

# African-American History: Lost, Strayed or Stolen

by Dr. McKinley Burt

My article for Black History Month will introduce the reader to new and pride-generating revelations about Black accomplishments at the turn of the century. These should prove of great interest to the general public, students, teachers, and historians. Hopefully, they will prompt further research into particulars. I am certain that many will be reminded of the video produced and narrated by Bill Cosby in the 1960's: "Black History: Lost, Strayed or Stolen."

The source document is a book written in 1902 by G.F. Richings, "Evidence of Progress Among Colored People," George S. Ferguson Co., Philadelphia. This dedicated Black researcher spent the latter part of last century traveling the length and breadth of the United States documenting this 'progress' with thousands of photographs, legal records, and in-depth interviews. He states, "The home, the store, the school and the church, and the factory are the infallible sign of civilization; the people who support these exhibit the true signs of enlightenment."

**Mississippi Cotton Manufacturing Co.:** "This company is located at Jackson, Mississippi, for the purpose of building a large cotton mill where colored labor will be employed . . . first conceived by Frederick Douglass in 1893. The capital stock is \$250,000 (several million in today's money) . . . The Hon. James Hill is president, one time postmaster of Vicksburg, Mississippi, and recently appointed to the U.S. Land Office by President McKinley . . . the main object is to give the young people an opportunity to follow the industrial as well as the professional walks of life."

**Coleman Manufacturing Co. of South Carolina:** "On the 8th of February, 1898, and with Masonic honors, the cornerstone of the handsome, three-story brick building, 80 x 120 ft.d, was laid. Noted speakers from all over the United States were invited, and the nation's railroads gave reduced rates. . . The promoter, Warren C. Coleman, is the wealthiest Negro in the state and has endorsement of leading white financiers. The mill is at Concord, N.C., 100 acres on the Southern Railway . . . 7000 to 10,000 spindles, 100 looms, and will spin, weave, manufacture, and sell warps, yarns, cloth prints and other fabrics of cotton and wool." [I have read elsewhere that this firm became the Cannon Linen Mills of today. A member of the Duke tobacco family was the only white shareholder.]

**General Evidence of Progress:** "In Nashville, Mr. Joseph Brown operates a large nursery and hot house, serving all of the town. In the same city, Mr. H.C. Gipson has a blacksmith's shop and hires quite a number of men."

And, on and on, Mr. Richings chronicles score after score of Black clothiers, freight companies, manufacturers, real estate developers, newspaper publishers, printers,

etc., all owning valuable downtown properties — and all serving a mixed clientele of whites and Blacks. And this was throughout the South and Midwest before 1900.

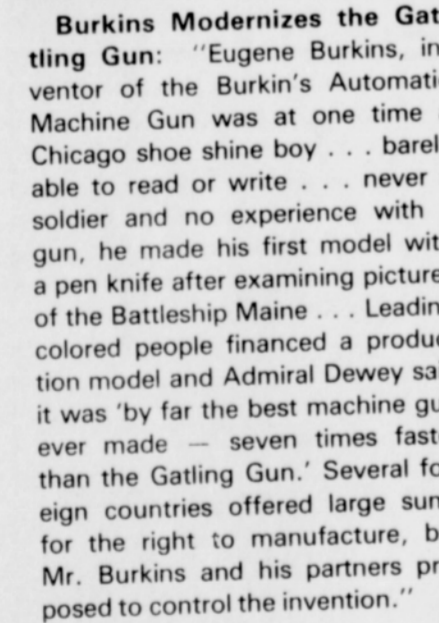
The question that needs to be asked is "What in heaven's name happened to all this economic vigor and vitality — and more specifically, the equity, the dollars, and the land that was involved in the "Evidence of Progress Among Colored People"? Was it really lost? Did it really stray? Or was it stolen? We note that the period coincides with (1) the institution of Jim Crow laws; (2) the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and of lynchings; (3) the ousting of Blacks from the craft unions; (4) the writing of racially-restrictive real estate covenants; and (5) an increasing tide of white immigrants from Europe.



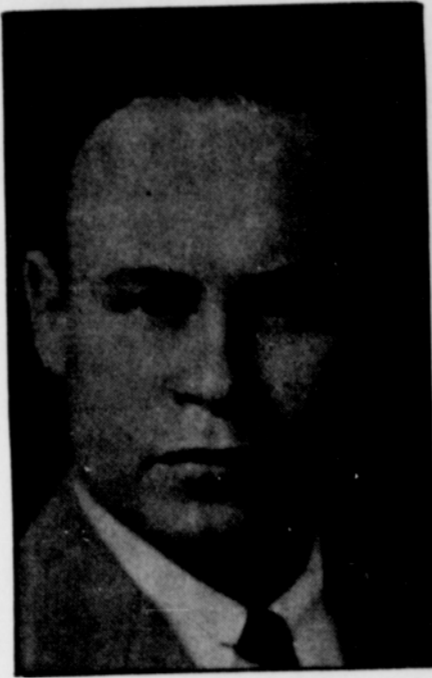
**Dr. Charles R. Drew (1904-1950)**  
Developed a method for preserving massive quantities of blood plasma in blood banks. He was also the first Director of the American Red Cross Blood Bank.



**Hallie Tanner Johnson**, educated at the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia, became resident physician at Tuskegee Institute after successfully standing for the Alabama State Board of Examiners. She died in 1900 at her home in Nashville, Tennessee.



**Eugene Burkins**, inventor of the Burkin's Automatic Machine Gun was at one time a Chicago shoe shine boy . . . barely able to read or write . . . never a soldier and no experience with a gun, he made his first model with a pen knife after examining pictures of the Battleship Maine . . . Leading colored people financed a production model and Admiral Dewey said it was 'by far the best machine gun ever made — seven times faster than the Gatling Gun.' Several foreign countries offered large sums for the right to manufacture, but Mr. Burkins and his partners proposed to control the invention."



**Richard B. Spikes**

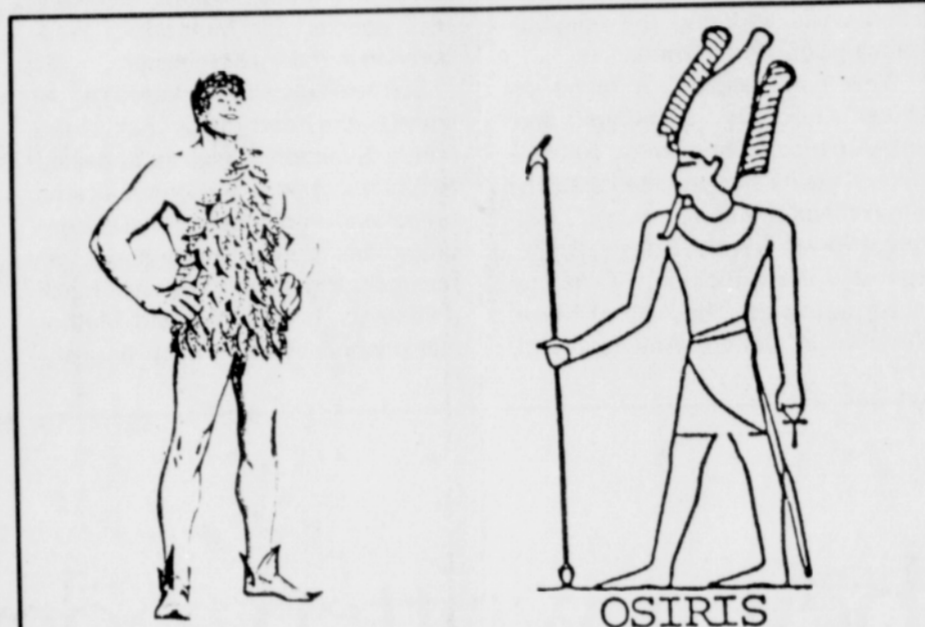
Invented the modern semaphore, a signaling apparatus used on railroad tracks; also an automatic gear shift in 1932; automatic transmission in 1933; and a "fail safe" brake system for motor vehicles in 1962.

**Hiram S. Thomas**

Invented the first potato chip in 1865 while working as a chef in Saratoga, N.Y.

**Garrett A. Morgan (1877-1963)**

Invented the gas inhalator (gas mask) in 1916, and the first automatic traffic signal with three positions in 1923.



The "Jolly Green Giant" is a co-option of our African heritage by the European. "Osiris", god of vegetation, was always painted green by the Africans as shown in many issues of National Geographic Magazine.

OSIRIS  
honored by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in his 1791 opera, 'The Magic Flute'.

"The 'Green Giant' was born in 1925 as the trademark of the Minnesota Canning Co. In 1935 a 'green skin' was added along with a leaf cloak." — Morgan, 'Symbols Of America' Viking Press

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# BLACK HISTORY

*is world history . . .*  
*Northwest African American Artists*

**Frederick M. Jones (1893-1961)**

Invented the first efficient truck refrigeration system, the portable x-ray machine, and the refrigerated box car.

**John J. Audubon (1785-1851)**

Audubon, an artist and ornithologist, was one of the greatest naturalists in the history of mankind. The famous Audubon Society, which is engaged in nature conservation, is named after him.

**Lt. Colonel Guion S. Bluford**

The first Black American to go into outer space, August 30, 1983, as a member of the Challenger crew.

**Matthew Henson (1867-1955)**

Assisted Admiral Robert E. Perry during his expedition to the North Pole, thus becoming the first man in history to stand on the North Pole, April 6, 1909.

**Sarah Boone**

On April 26, 1892, Sarah Boone was granted patent No. 473,653 by the U.S. Patent Office for the invention of the ironing board.

**Dr. Daniel Hale Williams (1856-1931)**

Performed the first successful surgery on a human heart in 1893.

**Toussaint L'Ouverture (1746 - 1803)**

L'Ouverture's father was very proud of his son despite his being born into slavery, and made sure that Toussaint learned how to read and acquire certain skills. L'Ouverture became very interested in herbs for healing and military strategy. His family lived on the island of Santo Domingo, in Haiti. This wealthy island was the attraction of England, Spain, and France.

Africans, who outnumbered the invaders, wanted to remove them from the island. L'Ouverture joined the army and became chief medical officer. He also taught soldiers military protocol and strategy. Toussaint took advantage of his medical background and knowledge of his homeland, and defeated Napoleon's 60,000 army with 20,000 men.

He did this by extending the battle while the French were suffering from yellow fever.

L'Ouverture, which means "opener", became general and governor of Santo Domingo, now known as the Dominican Republic. His rise to general and governor resulted from his popularity and military victories. Napoleon was furious with the possibility of treating L'Ouverture as an equal. During the negotiation, L'Ouverture trusted France, and was taken prisoner. His second general, Jacques Dessalines, continued the fight; an African maid who heard of Napoleon's plans was able to inform Dessalines in sign language. Santo Domingo and Haiti became free.

**Queen N'Zinga (1582 - 1663)**

Queen N'Zinga represents the strength of African people. She fought against the Portuguese for forty years over her country, Angola. The Portuguese used every trick against Africans to divide and conquer. They sold them guns for slaves, made slaves

fight for them, and created friction between chiefs. N'Zinga's brother, who was a weak king, asked N'Zinga to represent him at the Luanda Treaty of 1622. She had been already fighting against them for six years. At this meeting, the Portuguese did not provided her a seat, and her men used their own bodies for the Queen.

She refused the Portuguese' terms. When her brother died, she became the official Queen and declared Angola free. This infuriated the Portuguese who tried to manipulate Africans to kill her. Instead, she infiltrated their ranks and won victory after victory. Her quick attacks became legendary from 1616 to 1656.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning

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For I Am Not Ashamed of the Gospel of Christ... Rom. 1:16

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Don't Forget to Remember our Heritage"

Martin Luther King's legacy to us was his commitment to love and to non-violence.

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