

SEPTEMBER FREEDOM DAYS MOMENTS IN CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY

By JANUS ADAMS

SEPTEMBER 6
On September 6, 1960, in Rome, Rafer Johnson made Olympic decathlon history, winning a gold medal. On merit alone, it was a stellar triumph, but what he did for African Americans in the throes of the Civil Rights era was what Jesse Owens had done at the height of Jim Crow. Of the sixteen records set in Berlin in 1936, Owens had set four. In the brutal Civil Rights era, Johnson won the ten-event decathlon, the most grueling of all the Olympic trials, and he, too, set a record. So definitive was each man's victory that it could not be misconstrued as a fluke. Yet, meaningful as this was, was as meaningless as it should have been. There seems to be something very wrong with viewing black achievement through the prism of white negativity, with burdening ourselves to prove things that we should have never admitted into doubt.

SEPTEMBER 8
In the fall of 1968, the murder trial of Black Panther Party co-founder Huey Newton was front-page news. If Newton was convicted, he faced execution. If Newton was exonerated, high-level city, state, and federal officials faced their own demise in this presidential election year which turned to riot over the assassination of Martin Luther King, the draft, and the war in Vietnam. The battle for public opinion was on. To raise both public consciousness and defense funds, Panthers and supporters crisscrossed the country in a frantic round of

On September 29, 1967, he stood on the dock overlooking the Annapolis, Maryland harbor, where his great great great great grandfather was dragged ashore on September 29, 1767, two centuries ago. Photo credit: Moneta Sleet, Jr.



Attorney General Tom Clark, it would cross 23,000 miles of track through North and South. But true to the journey toward freedom in the United States, the Freedom Train, which rolled on September 17, 1947, would make more than a few stops along the way.

sciousness in the community." Two weeks later, another appreciative, consciousness-raised crowd would rally in front of the Hotel Theresa to greet Ghana's president, Kwame Nkrumah.

SEPTEMBER 21
It is said that you can't change the hearts and minds of men. There have always been leaders who knew that the first priority was often to change the behavior of men—hearts and minds could follow in their own due time. One such leader was Joseph E. Ritter, Catholic Archbishop of the Diocese of St. Louis.
On September 21, 1947, as he integrated parochial schools, Archbishop Ritter presented his diocese with an ultimatum. In short, he threatened to excommunicate those who actively protested the integration order of the diocese.

Those who resisted school desegregation did so at peril to their eternal souls.

SEPTEMBER 29
When Alex Haley was a boy in Henning, Tennessee, the stories his grandmother told were not always welcome. "Oh, Maw," Alex's mother would say. And his grandmother would snap back, "If you don't care who and where you came from, well, I does!" But then would come the days of summer when other, older aunts came to visit the Henning homestead and young Alex would "sort of scrunch myself down behind the white-painted rocker holding Grandma." That was a first call to adventure for the boy who would retrace her stories back to Africa and write *Roots*, the book that launched the great American genealogical quest.

On September 29, 1967, he stood on the dock overlooking the Annapolis, Maryland harbor, where his great-great-great-great-grandfather was dragged ashore on September 29, 1767, two centuries ago. How he came to know that was a story in itself—a story that began on the porch with Grandma.

Those wondrously woven threads would knot themselves into the tapestry of who Alex was and the adventurer-folk historian-writer he would become. The strange words would beckon a trail to "Naplis," Annapolis. Massa John's plantation records dated the arrival of his cargo, "Toby" who knew himself as "Kintay," Kunte Kinte, and who was born four days upriver from "Kamby," Gambia.

The following is an excerpt from the book "Freedom Days". Permission for reprint was given by John Wiley and Sons, Inc.



Mandinka tribal elders surround Alex Haley. Kunte Kinte was a Mandinka.

"Free Huey!" rallies. As the trial wound its way toward the jury and a verdict, FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover publicly declared war on the Black Panthers, topping the headlines for September 8, 1968.

The Black Panther Party is "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country," Hoover pronounced.

"Schooled in the Marxist-Leninist ideology...leaders...travel extensively all over the United States preaching...not only to ghetto residents, but to students in colleges, universities and high schools as well." Clearly, the Panthers were a threat, but not for the reasons Hoover alleged.

SEPTEMBER 12
He was known as the best all-around boxer ever: Sugar Ray Robinson. "The greatest combination of brains, brawn, and boxing skill the modern prize ring has seen," said sportswriter Dan Parker. On the night of September 12, 1951, to that list of credits was added the record for gross receipts in a nonheavyweight fight: \$767,626.17. For his rematch with England's black champ, Randy Turpin, 61,370 fans packed New York's Polo Grounds to see Sugar Ray retake his crown.

SEPTEMBER 17
Since the days of the Underground Railroad, images of "freedom" and "trains" had been inextricably linked. These two words conjured notions of space, distance, movement, and a long-awaited destination well worth the ride. And so it was that the inspiration for the Freedom Train chugged from dream to reality. An idea attributed to then

But for African Americans, accustomed to empty words, freedom's meaning was best expressed by the planners' action: the Freedom Train would travel only to cities that accepted a non-segregation policy. To be an authorized depot, a city was asked to proclaim a "Community Rededication Week" of activities recommended by the American Heritage Foundation, a committee specifically organized to manage the project.

SEPTEMBER 19
For years, New York's black communities had been unofficially off-limits to diplomats—except, of course, for such segregated nightspots as the Cotton Club. But all that changed on September 19, 1960, when Dr. Fidel Castro, premier of Cuba, angered by the inappropriate treatment he'd received at a downtown hotel, moved uptown to a suite at Harlem's black-owned Hotel Theresa.

From his perch at the Hotel Theresa, Castro obviously enjoyed the moment for all it was worth—and the need for solidarity against the mistreatment of people of color world-wide was a point well worth making. Among those with whom he held audience at the hotel were Premier Nikita Khrushchev of the Soviet Union, Malcolm X, the press, and a grateful Harlem community, which maintained a steady vigil. As historian John Henrik Clarke recalled years later, "The symbols were absolutely magnificent. Fidel Castro in a black-owned hotel, Khrushchev meeting him in the lobby, the community surrounding the hotel day and night, Castro occasionally coming to the window to wave. It was an event in the development of con-

ALBINA COMMUNITY BANK

CELEBRATES
THE DREAM OF
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.



Two-thirds of the peoples of the world go to bed hungry every night. They are undernourished, ill clothed, and shabbily clad. Many of them have no houses or beds... There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we now have the resources to get rid of it."

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

Albina Community Bank Prides in
Providing Business Loans To Serve In
The Community

2002 NE MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BLVD. PORTLAND, OREGON 97212

Dedicated to reducing congestion and providing mobility choices for all.



Clark County Transit Benefit Authority
P.O. Box 2529
Vancouver, WA 98668-2529
(360) 695-0123
www.c-tran.com