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Opinion

Why We Must Never Lose Sight of Our Roots

So Dad has joined the other [ancestors] up there. I feel that they do watch and guide, and I also feel that they join me in the hope that this story of our people can help alleviate the legacies of the fact that preponderantly the histories have been written by the winners.” – Alex Haley, from the conclusion of *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*

On the 40th anniversary of the publication of Alex Haley’s landmark book *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, a new television adaptation is bringing renewed attention to the story that opened so many eyes to the harsh truth about American slavery and its aftermath – an aftermath that continues under new guises despite much progress.

The publication of *Roots* in 1976 came at a seminal moment in American history. Cities across America were hosting celebrations of the nation’s bicentennial and the founding creed set forth in the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit

Marian
Wright
EdelmanChildren’s
Defense
Fund

of Happiness.”

In 1963 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded our nation and world on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial that America had never fully lived up to that promise: “When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the

“For the first time descendants of slaves, descendants of slave owners, and people of all backgrounds were sharing a common experience and understanding of America’s original sin

Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the ‘unalienable Rights’ of ‘Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.’ It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory

note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked ‘insufficient funds.’”

With *Roots* Alex Haley provided an epic lesson in American history through the story of his American family – slavery from the enslaved people’s point of view. His book spent months on the bestseller list and the original television adaptation of *Roots* that aired in January 1977 shattered viewing records

as it gave tens of millions of people a visual, visceral experience of the true horrors of slavery. For the first time descendants of slaves, descendants of slave owners, and people of all backgrounds were sharing a common experience and understanding of America’s original sin whose after effects still radiate across our land. Acknowledging that truth together was a

transformative experience.

In the past year we have seen a welcome surge, prodded by new books on slavery, campus debates, and student protests, of new commitments by some universities and other institutions to confront the truth about their own histories, especially the ugly legacies of slavery and Native American genocide. Black Lives Matter protests denouncing indefensible deaths of Black youths and citizens at the hands of out of control law enforcement officials in Ferguson, Baltimore, Cleveland, New York City, Texas, and elsewhere and the shocking racist vigilante citizen killings of Trayvon Martin in Florida and the massacre of praying Black church people in South Carolina heightened the need for greater racial awareness and national action.

I hope the renewed interest in *Roots* will spark much greater and sustained interest in an honest retelling of our history and promote new dialogue about the ways today’s structural, cultural, racial and economic inequalities reflect racial seeds from our violent past of slavery and Jim Crow which still poison the soil and political discourse of our nation.

Read the rest of this commentary at
TheSkanner.com

Why Snoop Lion Should Write, Direct and Produce Black Movies

Last week rapper Snoop Dogg put up an epic video rant on his Instagram. In the verbiage that only Snoop can conjugate, he said in no uncertain terms that people should not watch the 21st-century remake of the epic TV miniseries *Roots* that aired on The History Channel last week.

I must say that I thoroughly agree with Snoop Dogg’s position 100 percent, though I can do without the raw language he used.

“*Roots: The Saga of an American Family*” was a book written by famed author Alex Haley in 1976. In the book, Haley traced his ancestral roots back to The Gambia in West Africa. He was able to trace his family lineage all the way back to Kunta Kinte.

Kinte was captured as a teenager in The Gambia and ultimately sold into slavery and brought to the U.S. The book was turned into a blockbuster TV miniseries back in 1977.

The remaking is what led Snoop to do his now-viral video on Instagram. His position was that he didn’t want to see any more movies about slavery. “Where are all the movies about Black success?” Snoop asked.

I totally agree with Snoop. I refused to watch the remake

Raynard
JacksonNNPA
Columnist

of *Roots*.” I was watching my N.B.A. basketball playoffs.

Following Snoop’s rant, TV personality Roland Martin addressed the subject on his news program on TV ONE.

“His position was that he didn’t want to see any more movies about slavery. ‘Where are all the movies about Black success?’ Snoop asked

The one point that I do agree with Roland on is that more Blacks need to step up and be willing to help finance the production of some of these movies about successful Blacks. That’s a legitimate challenge that Snoop should address.

Martin launched into this tirade about Jews “never” getting tired of movies about the Holocaust. He is way off base with his analysis.

Martin and those who agree with him are missing a few, very germane points. I mean can anyone name a Black person who has financed, execu-

tive produced, produced, directed, or distributed a major movie or TV program about the Holocaust? You can’t, because it hasn’t happened.

But most movies about slavery have non-Blacks in major positions of control or power, even though there may be a Black producer or director attached to the project.

I am not aware of one movie about slavery where Blacks have had total control of the process from beginning to

end.

The movie *Amistad* (1997) was written by David Franzoni, directed by Steven Spielberg and produced by Debbi Allen (Black), Steven Spielberg and Colin Wilson. John Williams composed the musical score.

“12 Years a Slave” (2013) was based on the life of former slave Solomon Northup and it was directed by Steve McQueen (Black) and produced by Brad Pitt, Dede Gardner, Jeremy Kleiner, Bill Pohlad, Steve McQueen (Black), Arnon Milchan, and Anthony Katagas. John Ridley (Black)

wrote the screenplay and Fox Searchlight Pictures distributed the movie.

The 2016 version of *Roots* was written by Lawrence Konner, Mark Rosenthal, Alison McDonald (Black), and Charles Murray (Black). The four-part miniseries was directed by Bruce Beresford, Phillip Noyce, Thomas Carter (Black), and Mario Van Peebles (Black).

Now, let’s look at a few of the top Holocaust movies.

“*The Diary of Anne Frank*” (1959) was based on the writings of Anne Frank and directed by George Stevens and written by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett and distributed by Twentieth Century Fox.

“*Schindler’s List*” (1993) was written by Steven Zaillian and produced by Steven Spielberg, Gerald R. Molen, and Branko Lustig. Steven Spielberg also directed the movie and “*Schindler’s List*” was distributed by Universal Pictures.

Do you notice anything that stands out to you here? There are no Blacks in any position of control or authority in any of these movies. The Jewish community tells their history through their own eyes and from their own perspective.

Read the rest of this commentary at
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