

# BLACK AF HISTORY

THE UN-WHITWASHED  
STORY OF AMERICA

MICHAEL HARRIOT



DEYST.

*An Imprint of* WILLIAM MORROW

***For Karen***



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And Black people.

We wrote this book.

*We are this book.*

K

# WORKS NOT CITED

## BLACK AF HISTORY HACKS

We're not doing the "works cited" thing (there's a whole section of endnotes).

However, I often receive requests, tweets, and emails asking about books people should read if they want to know more about Black history, to which I usually reply: "All of them." If you, like me, don't have the time to read every book that was ever written, here are some specific works, databases, and publicly available resources that aided in the research for this book, even if they were not directly cited. Not only will these help you gain a deeper understanding about the past, they also offer an unwhitewashed version of Black America's untold story.

## TEN ESSENTIAL BOOKS

Lerone Bennett. *Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America, 1619–1962*. Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2016.

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## ONLINE RESOURCES

I don't know if you've heard about this thing called the internet, but it's a great source for digging into history. Instead of simply googling a fact, investigate these sites:

- **BLACK NEWSPAPERS:** Google News, Newspapers.com, and a number of individual newspaper publishers offer digitized archives of Black newspapers that date as far back as the 1700s. Not only can you find the primary source, you can also read the contemporaneous reports of Black journalists.
- **U.S. CENSUS BUREAU:** The census doesn't just count people, it records financial data, geographic information, and voting data that create statistical snapshots of the past.
- **LIBRARY OF CONGRESS:** Read firsthand narratives of people who survived enslavement from the Federal Writers' Project. Listen to recordings of a Frederick Douglass speech. Hear an old blues recording. And it's free!
- **NATIONAL ARCHIVES:** You can download slave schedules, birth certificates, military records, and digitized transcripts from the Freedmen's Bureau archives.
- **ARCHIVE.ORG:** This is a valuable research tool that allows users to borrow out-of-print writings, old encyclopedias, and school textbooks.
- **TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE DATABASE:** Originally a CD-ROM, this online repository contains information on more

than 35,000 human trafficking expeditions that carried more than 12 million Africans to the Americas between 1520 and 1866.

- **GENEALOGY WEBSITES:** For-profit ancestry companies don't just do DNA tests. Many have created online access to birth records, death certificates, wills, newspapers, and other resources.

## BLACK HISTORY TREASURE TROVES

Black history doesn't just live in books; it's all around you, waiting to be excavated. Some of the lesser-known hiding places include:

- **OTHER BOOKSTORES:** Many Black-owned, independent, and secondhand bookstores stock books that large chains usually overlook. Some will even have self-published works by local authors that were never available nationwide.
- **COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES:** Institutions of higher learning often invest in special collections and archives that preserve important documents and historical records. Many also host free lectures and events that are open to the public.
- **MUSEUMS:** Never leave a historical site without visiting the gift shop. You'll find art, audio recordings, oral histories, and research from people who may not be nationally recognized.
- **COURTHOUSES:** Every county's clerk of court is a treasure chest of history. Aside from wills, birth records, and death certificates, local governments archive proclamations, deeds to real estate, and transactions from the sale of human property.
- **BIG "SECOND" CHURCHES:** In most towns, the "First" church of a particular denomination is usually the white church. Any large church whose name includes the word "Second" probably has a Black congregation that formed pre-

emancipation or shortly thereafter (AME churches are the exception). If you attend one of these churches, I'd bet your tithes and offerings there's a repository the deacons simply call "the files" that contains more history than the average museum.

- **YE OLDE ANTIQUE SHOPPE:** Besides the teakettles and Confederate relics, many antique shops also have diaries, photos, and first-edition books by Black authors that are often overlooked by white collectors.
- **ANCESTORS AND ELDERS:** Your deceased grandmother's attic is a museum. The stories your great-uncle has told too many times are part of an oral tradition. Your family's Bibles, diaries, and old letters are historical documents.
- **WHITE LIES:** Whenever you encounter a weirdly specific anti-Black law, rumors of a place where Black people aren't allowed, an account of a "race riot," or any story about Black people that seems kinda semi-racist, there's probably some whitewashed history hiding somewhere in there.

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