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Opinion

Black Women You Should Know

All too often, our “history” month turns into a tribute to the past. And while the past is an important place to lift up it is, indeed, a tributary, a stream that flows into the larger stream of an unbounded future. The future must always be greater than the present, or there has been no progress. And, in the words of Frederick Douglas, “progress concedes nothing without a demand.”

I spend much of Women’s History Month thinking of those who have come before me; I stand on their shoulders. I claim Women’s History Month for Black Women and love to call our roll of luminaries that, for me, includes Dr. Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, the first Black woman to get a Ph.D. in economics, Dr. Phyllis Ann Wallace, the first Black woman to get a Ph.D. in economics from Yale, and the first to attain tenure at MIT. There are more, but I also want to speculate about the future role of luminaries and reflect on that fact that many Black women have made it possible for us to bask in a new generation of leadership. The past has laid a foundation, but the future is far more important than the past.

Thus, Leah Daughtry (who

Julianne Malveaux
NNPA Columnist

managed the 2016 Democratic National Convention), Minyon Moore (who had a key role in the Clinton campaign), and Yolanda Caraway (an amazing political operative who has worked for Rev. Jesse Jackson, President Bill Clinton, and candidate Hil-

“The past has laid a foundation, but the future is far more important than the past

lary Clinton), put a footprint in the sand for future leadership with their Power Rising conference in Atlanta, last month. They gathered more than a thousand Black women from around the country to develop a “Black Women’s Agenda,” deliberately mixing up the seasoned with the sassy, established leaders

with those who are eager to make their mark.

Symone Sanders, the CNN commentator who made her mark supporting Bernie Sanders, and who does not back down from a fight around principles and issues, led a panel of young women who spoke of the challenges in their work. Amanda Brown Lierman, a new mom and the political director of the Democratic National Committee, was among those on another panel about life in politics. Others on that panel included LaDavia Drane, who led Black outreach for Hillary Clinton and is now chief of staff for Congresswoman Yvette Clark (D-N.Y.) and Boston City Councilor Ayanna Pressley, who is now running for Congress. These young women aren’t playing! They are calling out their elders, but also calling out the rules. They aren’t trying to toe a line, they are trying to make a difference.

Ayanna Pressley, as an example, is challenging an incumbent Democrat in a Congressional primary. Tired of being told to “wait her turn”, she has decided that now is her time. Even though she has always garnered support from Emily’s List, the fact that she is challenging a pro-choice Democratic man

in Boston has not won her support from the political establishment. Yet the 42-year-old sister says she will not be constrained by tradition. The Power Rising conference represented an example of that unfettered and passionate energy.

One of the most promising young leaders is Tamika Mallory, one of the four co-leaders of the Women’s March. Tamika is a protégé of Rev. Al Sharpton (her parents were among the founders of the National Action Network, and she served as its Executive Director for several years). Because of her amazing work, Mallory earned a Phoenix Award from the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation in 2017. With appropriate humility, she accepted her award “for the people,” and the most important thing that one gets from Tamika Mallory is that she loves humanity, loves Black people, and especially Black women. She, like the others mentioned, is a leader for our future. She is the future of Black Women’s History. We all know that because she is a leader, she will attract negative energy and still, she rises, walking through life with her shoulders back, head held high, an unapologetic lover of her people.

Remember (The Truth About) The Alamo

On a Saturday evening in February 1955, like a million other kids in America with their eyes glued to black and white televisions, I sat watching Walt Disney’s version of the Battle of the Alamo.

What we saw was the popular actor Fess Parker portraying a heroic Davy Crockett on the ramparts of the famous old Spanish mission battling Mexican soldiers for freedom.

What I did not know at the time was that the history surrounding this battle, and the role of Americans in the early history of the Mexican republic, was being extremely distorted.

Walt Disney never told us that slavery was the reason for the battle and the ultimate creation of the Republic of Texas, which later became the state of Texas.

On Sept. 16, 1829, the Afro-Mexican president of Mexico, Vicente Guerrero, signed a decree outlawing slavery in that nation at a time when the southern United States was deeply in thrall to slave labor.

While most of Mexico welcomed the emancipation decree, its northern region, known as “Texas,” was largely populated with American Southerners who had moved west in search of more fertile

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land where their slaves could produce cotton.

To accommodate the “Texican” slaveholders, Texas was exempted from the decree for one year. But after the period

“Walt Disney never told us that slavery was the reason for the battle

of exemption ended in 1830, the Texicans refused to free their slaves and the Mexican government demanded that they comply with the law or face military intervention.

While military intervention did not occur for another six years, several violent conflicts broke out in the interim between Texicans and the Mexican government

Finally, in 1836 Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna led an army north from Mexico City to put down what had grown to be a Texas insurrec-

tion and freeing slaves along the way.

Determined to resist Mexico’s intention to free their slaves, Davy Crockett and roughly 200 other Texicans gathered at the Alamo in San Antonio to block Santa Anna’s advancing army. Santa Anna laid siege to the Alamo, and after 13 days, it fell.

While the “heroes” of the Alamo were under siege, Sam Houston and other Texicans were less than 200 miles away drafting a constitution for the hoped-for independent Republic of Texas. It contained the following guarantees that slavery would be protected:

“...[N]or shall Congress have power to emancipate slaves; nor shall any slaveholder be allowed to emancipate his or her slave or slaves, without the consent of Congress...”

The Texas constitution established additional racist policies by stating:

“No free person of African descent, either in whole or in part, shall be permitted to reside permanently in the Republic, without the consent of Congress...”

Weeks after their defeat at the Alamo, the slaveholding Texicans got what they wanted when they defeated Gen. Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto and forced him, as

a prisoner, to sign the Treaty of Velasco. That treaty recognized Texas as a republic, independent of Mexico, but it also stated in part:

“[A]ll private property including... negro slaves... that may have been captured by ... the Mexican army or may have taken refuge in the said army ... shall be restored to the Commander of the Texican army...”

The Mexican government refused to recognize the Treaty of Velasco and consequently did not return any slaves. But Texas continued as a slaveholding republic and later as a slaveholding state.

Twenty-five years after the Battle of the Alamo, Texas, along with 10 other slaveholding states, tried to revolt against the United States as it had with Mexico.

Today, whenever we hear cries of “Remember the Alamo,” we should ignore Disney’s image of Davy Crockett bravely wielding his musket as a club in defense of freedom while being swarmed by Santa Anna’s troops. Instead, we should remember that Crockett and those by his side were fighting in defense of slavery, not freedom.

Oscar H. Blayton is a former Marine Corps combat pilot and human rights activist who practices law in Virginia.