

BLACK HISTORY, ORAL HISTORY, AND GENEALOGY*

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When I was a little boy I lived in a little town which you probably never heard of called Henning, Tennessee, about 50 miles north of Memphis. And I lived there with my parents in the home of my mother's mother. And my grandmother and I were very, very close. Every summer that I can remember growing up there in Henning, my grandmother would have, as visitors, members of the family who were always women, always of her general age range, the late forties, early fifties. They came from places that sounded pretty exotic to me---Dyersburg, Tennessee; Inkster, Michigan---places like that, St. Louis, Kansas City. They were like Cousin Georgia, Aunt Plus, Aunt Liz, so forth. And every evening, after the supper dishes were washed, they would go out on the front porch and sit in cane-bottomed rocking chairs, and I would always sit behind grandma's chair. And every single evening of those summers, unless there was some particularly hot gossip that would overrule it, they would talk about otherwise the self same thing. It was bits and pieces and patches of what I later would learn was a long narrative history of the family which had been passed down literally across generations.

As a little boy I didn't have the orientation to understand most of what they talked about. Sometimes they would talk about individuals, and I didn't know what these individuals were often; I didn't know what an old massa was, I didn't know what an old missus was. They would talk about locales; I didn't know what a plantation was. And then at other times, interspersed with these, they'd talk about anecdotes, incidents which had happened to these people or these places. The furthest-back person that they ever talked about was someone whom they would call "The African". And I know that the first time I ever heard the word Africa or African was from their mouths, there on the front porch in Henning.

I think that my first impression that these things they spoke of went a long way back, came from the fact that they were wrinkled, greying, or completely grey in some cases, and I was a little boy, three, four, five, and now and then when some of them would get animatedly talking about something, they would fling their finger or hand down toward me and say something like "I wasn't any bigger than

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this young 'un here". And the very idea that someone as old and wrinkled as she had at one time had been no older than I was just blew my mind. I knew it must be way, way back that they were talking about.

When they were speaking of this African, the furthest-back person of all, they would tell how he was brought on a ship to this country to a place they pronounced as "Napolis". And he was bought off this ship by a man whose name was John Waller, who had a plantation in a place called Spotsylvania County, Virginia. And then they would tell how he was on this plantation and he kept trying to escape. The first three times he escaped he was caught and given a worse beating than previously as his punishment. And then the fourth time he escaped he had the misfortune to be caught by a professional slave catcher. And I grew up hearing how this slave catcher decided to make an example of him. And I grew up hearing how he gave the African the choice either to be castrated or to have a foot cut off. And the African chose the foot. And I grew up hearing how his foot was put against a stump, and with an ax was cut off across the arch. It was a very hideous act. But as it turned out that act was to play a very major role in the keeping of a narrative down across a family for a long time.

The reasons were two. One of them was that in the middle 1700's in Virginia, almost all slaves were sold at auction. A male slave in good condition would bring on the average about \$750. At the end of every slave auction they would have what they called the scrap sale, and those who were incapacitated, ill, or otherwise not so valuable for market, would be sold generally for amounts of \$100 or less in cash. And this particular African managed to survive and then to convalesce, and he posed then to his master an economic question. And his master decided that he was crippled and he hobbled about, but he still could do limited work. And the master decided that he would be worth more kept on that plantation than he would be worth sold away for cash of less than \$100. And that was how it happened that this particular African was kept on one plantation for quite a long period of time.

Now that came at a time when, if there was any single thing that probably characterizes slaves, it was that they had almost no sense of what we today know and value and revere as family continuity. And the reason simply was that slaves were sold back and forth so much. Characteristically slave children would grow up without an awareness of who their parents were, and particularly male parents. This African, now kept on the plantation by his master's decision, hobbling about and doing the limited

work he could, finally met and mated with another slave on that plantation, and her name (in the stories told by my grandmother and the others on the front porch in Henning) was Bell the big house cook. And of that union was born a little girl who was given the name Kizzy. As Kizzy got to be four or five or so, this African would take that little girl by the hand, and he would take her around and point out to her various natural objects, and he would tell her the name for that thing---tree, rock, cow, sky, so forth. The names that he told her were instinctively in his native tongue, and to the girl they were strange phonetic sounds which in time, with repetitive hearing, the girl could repeat. He would point at a guitar and he would make a single sound as if it were spelled *ko*. And she came in time to know that *ko* was guitar in his terms. There were other strange phonetic sounds for other objects. Perhaps the most involved of them was that contiguous to the plantation there was a river, and whenever this African would point out this river to his daughter Kizzy he would say to her "*Kamby Bolongo*". And she came to know that *Kamby Bolongo* in his terms meant river.

There was another thing about this African which is in the background of all the Black people in this country, and that was that whoever bought them off the slave ship, when they got them to a plantation, about their first act was giving them an Anglicized name. For all practical purposes that was the first step in the psychic dehumanization of an individual or collectively of a people. And in the case of this particular African his master gave him the name Toby. But whenever any of the other adult slaves would address him as Toby, this African would strenuously rebuff and reject it and he would tell them his name was "*Kin-tay*", a sharp, angular two-syllabic sound that the little girl Kizzy came to know her father said was his name.

And there was yet another thing about this African characteristic of all those original Africans in our background, and that was that they had been brought from a place where they spoke whatever was their native tongue, and brought to this place where it became necessary to learn English for sheer survival's sake. And gradually, haltingly, all those original Africans learned a word here, a phrase there, of the new tongue--English. As this process began to happen with this African, and he began to be able to express himself in more detailed ways, he began to tell his little daughter Kizzy little vignettes about himself. He told her, for instance, how he had been captured. He said that he had been not far away from his village chopping wood to make himself a drum when he had been set upon by four men, overwhelmed, and taken thusly into

slavery. And she came to know along with many other stories the story of how he was chopping wood when he was captured.

To compress what would happen over the next decade, the girl Kizzy stayed on the plantation in Spotsylvania County directly exposed to her father who had come directly from Africa, and to his stories, until she had a considerable repertoire of knowledge about him from his own mouth. When the girl Kizzy was 16 years of age, she was sold away to a new master whose name was Tom Lea and he had a much smaller plantation in North Carolina. And it was on this plantation that after a while the girl Kizzy gave birth to her first child, a boy who was given the name George. The father was the new master Tom Lea. And as George got to be four or five or so, now it was his mother Kizzy who began to tell him the stories that she heard from her father. And the boy began to discover the rather common phenomenon that slave children rarely knew who their fathers were, let alone a grandfather. He had something which made him rather singular. And so it was with considerable pride the boy began to tell his peers the story of his grandfather; this African who said his name was *Kin-tay*, who called a river *Kamby Bolongo*, and called a guitar *ko* and other sounds for other things, and who said that he had been chopping wood when he was set upon and captured and brought into slavery.

When the boy George got to be about 12, he was apprenticed to an old slave to learn handling the master's fighting gamecocks. And this boy had innate, green thumb ability for fighting gamecocks. By the time he was in his mid-teens he had been given (for his local and regional reknown as an expert slave handler and pitter of fighting gamecocks) the nickname he would take to his grave decades later---Chicken George.

When Chicken George was about 18 he met and mated with a slave girl. And her name was Matilda, and in time Matilda gave birth to seven children. Now for the first time that story which had come down from this African began to fan out within the breadth of a family. The stories as they would be told on the front porch in Henning by grandma and the others were those of the winter evenings after the harvest when families would entertain themselves by sitting together and the elders would talk and the young would listen. Now Chicken George would sit with his seven children around the hearth. The story was that they would roast sweet potatoes in the hot ashes, and night after night after night across the winters, Chicken George would tell his seven children a story unusual among slaves, and that was direct knowledge of a great-grandfather; this same

African who said his name was *Kin-tay*, who called the river *Kamby Bolongo*, and a guitar *ko*, and who said that he was chopping wood when he was captured.

Those children grew up, took mates and had children. One of them was named Tom. And Tom became an apprenticed blacksmith. He was sold in his mid-teens to a man named Murray who had a tobacco plantation in Alamance County, North Carolina. And it was on this plantation that Tom, who became that plantation's blacksmith, met and mated with a slave girl whose name was Irene and who was the plantation weaver. And Irene also in time bore seven children. Now it was yet another generation, another section of the state of North Carolina and another set of seven children who would sit in yet another cabin, around the hearth in the winter evenings with the sweet potatoes in the hot ashes. And now the father was Tom telling his children about something virtually unique in the knowledge of slaves, direct knowledge of a great-great-grandfather, this same African, who said his name was *Kin-tay*, who called the river *Kamby Bolongo*, who said he was chopping wood when he was captured, and the other parts of the story that had come down in that way.

Of that second set of seven children, in Alamance County, North Carolina, the youngest was a little girl whose name was Cynthia, and Cynthia was my maternal grandmother. And I grew up in her home in Henning, Tennessee, and grandma pumped that story into me as if it were plasma. It was by all odds the most precious thing in her life--- the story which had come down across the generations about the family going back to that original African.

I stayed at grandma's home until I was in my mid-teens. By that time I had two younger brothers, George and Julius. Our father was a teacher at small black land grant colleges about the South and we began now to move around wherever he was teaching. And thus I went to school through two years of college. When World War II came along I was one of the many people who thought that if I could hurry and get into an organization of which I recently heard called the U.S. Coast Guard, that maybe I could spend the war walking the coast. And I got into the service and to my great shock rather suddenly found myself on an ammunition ship in the Southwest Pacific, which was not at all what I had in mind. But when I look back upon it now, it was the first of a series of what seemed to be accidental things, but now seem to be part of a pattern of many things that were just meant to be, to make a certain book possible, in time. On the ships in the Coast Guard, totally by accident, I stumbled into the long road to becoming a writer. It was something I had never have dreamed of.

I became a writer in the time when if you were black and you went into the naval services you automatically went into what was called the steward's department. And first you were a mess boy, and that meant that you would shine shoes and wait on tables, clean the toilets, make up the beds, things like that. And if you did these things sufficiently well and long, you would advance to cook. And I became a cook on this ammunition ship in the Southwest Pacific. My most precious possession on the ship was a portable typewriter. Every night, when I would finish my pots and pans, I would go down in the hold of the ship, and I'd type letters to everybody I could think of---ex-school-mates, friends, even teachers, anybody that I could think of. Other ships would take mail ashore.

With us out there, far from home as we were and for as long at sea as we would stay (sometimes two, three months before we would get ashore in places like Australia and New Zealand), mail call was a very epochal event for us. And when I got things going pretty well, I would get on the average 30 to 40 letters every mail call. And ships have swift grapevines, and it quickly circulated about this ship that I was the ship's most prolific writer and receiver of mail.

Concurrently, after we would be at sea two or three months and finally got ashore somewhere in Australia or New Zealand, our topmost priority was to fall in love with somebody as quick as possible. And we would do the best we could and then we'd go back out to sea. And now there would be maybe a hundred young guys on the ship as I was, 17 or so, who was just smitten with some girl he had left ashore, and girls have a way of getting prettier in your mind the longer you're at sea, and some of my buddies who were not as articulate on paper as they were verbally, began to come around and in a covert way they began to suggest that since I wrote so many letters that maybe I would be willing to help them compose a letter to some girl. And I began to do this. I would sit at a mess table with a stack of three by five index cards. And my clients would line up and as they got to me I would just interview them. I'd say, "now, what does she look like---hair, eyes, nose, so forth?" And they would tell me. And I'd say, "what did you want to tell her, where did you go, was there anything you want to say in the way of details?" And then I would take each card, put her name and his name on it, and then later as I got a chance, I'd write, for him to copy later in his own handwriting, a rather personalized love letter utilizing that specific information about that girl.

The girls in Australia and New Zealand were not used

to these kinds of missives. And I will never forget one day and night that were to prove most motivational and pivotal in my becoming a writer by accident. We had been at sea for three months, during which time three batches of mail had been taken off our ship, so that each of my client's girls had these many letters. We got into Brisbane, Australia about noon. Liberty was declared at 6 in the afternoon and everyone who had liberty just flew ashore. Around midnight most of those came back wobbling and stumbling, having accomplished the most they'd been able, which was to get very drunk. And then it was almost as if a script had been written. Around 1 in the morning my "clients" started coming back, individually. Before a steadily enlarging and increasingly awe-struck audience, they were describing, in the graphic way that only sailors can, how when they in person got to that girl behind these letters, they met just incredible results, sometimes practically on the spot. I became heroic on that ship that night and for the rest of World War II, I never fought a soul. All I did was write love letters.

Writing love letters led me secretly to begin trying to write stories for modern romances and true confessions. I would write these stories making out I was a girl and this lout had done this, that or another to me and I was trying to resolve my problem, and I would send out those manuscripts and they would come back just as fast as war-time mails would permit. I wrote every single day, 7 days a week for 8 years, before the first story was bought by a magazine. And I stayed on in the service, shipping on whenever my hitch was up, until lo and behold I was 37 years of age and I had 20 years of service and retired. I came out of the service in San Francisco determined, because I had sold by now to *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, *Reader's Digest*, and a good number of stories to men's adventure magazines, mostly sea adventure stories because that was the material I had accessible to me in the service, I was going to find for myself a career as a free-lance writer. My first assignment was from *Reader's Digest* to do an article about the then-newly emerging social phenomenon called the Nation of Islam, or colloquially, the Black Muslims. I now met Malcolm X, I worked with him in writing that article. Then I worked with him and another writer writing a piece for the *Saturday Evening Post*, and in the interim I had happened to begin the feature called "Playboy Interviews", and *Playboy* asked me if I would interview Malcolm X, which I did. The interviews are very in-depth and intensive. I worked now with Malcolm very, very intensively for about three weeks. And when that interview was published, Doubleday asked Malcolm if he would be willing to tell his life in book-length detail. After some demurring Malcolm finally agreed. Because I had happened

to be the black writer who worked with him on most of the major magazine stories which had been done about him, he asked me if I would be willing to work with him on the book. I was, of course, pleased and honored and flattered to do so.

I had a place in Greenwich Village and Malcolm X, after his extremely busy days, would come to my place about 9 in the evening and stay generally until about 1 or 2 the following morning. And he would do this about 4 nights a week. And each of these nights I would just interview him, picking out of this man's memory every thread, every fiber of everything he could remember across the whole of his life. And that went across a calendar year. At the end of that time I had a great volume of notes of his memories. I spent a second year arranging those notes and vicariously, as if I were Malcolm, writing in the first person, putting onto paper, and with all the rewrites and the drafts, what hopefully would sound to a reader as if Malcolm X had just sat down and told that reader, from his memory, from earliest memory to the time he was talking. When the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* manuscript was finished I got in touch with Malcolm and we went into a hotel, and he went across the whole manuscript. I can see his red ball point pen, changing the name of someone whom he said he didn't wish to embarrass, and things of that nature. And finally when he was finished, he said: "Brother, I don't think I'm going to live to read this in print. So I'd like to read it again." And he spent three days in the New York Hilton Hotel, reading again that manuscript. And it was then sent to the publisher.

Malcolm proved very prophetic, because it was two weeks later he was shot to death on a Sunday afternoon in the Audubon Ballroom. And as much as Malcolm had talked matter-of-factly about the imminence of violent death, it just seemed to me impossible. And it was a very, very rocky, traumatic kind of night for me. The following morning I sat down at the typewriter, just dropping blank white sheets in that machine and drumming on the keyboard for the space of maybe 30 or 40 minutes, sit, stare at the keyboard, drum again. This is the only thing I've written in my life in that manner. And over a period of three days was written that part which appears now at the end of the book called "The Epilogue". And it was just a tumbling out of the memory of the reminiscence of having met and worked with this man, and anecdotes and insights into him. Then that was sent to the publisher.

Now there happened one of the things when I look back upon it, like the first of a series of miracles that were subsequently to make it possible for me to pull

together a book that aspires to be the first of its kind in having to do with black history, black heritage, black pride, just blackness in general. The first thing that happened here in this series of miracles was *Playboy* magazine called and asked if I would fly over to England and interview the actress Julie Christie. So I flew over there. Julie Christie was involved in the making of a motion picture called *Far From the Madding Crowd*. The weather was terrible. They had to move the set from one side of England to the other and Julie Christie was so uptight she was scarcely speaking to the director, let alone some interviewer who had appeared from this country. I had to get in touch with *Playboy* and tell them this. And they sent me a cable and said, "Well, you're over there so stand by and see what develops." And that was how I, who always innately had loved history and had been steeped in history by grandma and others from the time I was a little boy, found myself plunked in one of the places on earth that had probably more history per square foot than anywhere I know-London. I was all over the place. There was scarcely a tour guide in London that didn't have me on the next several days.

One morning I was in the British Museum and I came upon something, I had vaguely heard of it, the Rosetta Stone. It just really entranced me. I read about it, and I found how, when this stone was discovered in 1799, it seemed to have three sets of texts chiseled into the stone: one of them in Greek characters, which Greek scholars could read, the second in a then-unknown set of characters, the third in the ancient hieroglyphics which it was assumed no one would ever translate. Then I read how a French scholar, Jean Champollion, had come along and had taken that second unknown set of script, character for character, matched it with the Greek and finally had come up with a thesis he could prove---that the text was the same as the Greek. And then in a superhuman feat of scholarship he had taken the terribly intricate characters of the hieroglyphics and cross matched them with the preceding two in almost geometric progression, and had proved that too was the same text. That was what opened up to the whole world of scholarship, all that hitherto had been hidden behind the mystery of the allegedly undecipherable hieroglyphics.

And that thing just fascinated me. I would find myself going around London doing all sorts of other things and at odd times I would see in my mind's eye, almost as if it were projected in my head, the Rosetta Stone. And to me, it just had some kind of special significance, but I couldn't make head or tail of what it might be. Finally I was on a plane coming back to this country, when an idea hit me. It was rough, raw, crude, but it got me to

thinking. Now what this scholar worked with was language chiseled into the stone. And what he did was to take that which had been unknown and match it with that which was known, and thus found out the meaning of what hitherto had been unknown. And then I got to thinking of an analogy; that story always told in our family that I had heard on the front porch in Henning. The unknown quotient was those strange phonetic sounds. And I got to thinking, now maybe I could find out where these sounds came from. Obviously these strange sounds are threads of some African tongue. And my whole thing was to see if maybe I could find out, just in curiosity, what tongue did they represent. It seemed obvious to me what I had to do was try to get in touch with as wide a range of Africans as I could, simply because there were many, many tongues spoken in Africa. I lived in New York, so I began doing what seemed to me logical. I began going up to the United Nations lobby about quitting time. It wasn't hard to spot Africans, and every time I could I'd stop one. And I would say to him my little sounds. In a couple of weeks I stopped a couple of dozen Africans, each and every one of which took a quick look, quick listen to me, and took off. Which I well understand; me with a Tennessee accent trying to tell them some African sounds, I wasn't going to get it.

I have a friend, a master researcher, George Sims, who knew what I was trying to do and he came to me with a listing of about a dozen people reknown for their knowledge of African linguistics. And one who intrigued me right off the bat was not an African at all, but a Belgian. Educated at England, much of it at the School of Oriental and African Studies, he had done his early work living in African villages, studying the language or the tongue as spoken in those villages. He had finally written a book called in French, *La Tradition Orale**. His name: Dr. Jan Vansina, University of Wisconsin. I phoned Dr. Vansina. He very graciously said I could see him. I got on a plane and flew to Madison, Wisconsin, with no dream what was about to happen. In the living room of the Vansinas that evening I told Dr. Vansina every little bit I could remember of what I'd heard as a little boy on the front porch in Henning. And Dr. Vansina listened most intently. And then he began to question me. Being himself an oral historian, he was particularly interested in the physical transmission of the story down across the generations. And I would answer everything I could. I couldn't answer most of what

**De la Tradition Orale: Essai de Methode Historique* (Tervuren, Belgique, 1961). The English translation is *The Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (Chicago, 1965).

he asked. Around midnight, Dr. Vansina said, "I wonder if you'd spend the night at our home," and I did stay there. The following morning, before breakfast, Dr. Vansina came down with a very serious expression on his face; I was later to learn that he had already been on the phone with colleagues, and he said to me: "The ramifications of what you have brought here could be enormous." He and his colleagues felt almost certain that the collective sounds that I had been able to bring there, which had been passed down across the family in the manner I had described to him, represented the Mandinka tongue. I'd never heard the word. He told me that that was the tongue spoken by the Mandingo people. He began then to guess translate certain of the sounds. There was a sound that probably meant cow or cattle; another probably meant the bow-bow tree, generic in West Africa. I had told him that from the time I was knee-high I'd heard about how this African would point to a guitar and say *ko*. Now he told me that almost surely this would refer to one of the oldest of the stringed instruments among the Mandingo people, an instrument made of a gourd covered with goat skin, a long neck, 21 strings, called the *kora*. He came finally to the most involved of the sounds that I had heard and had brought to him---*Kamby Bolongo*. He said without question in Mandinka, *bolongo* meant river; preceded by *Kamby* it probably would mean Gambia River. I'd never heard of that river.

It was Thursday morning when I heard those words; Monday morning I was in Africa. I just had to go. There was no sense in messing around. On Friday I found that of the numerous African students in this country, there were a few from that very, very small country called Gambia. And the one who physically was closest to me was a fellow in Hamilton College, Clinton, New York. And I hit that campus about 3:30 Friday afternoon and practically snatched Ebou Manga out of an economics class and got us on Pan American that night. We flew through the night to Dakar, Senegal, and there we got a light plane that flew over to a little airstrip called Yundum---they literally had to run monkeys off the runway to get in there. And then we got a van and we went into the small city of Bathurst, the capital of Gambia. Ebou Manga, his father Alhaji Manga (it's a predominantly Moslem culture there), assembled a group of about eight men, members of the government, who came into the patio of the Atlantic Hotel, and they sat in kind of a semi-circle as I told them the history that had come down across the family to my grandmother and thence to me; told them everything I could remember.

And when I finished, the Africans irritated me considerably because *Kamby Bolongo*, the sounds which had gotten me specifically to them, they tended almost to

poo-poo. They said, "Well, of course *Kamby Bolongo* would mean Gambia River; anyone would know that." What these Africans reacted to was another sound: a mere two syllables that I had brought them without the slightest comprehension that it had any particular significance. They said, "There may be some significance in that your forefather stated his name was *Kin-tay*." I said, "Well, there was nothing more explicit in the story than the pronunciation of his name, *Kin-tay*." They said, "Our oldest villages tend to be named for those families which founded those villages centuries ago." And then they sent for a little map and they said, "Look, here is the village of Kinte-Kundah. And not too far from it is the village of Kinte-Kundah-Janneh-Ya." And then they told me about something I never had any concept existed in this world. They told me that in the back country, and particularly in the older villages of the back country, there were old men called *griots*, who are in effect walking, living archives of oral history. They are the old men who, from the time they had been in their teen-ages, have been part of a line of men who tell the stories as they have been told since the time of their forefathers, literally down across centuries. The incumbent *griot* will be a man usually in his late sixties, early seventies, and underneath him will be men separated by about decade intervals, sixty, fifty, forty, thirty, twenty, and a teen-age boy, and each line of *griots* will be the experts in the story of a major family clan; another line of *griots* another clan; and so on for dozens of major clans. Another line of *griots* would be the experts in the history of a group of villages. Another would go into the history of the empires which had preceded it, and so forth. And the stories were told in a narrative, oral history way, not verbatim, but the essential same way they had been told down across the time since the forefathers. And the way they were trained was that the teen-age boy was exposed to that story for forty or fifty years before he would become the oral historian incumbent.

It astounds us now to realize that men like these, in not only Africa but other cultures, can literally talk for days, telling a story and not repeating themselves, and telling the details in the most explicit detail. The reason it astounds us is because in our culture we have become so conditioned to the crush of print that most people in our culture have almost forgotten what the human memory is capable of if it is trained to keep things in it. These men, I was told, existed in the back country. And the men there told me that since my forefather had said his name was *Kin-tay* they would see what they could do to help me.

I came back to this country enormously bewildered. I didn't know what to do. It embarrasses me to say that up to that time I really hadn't thought all that much about Africa. I knew where it was and I had the standard cliché images of it, the Tarzan Africa and stuff like that. Well, now it was almost as if some religious zealotry came into me. I just began to devour everything I could lay eyes on about Africa, particularly slavery. I can remember after reading all day I'd sit on the edge of a bed at night with a map of Africa, studying the positions of the countries, one with relation with the other.

It was about six weeks later when an innocuous looking letter came to me which suggested that when it was possible I should come back. I was back over there as quickly as I possibly could make it. The same men, with whom I had previously talked rather matter-of-factly, told me that the word had been put out in the back country and that there had indeed been found a *griot* of the Kinte clan. His name, they said, was Kebba Kanga Fofana. When I heard there was such a man I was ready to have a fit. Where is he? I figured from my experience as an American magazine writer, the government should have had him there with a public relations man for me to talk to. And they looked at me oddly and they said, he's in his village.

I discovered at that point that if I was to see this man, I was going to have to do something I'd never dreamed before: I would have to organize a safari. It took me three days to rent a launch to get up the river, lorry, Land-Rover to take supplies by the back route, to hire finally a total of 14 people, including 3 interpreters, 4 musicians (they told me in the back country these old oral historians would not talk without music in the background), bearers and so forth. And on the fourth day we went vibrating in this launch up the Gambia River. I was very uncomfortable. I had the feeling of being alien. I had the queezy feeling of what do they see me as, another pith-helmet? We got on up the river to a little village called Albreda on the left bank. And then we went ashore. And now our destination by foot was a village called Juffure where this man was said to live.

There's an expression called "the peak experience". It is that which emotionally nothing in your life ever can transcend. And I know I have had mine that first day in the back country in black West Africa. When we got up within sight of the village of Juffure the children who had inevitably been playing outside African villages, gave the word and the people came flocking out of their huts. It's a rather small village, only about 70 people. And villages in the back country are very much today as they were two

hundred years ago, circular mud huts with conical thatched roofs. And from a distance I could see this small man with a pillbox hat and an off-white robe, and even from a distance there was an aura of "somebodiness" about him. I just knew that was the man we had come to see. And when we got closer the interpreters left our party and went straight to him. And I had stepped unwittingly into a sequence of emotional events that always I feel awkward trying to describe, simply because I'd never ever verbally could convey the power, the physical power, of emotional occurrences.

These people quickly filtered closely around me in kind of a horseshoe design with me at the base. If I had put up my hands I would have touched the nearest ones on either side. There were about 3, 4 deep all around. And the first thing that hit me was the intensity of the way they were staring at me. The eyes just raped. The foreheads were forward in the intensity of the staring. And it was an uncomfortable feeling. And while this was happening there began to occur inside me a kind of feeling as if something was turgid, rolling, surging around. And I had this eerie feeling that I knew inside me why it was happening and what it was about, but consciously I could not identify what had me so upset inside. And after a while it began to roll in: it was rather like a galeforce wind that you couldn't see but it just rolled in and hit you--bam! It was enough to knock you down. I suddenly realized what so upset me was that I was looking at a crowd of people and for the first time in my life every one of them was jet black. And I was standing there rather rocked by that, and in the way that we tend to do if we are discomfited we drop our glance. And I remember dropping my glance, and my glance falling on my own hand, my own complexion, in context with their complexion. And now there came rolling in another surging galeforce thing that hit me perhaps harder than the first one. A feeling of guilt, a feeling rather of being hybrid, a feeling of being the impure among the pure.

And the old man suddenly left the interpreters, walked away, and the people as quickly filtered away from me and to the old man. And they began a very animated talking, high metallic Mandinka tongue. One of the interpreters, his name was A. B. C. Salla, whispered in my ear and the significance of what he whispered probably got me as much as all the rest of it collectively. He said, "They stare at you so because they have never seen a black American." And what hit me was they were not looking at Alex Haley, writer, they didn't know who he was, they could care less. But what they saw me as was a symbol of 25 millions of us over here whom they had never seen. And it was just

an awesome thing to realize that someone had thrust that kind of symbolism upon me. And there's a language that's universal. It's a language of gestures, noises, inflections, expressions. Somehow looking at them, hearing them, though I couldn't understand a syllable, I knew what they were talking about. I somehow knew they were trying to arrive at a concensus of how did they collectively feel about me as a symbol for them of all the millions of us over here whom they never had seen. And there came a time when the old man quickly turned. He walked right through the people, he walked right past three interpreters, he walked right up to me, looked piercingly into my eyes and spoke in Mandinka, as instinctively he felt I should be able to understand it. And the translation came from the side. And the way they collectively saw me, the symbol of all the millions of us black people here whom they never had seen was, "Yes, we have been told by the forefathers that there are many of us from this place who are in exile in that place called America and in other places." And that was the way they saw it.

The old man, the *griot*, the oral historian, Kebba Kanga Fofana, 73 rains of age (their way of saying 73 years, one rainy season a year), began now to tell me the ancestral history of the Kinte clan as it had been told down across the centuries, from the times of the forefathers. It was as if a scroll was being read. It wasn't just talk as we talk. It was a very formal occasion. The people became mouse quiet, rigid. The old man sat in a chair and when he would speak he would come up forward, his body would grow rigid, the cords in his neck stood out and he spoke words as though they were physical objects coming out of his mouth. He'd speak a sentence or so, he would go limp, relax, and the translation would come. Out of this man's head came spilling lineage details incredible to behold. Two, three centuries back. Who married whom, who had what children, what children married whom and their children, and so forth, just unbelievable. I was struck not only by the profusion of details, but also by the biblical pattern of the way they expressed it. It would be something like: "and so and so took as a wife so and so and begat and begat and begat," and he'd name their mates and their children, and so forth. When they would date things it was not with calendar dates, but they would date things with physical events, such as, "in the year of the big water he slew a water buffalo," the year of the big water referring to a flood. And if you wanted to know the date calendar-wise you had to find when that flood occurred.

I can strip out of the hours that I heard of the history of the Kinte clan (my forefather had said his name was *Kin-tay*), the immediate vertical essence of it, leaving

out all the details of the brothers and the cousins and the other marriages and so forth. The *griot* Kebba Kanga Fofana said that the Kinte clan had been begun in a country called Old Mali. Traditionally the Kinte men were blacksmiths who had conquered fire. The women were potters and weavers. A branch of the clan had moved into the country called Mauretania. It was from the country of Mauretania that a son of the clan, whose name was Kairaba Kunta Kinte (he was a *Marabout*, which is to say a holy man of the Moslem faith), came down into the country called the Gambia. He went first to a village called Pakali n'Ding. He stayed there for a while. He went next to a village called Jiffarong; thence he went to a village called Juffure. In the village of Juffure the young *Marabout* Kairaba Kunta Kinte took his first wife, a Mandinka maiden whose name was Sireng. And by her he begot two sons whose names were Janneh and Saloum. Then he took a second wife; her name, Yaisa. And by Yaisa he begot a son whose name was Omoro. Those three sons grew up in the village of Juffure until they came of age. The elder two, Janneh and Saloum, went away and started a new village called Kinte-Kundah Janneh-Ya. It is there today. Literally translated it means "The Home of Janneh Kinte". The youngest son, Omoro, stayed in the village until he had 30 rains, and then he took a wife, a Mandinka maiden, her name Binta Kebba. And by Binta Kebba, roughly between 1750 and 1760, Omoro Kinte begat four sons, whose names were Kunta, Lamin, Suwadu and Madi.

By the time he got down to that level of the family, the *griot* had talked for probably 5 hours. He had stopped maybe 50 times in the course of that narrative and a translation came into me. And then a translation came as all the others had come, calmly, and it began, "About the time the king's soldiers came." That was one of those time-fixing references. Later in England, in British Parliamentary records, I went feverishly searching to find out what he was talking about, because I had to have the calendar date. But now in back country Africa, the *griot* Kebba Kanga Fofana, the oral historian, was telling the story as it had come down for centuries from the time of the forefathers of the Kinte clan. "About the time the king's soldiers came, the eldest of these four sons, Kunta, went away from this village to chop wood and was seen never again." And he went on with his story.

I sat there as if I was carved of rock. Goose-pimples came out on me I guess the size of marbles. He just had no way in the world to know that he had told me that which meshed with what I'd heard on the front porch in Henning, Tennessee, from grandma, from Cousin Georgia, from Aunt Liz, from Cousin Plus, all the other old ladies who sat there on that porch. I managed to get myself together

enough to pull out my notebook, which had in it what grand-ma had always said. And I got the interpreter Salla and showed it to him and he got rather agitated, and he went to the old man, and he got agitated, and the old man went to the people and they got agitated.

I don't remember it actually happening. I don't remember anyone giving an order, but those 70 people formed a ring around me, moving counter-clockwise, chanting, loudly, softly, loudly, softly, their bodies were close together, the physical action was like drum majorettes with their high knee action. You got the feeling they were an undulating mass of people moving around. I'm standing in the middle like an Adam in the desert. I don't know how I felt; how could you feel a thing like that? And I remember looking at the first lady who broke from that circle (there were about a dozen ladies who had little infant children slung across their backs), and she with a scowl on this jet black face, broke from that circle, her bare feet slapping against the hard earth, came charging in towards me. And she took her baby and roughly thrust it out. The gesture said, "Take it!" and I took the baby and I clasped it, at which point she snatched it away and another lady, another baby, and I guess I had clasped about a dozen babies in about two minutes. I would be almost two years later at Harvard when Dr. Jerome Bruner told me, you were participating in one of the oldest ceremonies of human kind called "the laying on of hands"; that in their way they were saying to you, "through this flesh which is us, we are you, and you are us." There were many, many other things that happened in that village that day, but I was particularly struck with the enormity of the fact that they were dealing with me and seeing me in the perspective of, for them, the symbol of 25 millions of us black people in this country whom they never had seen. They took me into their mosque. They prayed in Arabic which I couldn't understand. Later the crux of the prayer was translated, "Praise be to Allah for one long lost from us whom Allah has returned." And that was the way they saw that.

When it was possible to leave, since we'd come by water, I wanted to go out over the land. My five senses had become muted, truncated. They didn't work right. If I wanted to feel something I would have to squeeze to register the sense of feeling. Things were misty. I didn't hear well. I would become aware the driver sitting right by me was almost shouting something and I just hadn't heard him up to that point. I began now, as we drove out over the back country road, with drums distantly heard around, to see in my mind's eye, as if it were being projected somehow on a film, a screen almost, rough, ragged, out of focus, almost a portrayal of what I had studied so, so much

about: the background of us as a people, the way that ancestrally we who are in this country were brought out of Africa.

The impression prevails that most of the slaves were taken from coastal Africa. Not so. Coastal Africa's population never could have begun to satisfy the voracious mar of two centuries of slavery. By far most of us came from those interior villages. And I was seeing the way so many, many times I'd read about it, many, many different accounts, that the people would come screaming awake at night in the villages with the thatched roofs aflame falling in on them. And they'd dash out into the dark, into the very arms of the people who fired the villages, and the element of surprise and the arms were on one side and the slaughter was relatively brief, and the people who survived, those who were left whole enough, were linked neck by neck with thongs into what were called "coffles". It is said that some of the coffles were a mile long. And then there would come the torturous march, down towards the sea where the ships were. Many, many died hideously along the way, or were left to die when they were too weak to go on. And finally those who survived would get to the beach area, and down on the beaches were what they would call "barracoons", low structures of bamboo lashed together with thongs. And it would be in here that they would be put, rested, washed, fed better for a period of time, greased, their heads would be shaved, and so forth, and when it was felt that they were in condition, they would be sent out into the small yards in front of the barracoons for inspection by those who came from the ships for the purpose of purchase. And those who were finally selected for purchase after the most incredible examinations of every orifice in the human body would be branded and marched out to the ships.

It seemed to me, seeing all this riding along there, that the Africans really hadn't up to this time comprehended the enormity of what was about to happen to them. And the reason being that there was precedent up to now for everything that had happened. Cruelty was nothing new to them. The Africans were hideously cruel one to the other. Slavery, as such, was nothing new to Africans. Over half the people in Africa were slaves of other Africans. The difference being that there was no concept in Africa of what western type slavery would be. Slavery in Africa would equate with what we call share-cropping. It was only when, it seemed to me, these Africans were being moved from barracoon, freshly branded, across that strip of sandy beach, and they could see for the first time those cockle shell canoes at the water's edge and out further on the water the larger things that they thought were flying houses. I had read, and now was seeing it in my mind's

eye, how when the Africans were being moved across that beach, many of them would scream, they would go into paroxysms of shouting, fall flat, go clawing as deep as they could with their heads down into the sand, and taking great gulping choaking mouthfuls of sand trying to get one last hold on the land which had been their home. And they were beaten up from that and taken into the canoes and thus they went into the holds of those ships which are utterly undescrivable. And it was in that manner that every single one of our forebears came over, with no exceptions. And I was full of this.

When we got to the first village, it was with a great, great shock I realized that the drums I'd been dimly hearing were the talking drums that still work in back country Africa. They told what had happened behind us in the village of Juffure. Now as the driver slowed down, I could see the people in the village ahead of us packed on either side of the road and they were waving and there was this cocophany of sound coming out of them, growing louder as we came closer. And when we got to the edge of the village, I stood up in the Land Rover and looking down on these people, jet black people waving up, dimly I could see them. And I heard the noise coming from them. And the first thought, that just overwhelmed me, was that they were down there having never left Africa and I-we (symbolic of we here in this country) were standing up there in the Land Rover, and it was only caprice, which of our forefathers had been taken out. That was the only thing that made the difference of where we were, one place or the other. And I was just full of the realization of that. And I guess we'd gotten about a third of the way in the village when it finally registered upon my brain what it was they were all crying out. I hadn't understood it, I think, because they were all crying out the same thing, tightly packed, tightly massed, wizened old black elders, little naked tar black children all crying out in mass, "Mister Kinte, Mister Kinte". And let me tell you. I'm a man, but a sob hit me at ankle level and just rolled up. I just began crying as I have never cried in my life. It just seemed to me that if you really knew the ancestral history of blacks, we blacks, if you really knew the way every single one of us had come here, that no matter what ever else might later be your reaction, that you first had to weep. And that's all I could do. I remember being aware of people staring as if to say, "What's wrong?" And I didn't care. That was all I could do.

We got out of the village, we got to where I could get a taxi to Dakar. I got there, I got a plane, got back to this country. It took me about a week to get myself emotionally together enough to go back to the publisher. I

went to Doubleday and I told them what had happened. I told them it isn't the story of a family; it's the saga of a people passed down in this oral history way. And the reason it was a saga of people is because we black people--probably more than any other people on the face of earth in as large a number--have the most common generic background; that every single one of us without exception ancestrally goes back to some one of those villages, belonged to some one of those tribes, was captured in some way, was put on some one of those slave ships, across the same ocean into some succession of plantations up to the Civil War, the emancipation, and ever since then a struggle for freedom. So this book had to be the saga of a people. And since it was such, it was up to me to give it every possible thing that I, as a symbol of us, who happened to be a writer, could bring to that book. I had to do everything, to find every thread that could have any bearing on the history, the saga, of us as a people. They said they understood, and they gave me time to go.

When I look back over the whole of my life it seems so many things happened from the time I was a little boy that would prepare me for something that this book would demand. By accident I had gone to the Coast Guard. By accident I had become a writer in the Coast Guard. When I began to write seriously the material available to me had been old maritime records. I had spent years combing in old records of the old U.S. Maritime Service, of the old Lighthouse Service. Not a lot of people generally know a lot about old maritime records and in particular few black people happen to have been exposed to this simply because it's not something in our average background. But I did know a great deal about them.

From the time I was a little boy grandma always said that ship came to what they call "Naplis". Now I knew they had to be talking about Annapolis, Maryland. Now also I knew specifically where that slave came from; so obviously some ship had come from that area of the Gambia River and sailed to Annapolis, Maryland. And what I wanted now was the symbolic ship that brought over, it is said, 15 million of our forebears alive to this country, and in order to be the proper symbolic ship it had to be the specific ship that had brought Kunta Kinte. And I went now on a search for that ship. The *griot* had set a time reference in his oral history dating way: "About the time the king's soldiers came." And it was now when I found that he was talking about this group called Colonel O'Hare's forces who had come to the Gambia River in 1767 to guard the Fort James slave fort. So that gave me a calendar date. Now I went to work to find that ship. This was still colonies at the time; the mother country was England. So I got on a

plane now and went to London. I began to search in records. I went to Lloyd's of London and got to a man named Mr. R. C. E. Landers. And I got in his office and I just poured out what I was trying to do, and after a while he said to me, "Young man, Lloyd's of London will do all we can to help you." And it was Lloyd's of London who began to open doors for me to get to the source of the records in England.

I began to search for the records of ships that had moved from Africa to this country. There are cartons of records of slave ships, of ships in general, but also of slave ships, that moved two centuries ago that have never been opened, nobody ever had occasion to go in them since. There are just stacks of records. Slavery was an industry; it was not viewed as anything pejorative at all. It was just a business at the time. In the seventh week of an almost traumatizing searching, one afternoon about 2:30 I was in the 1,023rd set of slave ship records and pulled up a sheet that had the movements of 30 ships on it, and my eye ran down it and I saw number 18, and my eyes went out to the right and something just said to me, that might be the ship. The essential things were there. My reaction was a very dull one. I wrote down on an envelope the information, turned it in at the desk and walked out. Around the corner from there on Castle Lane was a little tea shop. I went in there and I had tea and a cruller, and I'm sitting up there and sipping the tea, and swinging my foot like it's all in a day's work, when it suddenly did hit me that maybe I'd found that ship. I still owe that lady for that tea and cruller.

I got a taxi; I didn't even stop at the hotel to get a toothbrush. I told that taxi, "Heathrow!" In my mind's eye I was seeing the book I had to get my hands on. I'd had the book in my hands. The taxi got me to Heathrow in time to get the 6:00 Pan American to New York, and I flew that ocean that night and didn't sleep a wink. I could see that book, it had a dark brown leather cover, *Shipping in the Port of Annapolis* by Vaughan W. Brown. I got to New York, shuttled to Washington, the Library of Congress, got the book. One line in agate type tended to support that it was indeed the ship, and I just about went berserk. I got on the phone, got finally to the author Vaughan Brown, a broker in Baltimore. I got to that man's office, went by his secretary, just as if she wasn't there, and went in his office. Here was a man who probably had never exchanged a social syllable with a black person in his life. He was raised in Virginia, Maryland, and so forth, his background was that. But when I could, man to man, communicate the fervor, the drive, the passion of trying to pull together the history of a people based on an oral history, married by now with documented history, people would literally quit

what they were doing, quit their jobs, temporarily, to help me. That man left his brokerage office, drove to Annapolis, to help me pin down that that was the ship.

I crossed the Atlantic Ocean round trip three times in the next ten days. In the next several weeks I was all over New England, Peabody Museum, the Widener at Harvard, various other places, looking for every thread, everything of any kind I could find about this ship, the symbolic ship that brought the 15 million, the specific ship that brought Kunta Kinte.

Finally, from one or another source, I knew that she was by name the ship the *Lord Ligonier*. She was built in 1765; this was her maiden voyage. Her captain was Captain Thomas Davies. She had sailed in 1765 with a cargo of rum to Gravesend, England. She had sold the rum, used the proceeds to buy the slaving hardware (the chains, the shackles, the other restraining objects) to put on the extra food stuffs a slave ship needed, to put on the extra crew a slave ship needed, and then she had set out up the English Channel. There were look-out points at intervals along the waterways. And the records are still there for those look-out points. I would get the records from this one and sift wildly through them until I found the *Lord Ligonier* had passed and I'd run to these records, sift through them until she passed. It became almost like running along the beach looking at her. I knew what that ship looked like. I knew her timbers. She was made of lobolloy pine planking. I knew that her beams were made of hackmatack cedar. I knew the nails that held her together were not really nails, they were "treenails". They were made of black locust split in the top with a wedge of oak. I knew the flax that made her sails had been grown in New Jersey. I knew everything about her. I knew the rig of her sails. And visually I could see her. I could read the captain's mind. I knew he had a new ship, maiden voyage, and everything in him was driving to get as fast as he could to the source of the black gold, to load and get back by the quickest passage which would make him look good to the owners. And I followed her from look-out point to look-out point and then she came along to a place called the Downs, and for God's sakes I found she dropped her anchor. And I nearly had a fit. Why in the world would she drop the anchor? I knew he was driving to make a great trip, and it just flipped me. I couldn't bear not to know why she stopped. And I began to think and it finally arrived upon me that ships then had no engines. The only thing that moved the ship was wind in the sails, so if I was going to find out why this ship moved or stopped, obviously what I had to know was more than I knew about weather. And I dropped everything. I found out the British meteorological

headquarters was in a city called Bracknell. I got on a train, went over there, and told some people, look, I have got to have the weather for the fall of 1766. And they looked at me as if I was crazy.

And I went back that night to London as near suicide as I have ever been in my life. I was obviously just a total failure if I couldn't find that. It was three days before I was functioning again. And I came out of that stupor thinking there had to be a way. And now again the previous training came into play. I hadn't been 20 years in the U.S. Coast Guard for nothing. I went and got me a big blank meteorological chart. I got my little dividers and tools and figured the band of ocean through which any ship would have to sail to get from the mouth of the English Channel to the Gambia River on the mid-West African coast. Then I figured that what I had to do by any means I could possibly do it was to collect all possible documented weather data that I could for that particular band of ocean between the months of April and September, 1766. I began to go to every city in England that had in the 1760's been a major sea port---Liverpool, Hull, the others. And every time I'd get to one of these towns I'd go to everything that looked like a library.

And I knew one thing as an old sailor from the Coast Guard, that every time a sailing ship has the watch changed they record the weather and the longitude and latitude in the log. And whenever I'd find any ship that had been anywhere in any direction in that band of ocean between April and September, 1766, I would pluck out the weather readings and take the longitude-latitude figures to pin point where she was when she made that weather reading and date it.

I went back to Bracknell about three weeks later with four hundred and eleven weather readings scattered over that band of ocean. I found two lieutenant-commanders, Royal Navy, professional meteorological people and they called in colleagues, and for them it was like a double acrostic puzzle. It took them about two days to recreate the weather in which the *Lord Ligonier* had sailed. I found out why at first she stopped: the wind had shifted on her. She had been coming around the Channel and in a place where she had to have easterly winds to keep progressing she'd met southwesterly winds, and all she could do was tack back and forth between the English and French coasts. So she had dropped the anchor in a place called the Downs, not too far from where Caesar's oared galleys had brought Britain into the Empire. She had had to lay in anchor there in about 8 fathoms for about 2 weeks until the wind changed southeasterly. That was Tuesday morning, May 15th, 1766. The physical weather was about 66° temperature, the millibar

reading was 10-10, the weather was a drizzle becoming fair. And that was the day she ran up the sails. She went out down past the white cliffs of Dover, Shakespeare Cliffs, Dungeness, Berry Head on down the Channel to Lizard Head. She went into the open sea southeast of the Bay of Biscay, southerly down past the Cape Verdes, the Canaries, and finally into the mouth of the Gambia River. She would spend the next ten months slaving in the Gambia River area. At the end of ten months she got a cargo: 3,265 elephants' teeth as they called tusks, 3,700 pounds of beeswax, 800 pounds of raw cotton, 32 ounces of gold, 140 slaves. And with that cargo she set sail July 5, 1767. It was a Sunday.

One of the most perverse things I was to run across was that the people who might be described as a hierarchy of slaving, the owners, the agents, the captains of those ships, strove in every possible way to manifest that they were functioning in a Christian context. If at all possible a slave ship when loaded would leave, as this one did, on the Sabbath. There was a popular saying at the time, "God will bless the journey." The *Lord Ligonier* sailed directly from the Gambia River to Annapolis, Maryland. She arrived the morning of September 29, 1767. September 29, 1967, I was standing on the pier at Annapolis drenched with tears.

I went to the Maryland Hall of Records (in the one set of records you can generally find back to the time of Christ: tax records) to find out what had she come in with and declared for tax. And I found she declared for tax the same cargo she declared leaving Africa, except that the original 140 slaves had become 98 who had survived that crossing. She crossed from the Gambia in 2 months, 3 weeks and 2 days, a voyage of about 5,000 miles.

I knew that when you had a cargo as valuable as slaves that then, as today, they advertised. And I went to the records of the *Maryland Gazette*. In the issue of October 1st, 1767, page 3, far left column, third head down was the *Lord Ligonier's* ad. She had just arrived from the River Gambia "with fresh slaves for sale" to be sold the following Wednesday at Meg's Wharf. I trusted oral history now better than I trusted the printed page and I knew Grandma always said that Mas' John Waller had bought that slave, had named him Toby but later Mas' John had sold him to Mas' William, his brother. And I knew that most transactions involving slaves, even among families, were legal matters. And I went to Richmond, Virginia, searching the legal deeds, and found a deed dated September 5, 1768, between the two brothers John and William Waller, Spotsylvania County, Virginia, transferring goods between them. And on the second page in this fairly long deed were the words "and also one Negro man slave named Toby."

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I could stand up here six hours and talk about this. I'm obviously obsessed with it. I've been almost 8 years now working on it. One of the spin-offs is that my brothers and I have begun a Kinte Foundation with numerous purposes. One of them is to establish this country's first black geneological library. Wendell [Wray] and Courtney [Brown] and others of us have begun this work. There will be a staff of about 15 all told in time, of people who are beginning the early work of collecting the documentation for the creation of the Kinte Black Geneological Library which will projectively open its doors in Washington, D.C. in bi-centennial 1976. The library will collect everything that we can lay hands on that documents slaves, free blacks, any blacks, preceding 1900.

Since so much of our material is derivative, which is to say that you can find many of the black records in what are surfacely white records, it is most important that we try and communicate this to you. You in your work may come upon things that we would love to have that you would, I know, be happy to let us have. I feel that, hopefully, the book, the motion picture (motion picture rights have already been negotiated), the library, the foundation, the whole thing will project a tremendous new emphasis and public awareness of and public image---worldwide---of oral history. We also hope to be able to project worldwide a correction of something that plagues not just black history, but all history for everybody, and that is that history has predominantly been written by the winners, which messes it up from the very beginning. Here now is a vehicle that I hope will be able to spread an awareness that black history is not just some euphemistic cry on the part of a people trying to make some spurious case for themselves, but that it does happen to be a matter of disciplined documented dedicated truth.