she had managed while she was enslaved. Once freed, Gallé promoted her business through aggressive newspaper advertisements.

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Before the Civil War: African American Women, Slave and Free, Business Enterprises Continued

Yet while gender-based domestic and personal service occupations provided the foundation for the entry of most black women in the antebellum American business community, the leading black businesswomen were involved in the same enterprises that generated wealth for leading black businessmen. In the South, there were black women plantation owners.

With their profits and holding wealth in the tens of thousands, these black women also engaged in finance as informal bankers, loaning their money with interest while investing in bank stock, municipal bonds, and internal improvements. Wealthy black women also owned stocks and bonds before the Civil War. In 1836 Marie Louise Panis in New Orleans owned 490 shares of capital stock in the Citizens Bank of Louisiana, worth \$49,000. Cotton planter Suzanne Meullion owned stock in the New Orleans, Opelousas and Great Western Railroad Company. The South Carolina free black woman rice planter Margaret Mitchell Harris purchased \$25,300 in stocks and bonds just before the Civil War with money made from the sale of her slaves.

One of the most successful antebellum black woman financiers was Madame Cecee McCarty, whose business activities were launched in the late 1790s. By 1830, she was the largest slaveholder in New Orleans. Merchandising, however, provided her with the financial basis for her informal banking activities. She was the owner of an imported goods store, with a market that extended beyond New Orleans. Using her 32 slaves as a traveling sales force, all with assigned territories, working out of the depot she owned in Plaquemines Parish, Madame McCarty by 1848 had accumulated more than \$155,000. While merchandising contributed to her wealth, Madam McCarty also increased her profits by the interest she accumulated from the loans she made and by speculating in the currency market. Throughout her long business career, as indicated in the records of an 1848 court case in which she was involved, Madame McCarty was recognized as “une femme extremement laborieuse et econome.”

The Louisiana-born entrepreneur black woman planter Marie Therez Metoyer, who was born in slavery in 1742 of African-born parents, was the matriarch of the most successful black slave-owning family in antebellum America. Unlike many black slaveholders* who inherited their plantations from white fathers, lovers who were their slave masters, or their mulatto parents, Marie (her slave name was Coincoin) was manumitted by her owner (she had been his house slave mistress), but unlike other former slave mistresses, Coincoin built her plantation from the ground up, starting when she was 46 years old. Coincoin's entrepreneurial zeal was propelled by her drive to buy her children from slavery. She had 11 children; some had fathers who were black, and the others were fathered by her slave owner. As Coincoin purchased land to build a cotton plantation, and at the same time she began purchasing slaves to work her land, she was also buying her own children from slavery. She died in 1816, but by 1830, the Metoyer family had acquired almost 12,000 acres and owned 278 slaves. By the Civil War, the Metoyer dynasty, according to Gary Mills, had acquired wealth amounting to over \$750,000.

In the antebellum South, Madame Cecee McCarty and Marie Therez, as entrepreneurs, were not unique as slave owners. Indeed, the most successful black businesswomen before the Civil War—the caterers, dressmakers, restaurant, boarding-house, inn, and hotel owners, as well as other black women planters—also owned property in slaves. Black female planters employed their slaves in the fields as well as the house, whereas the slaves of urban black businesswomen worked as employees in their owner's business or were hired out to others by their owners. Indeed, many of these urban free black female slaveholders were themselves, as Coincoin, former slaves. Some were slaves who hired their own time and had established successful enterprises while enslaved. The profits made while slaves enabled them to purchase their freedom, invariably using the same initiative to succeed as free black businesswomen.

How does one explain the ownership of slaves by free black women? Can the triple-jeopardy status of black women—racism, sexism, and classism—be ignored as a motivating basis for the ownership of slaves by free black women? Given the alternatives, the oppression of poverty and racial degradation that confronted black women during the age of slavery, can these black women slaveholders be exonerated for putting self and family economic survival above societal ties of racial kinship? Must we accept, then, that the extent to which free black women slaveholders succeeded in the management of their enterprises reflects, just as with their male counterparts, that they also had internalized the capitalist ethos of the antebellum American free enterprise system, which in the South rested on the labor exploitation of black slaves?

At the same time, a black womanist consciousness inclusive of ties of racial kinship existed, which was much more pervasive and reflective of the activities and sentiments of antebellum black women than that of black women slave ownership. By 1860, the number of black women slaveholders had declined, including those black women who held slaves for benevolent reasons, as opposed to those who owned slaves for commercial purposes. Moreover, there were many more black women who purchased slaves to free them than those who purchased slaves to own them.

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Before the Civil War: African American Women, Slave and Free, Business Enterprises Continued

The first black women's mutual aid societies were founded in the late eighteenth century. They increased in number and membership from then until the Civil War. Also there were cooperative enterprises. In 1841, an organization of 100 black women in New York established a cooperative grocery store, the Female Trading Association. Black women were active in the Free Produce movement, which encouraged the consumer boycott of slave-produced goods. Newspaper publishing, as a business enterprise, provided a venue for abolitionist protest for Mary Ann Shadd Cary, who immigrated to Canada, where she earned the distinction of becoming the first black woman in the Americas to found and publish a newspaper, the *Provincial Freeman*.

Consequently, while the historical focus on black women during the age of slavery has been primarily on plantation slave women and the activities of black women reformers in the abolitionist and women's rights movement, the business activities of several black women have survived in the historical record, including the international business activities of New England-born Mary Gardner Prince (1799–c.1856), who traveled with her husband to Russia. In St. Petersburg, Mary established two enterprises, a boardinghouse for children and a garment-making business for children's clothes and dresses. She operated these enterprises in Russia from 1824 to 1833, employing a journey-woman, whereas her other employees were apprentices. Her customers were the Russian nobility. Elizabeth Keckley, known as the dressmaker for Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, was primarily a dress designer who employed some 20 seamstresses in her haute couture shop. On the other hand, Californian Mary Ellen Pleasant,* while involved in several entrepreneurial ventures, has been remembered primarily as a boardinghouse keeper.

Black participation in the hair care products manufacturing business developed before the Civil War. These products were made in the homes by black women who sold them from door to door. The more successful black women in the hair business were hairdressers and wig makers. Invariably their customers were white, both men and women, and usually they worked out of their own shops located in the downtown business districts of the cities in which they lived. In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Virginia Proctor established her wig shop in the same building as her husband's barbershop. In Salem, Massachusetts, the Remond sisters, Cecilia, Maritcha, and Caroline, however, established a wig-making factory. They also manufactured hair tonic for hair loss, which they sold locally. Their largest market was through mail-order distribution, with sales primarily in New England.

After the Civil War, black women in business continued in developing the same lines of enterprises and self-employment in which they had participated during the age of slavery. Just as antebellum black women developed a diversity of businesses, at the same time, the majority of self-employed black women were laundresses, hucksters, market dealers, and seamstresses. While the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 ended slavery, freedom did not bring immediate rewards in the economic life of blacks, most of whom continued in the same occupations as black women before the war. Indeed, according to the 1900 census, 83.8 percent of African American women worked in personal services as domestics and laundresses. Yet black women used their business skills in the establishment of not-for-profit community institutions, particularly schools and social services. There would be, however, an increasing number who established enterprises in areas that paralleled the business activities of African American men, such as Maggie Lena Walker, the first American woman who established a bank and the leading black women hair care products manufacturers, Annie Minerva Turnbo-Malone and Madame C. J. Walker.

Sources: Juliet E. K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship* (New York/London: Macmillan/Prentice Hall International, 1998). Also, Juliet E. K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship Since 1865, vol 1* (paper, rev. ed.; Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, forthcoming, 2009/10), Juliet E.K. Walker, ed., *Encyclopedia of Africa American Business History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999).

This article is Part I in *The Herstorian's* three-part series of African American Women in Business, which review the business activities of Black Women from the Colonial Era to the Civil War. Part II in the series will detail African American women's business activities in the century from the Civil War to the Civil Rights era. Part III will detail African American women's business activities since the 1960s.

Trivia Questions

I was the first black woman to be elected to Congress and also the first black and first woman to run for President. Who am I?

I was a radical black activist and philosopher and was arrested as a suspected conspirator in the abortive attempt to free George Jackson from a courtroom in Marin County, California. I was once on the FBI most-wanted list. But I was also known for my association with the Black Panthers. Who am I? _____

I was a fugitive slave, Underground Railroad conductor, abolitionist, spy, soldier and nurse. I escaped to freedom and later led more than 300 slaves to the North and Canada to free them. Who am I? _____

I was born Isabella Baumfree an abolitionist, minister, slave and women's rights activist. I later changed my name because I was instructed by the Holy Spirit and became a traveling preacher. I am most famous for my speech *Ain't I a Woman?* My son was sold into slavery and he had been emancipated under the New York law, I sued the court and won his return. Who am I?

I was an educator, racial justice activist and I also served as a New Deal government official --I was one of the 20 highest-level office held by a women and the highest held by an African American woman. I also founded the Bethune-Cook College. Who am I?

Search and Find Her

A	A	N	N	I	N	A	S	I	M	O	N	E	E	P
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- Marian Anderson**
- Maya Angelou**
- Pearl Bailey**
- Daisy Bates**
- Mary McLeod Bethune**
- Ruby Dee**
- Althea Gibson**
- Lil Hardin**
- Billie Holiday**
- Bell Hooks**
- Lena Horne**
- Mae Jemison**
- Odetta**
- Rosa Parks**
- Lucy Parsons**
- Wilma Rudolph**
- Nina Simone**
- Sojourner Truth**
- Harriet Tubman**
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- Phillis Wheatley**

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Thank you for your support of the National Black Herstory Conference and its programs. If you have any questions, you may contact Mozella Galloway at 404-712-9674 or info@blackherstory.org.
For additional information, please visit our website at www.blackherstory.org.

**National Black Herstory Task Force
Membership Application**

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Avocation/Interest: _____

Membership Level: _____ (See levels below) Amount: \$ _____

Would you like to be a Volunteer? _____ Would you like to serve on a Committee/Advisory Board _____

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