

RESURRECTING VOICES

The Philadelphia Black Experience

A Podcast By the Historical Society of Pennsylvania

Episode 3 — The Great Migration
Featuring guest speaker Adrienne Whaley
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Resource Guide

Resources at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania

- Leon Gardiner Collection of American Negro Historical Society records
 - The American Negro Historical Society was founded in 1897 by Black Philadelphians to document the “Black Metropolis,” as it is called by Michiko Quinones and the Philadelphia 1838 Black Metropolis history project. This 16-box and 35 volume collection features administrative records, reports, minutes, speeches, membership lists, portraits, and more items documenting the life of the American Negro Historical Society. The collection also includes materials on the Banneker Institute, Pythian Baseball Club, Lebanon Cemetery, and other Black organizations. Founders and members Robert Adger, W.M. Dorsey, and Jacob C. White included their materials in this collection. Leon Gardiner, a historian and postal worker, was an avid collector of African American ephemera, clippings, and other memorabilia. He donated his collection to HSP in 1934.
 - [View digitized records from the Leon Gardiner Collection.](#)

- A Century of Negro Migration by Carter Godwin Woodson, 1918.
 - A book written by a Black historian in 1918 that provides context to the movement of Black Americans before the Great Migration.

- Annual Reports of the Traveler’s Aid Society of Philadelphia
 - The Traveler’s Aid Society’s mission was “the Assistance, Guidance and Protection of travelers without regard to age, race, sex, creed or color.”

- Annual reports and circulars of the Philadelphia Association for the Protection of Colored Women
 - Contains physical reports and assorted ephemera

- The Philadelphia Colored Directory
 - Directories from 1908, 1910, and 1914 that list the Black businesses and professionals in the city. Contains brief historical notes and statistics on Black Philadelphians and their employment.

- New York Age 1905-1953, 24 reels
 - A newspaper published weekly in New York City from 1887 to 1953. "Devoted to the general interests of the American Citizens of African descent."

- View other Black history collections at HSP.

Resources at the Library of Congress

- Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938
 - Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938 contains more than 2,300 first-person accounts of slavery, collected in the 1930s as part of the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) of the Works Progress Administration, later renamed Work Projects Administration (WPA).
- Black History Collection, 1623-2008
 - The Black History Collection spans 1623-2008, though it primarily concentrates on the period between 1800 to 1865. Materials in this collection include correspondence, financial documents, court records, slave deeds, family papers, military records, birth records, and more. Please note that this collection is not available to view digitally, but is open to researchers at the Library's Manuscript Reading Room.
- Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers
 - Chronicling America features millions of newspaper pages from across the United States published through 1963. Researchers can search these newspapers by state, ethnicity, and language.
 - [View African American newspapers published in English in Pennsylvania.](#)
- Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters Union Formed
 - The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) was founded on August 25, 1925 in New York City. The union was led by A. Philip Randolph and was the first predominately African American labor union. The members of the BSCP were porters employed by the Pullman Company.

- NAACP: A Century in the Fight for Freedom - The New Negro Movement
 - World War I created a transformation for African Americans from the “old” to the “new.” Thousands moved from the rural South to the industrial urban North, pursuing a new vision of social and economic opportunity. During the war black troops fought abroad “to keep the world safe for democracy.” They returned home determined to achieve a fuller participation in American society. The philosophy of the civil rights movement shifted from the “accommodationist” approach of Booker T. Washington to the militant advocacy of W.E.B. Du Bois. These forces converged to help create the “New Negro Movement” of the 1920s, which promoted a renewed sense of racial pride, cultural self-expression, economic independence, and progressive politics.

- The Negro Motorist Green Book
 - An annual guidebook for African-American roadtrippers founded and published by New York City mailman Victor Hugo Green from 1936 to 1967. From a New York-focused first edition published in 1936, Green expanded the work to cover much of North America. The Green Book became "the bible of black travel" during the era of Jim Crow laws, when open and often legally prescribed discrimination against African Americans and other non-whites was widespread. Green wrote this guide to identify services and places relatively friendly to African-Americans so they could find lodgings, businesses, and gas stations that would serve them along the road.

- American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1940
 - This collection of life histories consists of approximately 2,900 documents, compiled and transcribed by more than 300 writers from 24 states, working on the Folklore Project of the Federal Writers' Project, a New Deal jobs program that was part of the U.S. Works Progress (later Work Projects) Administration (WPA) from 1936 to 1940.

Additional Resources

- Goin North: Stories from the First Great Migration to Philadelphia
 - Captured in oral history interviews conducted in the 1980s with aging Philadelphians who participated in and witnessed the Great Migration firsthand, these stories tell of both individual lives and collective experiences adapting to a new home in the "City of Brotherly Love.

- African-American Migration to Philadelphia Oral Histories Project
 - The first wave of the Great Migration began in 1916 when African Americans left the South to escape terror and segregation in search of better jobs, housing and education. The 269 interviews were recorded between 1987 and 1988. They include family history and all aspects of Black urban life experienced by the migrants in the City of Philadelphia.

- History of Mercy-Douglass Hospital
 - Movers & Makers Special on the history of Philadelphia hospitals founded by the Black community. From Frederick Douglass Hospital in 1895 and Mercy Hospital in 1907, to their merging in 1948, Black medical professionals have had to overcome widespread discrimination in the field of medicine. Historians, doctors, and nurses discuss the role of race in healthcare of the past, present and future.

- “The Making of African America: The Four Great Migrations”: Ira Berlin
 - A sweeping new account of the African American experience over four centuries Four great migrations defined the history of black people in America: the violent removal of Africans to the east coast of North America known as the Middle Passage; the relocation of one million slaves to the interior of the antebellum South; the movement of more than six million blacks to the industrial cities of the north and west a century later; and since the late 1960s, the arrival of black immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and Europe. These epic migrations have made and remade African American life.

- Newspapers, Censuses, and Additional Records
 - [Penn State’s Pennsylvania Newspaper Archive](#)
 - [Newspapers.com](#)
 - subscription required (PA free to onsite researchers at HSP)
 - [NewspaperArchive.com](#)
 - subscription required
 - [GenealogyBank.com](#)
 - Subscription required
 - U.S. Federal Censuses, 1900-1950 (found at Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org)

- Funeral Program Collections
 - Found at FamilySearch, various universities, archives, and historical societies
 - A few notable examples
 - Georgia Digital Library’s “Atlanta Funeral Programs Collection”
 - West Feliciana Parish (Louisiana) Library’s “African American Funeral Programs Collection”
 - FamilySearch’s database “Virginia, African-American Funeral Programs, 1935-2009”
 - California African American Genealogical Society’s “Funeral Program Collection”
 - Houston (Texas) Public Library’s “African American Funeral Programs”

- [Philadelphia Deeds and Property Records \(20th century\)](#)

- Books
 - *Black Genealogy* by Charles Blockson
 - *A Genealogist’s Guide to Discovering Your African-American Ancestors* by Franklin C. Smith and Emily Croom
 - *The Warmth of Other Suns* by Isabel Wilkerson
 - *The Philadelphia Negro* by W.E.B. DuBois

Glossary (in order of mention)

Black codes: Laws passed in the Southern states after the Civil War to restrict the rights of Black Americans. Aimed to control and exploit the newly freed population. The codes varied by state but commonly limited the rights of Black people to own property, conduct business, and move freely.

Red Summer: A term referring to the racial violence that occurred predominantly in the United States during 1919, when a series of over 30 anti-Black riots occurred leading to the destruction of Black communities and many deaths.

Boll weevil: A species of beetle that feeds on cotton buds and flowers. Caused a desecration of cotton crops in 1915, serving as catalyst in the Great Migration as it pushed Black sharecroppers and farmers to the North for better economic opportunities.

Great Mississippi Flood of 1927: In April 1927, after months of heavy rain, levees along the Mississippi River began to break, leading to one of the greatest natural disasters in our country. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced with many joining the mass migration of Black people in the US.

Dizzy Gillespie: Born in 1917 in South Carolina, one of the most popular trumpeters and bandleaders of his time.

John Coltrane: Born in North Carolina in 1926, came to Philadelphia and stamped himself as a pillar in the jazz community. Often noted as a forefather of free jazz, he is a core influence for musicians that came after him.

The Warmth of Other Suns: Written by Isabel Wilkerson, this book published in 2010 recounts the Great Migration through the lives of three very distinct true narratives.

Sparks from the Anvil of Oppression: Philadelphia's African Methodists and Southern Migrants, 1890-1940: Written by Robert Gregg, this book published in

1993 tracks the impact of the African Methodist Episcopal church throughout the Great Migration.

Easy Rawlins: Ezekiel "Easy" Porterhouse Rawlins is a fictional character found in over a dozen stories by popular Black crime novelist Walter Mosley.

Chain migration: The process of migrants moving to a new city, country or region following relatives or others who have settled in that location.

Racial zoning: Passed in Baltimore in 1910, this law forbade Black people from buying homes in white neighborhoods and vice versa.

Bronzeville: Historically Black neighborhood in Chicago that grew quickly during the Great Migration and is still an epicenter of Black life in the city.

National Association of Colored People (NAACP): Civil rights organization founded in 1909 by a group that included W.E.B. DuBois and Ida B. Wells. Its mission is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination.

National Urban League: Civil rights organization founded in 1910 with the mission to help African Americans and others in underserved communities achieve their highest true social parity, economic self-reliance, power, and civil rights.

The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters: The first Black-led labor union founded in 1925 by A. Philip Randolph.

Committee on Negro Migration: Coalition of local organizations founded in 1917 that mapped and surveyed new residents in Philadelphia from 1922-1923.

Mercy Hospital: Founded in 1907 as the second Black-run hospital in Philadelphia. Merged with the first Black-run hospital in the city, Frederick Douglass Memorial Hospital and School for Nurses, in 1948. Closed permanently in 1973.

Traveler's Aid Society: Free service initially founded in 1851 to support settlers going west, women, and immigrants that were in need of support. With chapters emerging in many cities in the 20th century, it served many during the Great Migration.

New Negro Movement: The term “new negro,” popularized by Philadelphia’s Alain Locke, noted the movement taking place after Reconstruction by Black people leaving the South and becoming radicalized in their new cities.

Harlem Renaissance: A cultural boom between the 1920s and 1930s of art and intellectualism by Black people, many of whom had recently left the South.

Negro Motorists Green Book: Published by New York City mailman Victor Hugo Green from 1936 to 1967, the *Green Book* was a guide to assist Black people in traveling safely around the country. It listed accommodating hotels, gas stations, and restaurants.

Jack & Jill of America, Inc.: Mother-led youth organization founded in 1938 in Philadelphia by Marion Stubbs Thomas. It sought to provide social, cultural, and educational opportunities for youths between the ages of 2 and 19. Jack & Jill has over 200 chapters across the country.

Divine Nine: The National Pan-Hellenic Council, colloquially known as the “Divine Nine,” is the coordinated body of the nine historically Black fraternities and sororities. Members can either join during their undergraduate or postgraduate studies.

Sigma Pi Phi: Known as “the Boulé,” this men’s fraternal organization was founded in Philadelphia in 1904 by Henry McKee Minton, the former superintendent of Mercy Hospital. It is the oldest Black Greek letter graduate-level fraternity.

Greenbelt Knoll: First integrated residential development in Philadelphia in 1956, created by builder and developer Morris Milgram. Famous Black playwright Charles Fuller and Reverend Leon H. Sullivan resided there.

Reverend Leon H. Sullivan: Pan-African preacher and civil rights activist who served as longtime pastor of Zion Baptist Church. While on the board of General Motors, Sullivan urged GM to divest from South Africa until they ended apartheid.

Historically Black College or University (HBCU): Colleges and universities opened specifically for African American students before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. There are over 100 HBCUs in operation today. Pennsylvania is home of the first HBCU, Cheyney University, formerly known as the Institute for Colored Youth.

Full Transcript

Selena Bemak: Welcome back to *Resurrecting Voices: the Philadelphia Black Experience*, a podcast brought to you by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and funded by the Library of Congress. Founded in 1824, this year marks the 200th anniversary of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Since our founding, HSP has collected an astonishing array of documents that bring the people of the past into conversation with us today.

Alongside the collections at the Library of Congress, these records serve as the basis for this podcast. I'm your host, Selena Bemak, and I'm thrilled to be your guide as we embark on a journey through these narratives of 19th and 20th century Black Philadelphia. Join us and our guest speakers to uncover the stories, resilient voices, and vibrant culture that shaped this pivotal period in history.

Today we are joined by our guest speaker, Adrienne Whaley, genealogist Katy Bodenhorn-Barnes, and our project advisor, Stephanye Watts. Adrienne Whaley currently serves as director of education and community engagement at the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia. She earned her bachelor's degree in African American studies from Harvard University and her master's in education from the University of Pennsylvania.

Adrienne has previously served as curator of education and public programming at the African American Museum in Philadelphia. She has worked in both art and history museums and loves the potential for objects, artifacts, and primary source documents to enrich student learning experiences.

Adrienne is also a genealogist and formerly held the role of President of the African American Genealogy Group. So today we are talking about the Great Migration and the path to Philadelphia. And Adrienne, I know this is a topic dear to your heart as it is a part of your own family history.

Adrienne Whaley: Yes, absolutely. So like a lot of Black Philadelphians, my roots actually stretch way beyond Philadelphia, and they head all the way down south. On my mom's side of the family, her people are from D.C., but they actually got to D.C. from Georgia. So they moved up during the Great Migration in the 1930s. My great-grandfather, Noah Cooper, moved up to D.C. He worked a lot of odd jobs. He worked as a laborer, and eventually his family was able to come up and join him.

Then once they were settled, they would actually let his nieces come up to Washington, D.C. so that they could live with him while they studied and got an education and an opportunity that was a space that was brighter, that had more opportunity, that seemed to allow them to experience more of the world.

My dad is from Ohio, but his people, a lot of them are actually from Alabama, and some of the other ones are from South Carolina. The Alabamians actually came up following the coal mines and looking for steel mill jobs, and then my parents moved from both of their respective environments to Philadelphia, met in college, and that is how I ended up here. So it's a series of migrations.

Selena: Certainly a series of migrations, and it even sounds like some chain migration along the way with your uncle. Your family history is obviously one of thousands in this country. For anyone unfamiliar, let's start with a breakdown of the Great Migration so we can understand how it reshaped America.

Adrienne: Yeah, the Great Migration of people of African descent from the South up to the North, to the Midwest, and to the West is one of the greatest mass movements of people in this nation's history. We're talking about around 6 million people who leave the Black Belt. They're leaving states like Alabama, and Georgia, and South Carolina, and Texas, and Louisiana. And they're heading to cities like Philadelphia; and Newark, New Jersey; New York City; Detroit; Portland, Oregon; Pittsburgh; Chicago; Los Angeles; St. Louis; Boston; lots of other places.

The period of the Great Migration, depending on who you talk to, it starts around 1910. For places like Philadelphia, some people actually say that it started earlier in like the 1890s. Some people say that it starts around 1915 or '16 or '17, looking at World War I. And it stretches all the way up to a pretty recent time, up to 1970.

Now, there's a bit of a break in the middle. So imagine starting in like 1910, and then the Great Depression hits in 1929. And that really slows economic opportunities for folks and sort of freezes them in place. But when World War II begins, and there are industries that are really gearing up to produce everything that's needed in the United States and beyond for that, the Great Migration starts back up again.

So, why are people leaving? Well, they're doing this so that they can seek a better life. And we're going to dig into this story kind of deeply. But people are looking for better opportunities. These are folks who, not that long before the start of the Great Migration, had been enslaved, right? Slavery ends in 1865. And how much of life changes for these folks in the period immediately after that?

When the Great Migration starts, it's people thinking about "What are opportunities that we can take advantage of? How can we find better opportunities for ourselves? How can we find places of safety?" So we'll talk about that a lot. But you can imagine, a movement of 6 million people from the Black Belt, from the South, all across the Northeast, New England, the Midwest, and the West Coast. It's going to impact a lot about American life.

Selena: Let's talk more about migration, why people moved. What are the push and the pull factors, if we can be more specific about that?

Adrienne: Yeah, absolutely. So think about all of the restrictions that are placed on the lives, the experiences, the opportunities for decision-making of people of African descent leading up to 1865, right? So, think about all of the ways in which enslaved people, which the vast majority of people of African descent in this country were all the way up into that point in time. Think about what that experience is like. And then an entire war needs to be fought in our nation in order to end that circumstance.

There are lots of people in the South who do not want the lives and opportunities for people of African descent to change, to get any better after the war ends and after slavery is legally ended.

So what you find is that there are Black Codes that are put in place that really restrict opportunities for people of African descent to just do the basic functions in their lives, to have fair contracts, right? To be able to not be arrested for loitering because they choose not to spend every waking moment of their lives working. Their mobility, their ability to worship with different kinds of people, their ability to get an

education, their ability to have the sorts of jobs that they want to have, to be able to vote for representation in their local, and state, and national governments, all of that is being constrained.

Even when amendments to the Constitution are put in place, that stuff is still happening. Jim Crow laws get passed that continue to constrain basically every element of the lives of people of African descent. People want to be able to escape that.

There's also massive racial violence taking place in the South, whether we're talking about lynchings or racial riots that are targeted specifically against communities of African descent. So folks might've heard of like Red Summer, for example, in 1919. We're talking about anti-Black race riots that are taking place in Knoxville, Tennessee; in Elaine, Arkansas; in Texas; in Omaha, Nebraska; in Charleston, South Carolina.

And it actually stretches into the North as well. So places like Washington, D.C., Chicago, and East St. Louis in Illinois, you've got all of that taking place. So there's stuff happening both at the individual level that's meant oftentimes to scare Black people into not reaching for economic and political opportunity, as well as things happening at the community level when people see that there is too much success that is taking place. People sort of step up to try to find ways to destroy that, not only to limit the progress itself, but to scare people out of wanting to take any steps to assert themselves at all.

You also have things like natural disasters. The boll weevil sweeps the South, right? So think about cotton as a primary crop, and so economic sort of factor for the southern states. When the boll weevil comes through, it's destroying those cotton crops, which means that there's no money that's able to be made, and there's no work for people of African descent to do because of that.

[“Boll Weevil,” performed by Irvin “Gar Mouth” Lowry plays; Lomax, John A, Ruby T Lomax, Willie “Red Eye” Williams, and Irvin “Gar Mouth” Lowry. Boll Weevil. near Varner, Arkansas, 1939. Audio.
[https://www.loc.gov/item/lomaxbib000342/.](https://www.loc.gov/item/lomaxbib000342/)]

And this doesn't get a lot of attention unless you go looking for it, but there was actually a major flood of the Mississippi River in 1927. It impacted over a million Americans, over 10 states. Over 500,000 people of African descent were displaced, and over 200,000 of those folks ended up in refugee camps. So, that's a major moment in American history. It is literally a watershed moment and the water was not shedding fast enough, and it's displacing all of these human beings.

Katy: This is a good time too, even though we're talking about genealogy just as part of all this to know your local history though when you're researching your own family's role in these events.

Adrienne: Yes.

Katy: Like you've got to know when those floods were hitting you know the areas where your family lived if you're wanting to be able to answer those questions of motivation, which is what a lot of people are after.

Adrienne: Yes, yeah, for sure. It's not just about looking at the basic documents. It's about understanding what is happening in the specific place at the specific time that you are researching, for sure, which means that you will probably be discovering things about the economic structures that are changing in the region. So we're thinking about a time that is introducing even more mechanization to the sorts of work that

people of African descent were doing in the South, which means that there's going to be less and less opportunity for people of African descent to be doing the work that they had done before.

And then you take all of that, and you stir it all up, and you think about poor housing opportunities. You think about lack of educational opportunities when people want their children and for themselves to be able to get education so that they can have a better chance to move up in life. All of those sorts of things are pushing people out of the South.

Then you've got what people call "pull factors." People are thinking about the North because of its legacy of at least seeming to have less racism, seeming to be less involved in the slave trade. Although I think many of us know that the North is actually deeply involved in the slave trade.

But because slavery is abolished in the North well before it is in the South, people are looking at northern cities as places where they're not going to be as discriminated against. They're looking at these as places where they can better be themselves and seek chances for themselves, their children, their families, their communities to have a better life.

There are job opportunities that seem like they're going to pay better wages. At least one source says that Northern factory jobs paid on average three times as much over the course of a year as what working on a standard cotton farm or something like that would have paid a person of African descent.

Here in Philadelphia, there are shipyards. There is a massive sugar refinery industry. In fact, one of the largest sugar refineries in I believe the nation if not the world, Franklin Sugar was here in Philadelphia. But there's railroad jobs and all sorts of other things that are actually even advertising in the South and trying to recruit people to come up and work in those spaces.

This is all compounded by the fact that especially as World War I arises, European immigration is being limited, which means that the jobs that those immigrants would have taken are now open, and people desperately need bodies to fill those spaces.

There's the potential for better housing, for better educational opportunities. And like I mentioned, people are getting social encouragement. So folks who've moved up north, they're writing letters to newspapers, things like *The Crisis*, which is published by the NAACP, *The Chicago Defender*, which actually becomes such a factor in encouraging people of African descent to move from the South to the North that southerners are actually complaining about it and trying to keep it from entering southern cities.

They are writing story after story and publishing letter after letter from people who are now in the North who had been in the South who were talking about how much better life is up north. So people are getting that from members of their church communities who've already moved. Maybe a brother or a sister who's moved up to the Midwest, Chicago, to take a job. They're getting all of these, and it's encouraging them to maybe think about what could be possible in their own lives.

Selena: That's so incredible. So, I don't want to skip too far ahead, but something that you said resonated with me. Two of my favorite examples of people who came to Philadelphia by way of the Great Migration are jazz musicians, Dizzy Gillespie and John Coltrane.

Dizzy Gillespie was born in 1917 in Cheraw, South Carolina, which is a small town, less than maybe 5,000 people, and moved to Philadelphia in 1935 as an adolescent. And then John Coltrane, another jazz artist who came a little bit later, but both were really influential in the music scene in Philadelphia, was born in 1926 in Hamlet, North Carolina, moved to Philadelphia in 1943 when he was a teenager after graduating high school and took a job in a sugar refinery here. So I wonder if it's that same one you mentioned.

Adrienne: It might have been. Yeah. This is the story, right? So much of Black life and culture between like 1910 and 1970, it's this mix of people who are bringing traditions and stories and their culture from the South, and they're mixing it up with everything that's already existed in these northern cities to produce so much of what it is that we think of today when we think of jazz music, when we think about soul food, when we think about things like the Harlem Renaissance, which occurs in Harlem and in so many other places beyond that. All of this is like this great big mixture of communities.

And I actually think that's really important to mention, because when we think about the Great Migration to Philadelphia, Philadelphia already had a Black community that had long, and rich, and deep roots. So you actually end up in some circumstances where there's conflict between the quote unquote "Old Philadelphians" and then the migrants, because the Old Philadelphians have in many ways managed to establish themselves, and build institutions in the city. And now they've got this group of new people who are coming up, who maybe are not as familiar with ways of being and ways of doing and ways of thinking that a Northern city might demand. And so, there's cultural conflict.

And particularly when the Black community in some of these northern cities like Philadelphia has spent centuries negotiating the relationship with the surrounding white communities, to have another Black population come in actually starts to create these tensions because new tensions are arising with the white communities that are near them. So how are they going to negotiate all of that? How are they going to support? How are they going to figure out what collaboration looks like, but in ways that are not necessarily paternalistic, for lack of a better word.

And I'm not sure that Philadelphia got that right. As much benevolent work as was done, the sense that you see from primary source materials is that Black folks in the North wanted to teach migrants how to behave without necessarily recognizing the skills, the strengths, the expertise that they were bringing with them. But it's a really complicated situation, and I think that people were acting out of both a mixture of fear and benevolence together. It's complicated.

Stephanye Watts: Adrienne, as always, you cracked my skull. As much as we talk about, especially on this podcast and our everyday nerdy history, memory worker life, it's the first time I really thought about it that the families that were coming here in the 1900s were really walking into a 200-year-old Black community.

Adrienne: Yes.

Stephanye: I have chills now because I have a lot of things that I'm thinking about now and what you were talking about in regards to becoming acclimated, I'll say this in the PC way, acclimated to the ways of a northerner is really interesting. But I'm wondering, was there a difference in where these communities were living in Philadelphia at the time?

Adrienne: Ooh, that's a good question, because we know that the southern migrants were moving into North Philly, they're moving into South Philly, they're also moving into West Philadelphia. And I think some of it depended upon the means that the migrants had as they were coming up.

I think for a long time, the perception was that southern migrants were sort of like all the poorest of the poor and all the most rural of the rural. But one thing that Isabel Wilkerson talks about in her book, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, is that actually there were a number of southern migrants who were coming from more urban environments in the South who had more professional jobs and more professional skill sets. And so they might have been bringing some means with them to be able to move into what was like the garden neighborhoods of like a West Philadelphia.

We know that Philadelphia's older Black community had been really centered around like the South Street area of Philadelphia, what had in like the 18th century been known as like South work. But we know that other communities had been springing up in other areas. So I don't know exactly where everybody was spread out at this point in time, but they certainly would have been colliding in South Philly. There certainly would have been overlap in West Philly. And my belief would be in North Philly as well. Yeah.

Katy: Could you elaborate a little more on what kinds of people were coming up? Because obviously there were going to be a lot of the poor, rural agricultural workers, but you reference Isabel Wilkerson and I was thinking about her story, and part of that book, *The Warmth of Other Suns* is devoted to a doctor from Louisiana...

Adrienne: Yes! There are folks who've studied and trained and have specific skills, there are like reverends and preachers who are coming up, there are people who sort of know the ins and outs of being in an urban environment, it's just that they haven't been in a northern environment.

But especially if you reach back to like the early, early parts of the Great Migration, like the 1890s when folks are coming up from like, Maryland and Delaware into like specifically Philadelphia, there's a book called *Sparks from the Anvil of Oppression* that talks about sort of what are the different skill sets and experiences that those folks are bringing to the table. And so I think that if we're looking at it over the course of time, it's just a really big mixture.

And it also I think is regional. So, if we're thinking about, for example, the roots of the Great Migration. So folks who are ending up in Philadelphia are coming from Florida, they're coming from South and North Carolina, they're coming from Virginia, but the folks who are ending up in a place like Los Angeles or San Francisco, St. Louis, or Minneapolis, they're coming from Texas, they're coming from Louisiana, they're coming from Arkansas. So what are the skills and experiences that they would have had and brought with them from those locations to get to specifically places that are in the West?

I have to throw in, if you've ever read any of the Easy Rawlins stories by Walter Mosley, like *Devil in a Blue Dress*, that's a Great Migration story. Easy Rawlins and his friend Mouse, they're from Texas and Louisiana, and they end up in Los Angeles. And a lot of the members of their community who were in LA are also from Texas and Louisiana. So if you dig into some really good works of Black literature, you're going to see the Great Migration story popping up in those things.

But if we're thinking about migration routes, then for example, folks who are ending up in Chicago, or St. Louis, Cincinnati, Detroit, or Cleveland, they're coming from places like Mississippi, from Alabama, from Tennessee, from Kentucky. And so again, like how were their life experiences similar to or different from the people who might've been coming up from the Carolinas, or Florida, or Virginia, or from points further west? There's just so many different kinds of people mixed up in all of that, in terms of skills, economics, and so on.

Katy: So, I thought I read at one point, and this might also be from the same book, that at least some of the influence for how a lot of people ended up in Philly was that they were from these southern East Coast places, and that it might have actually just been tied to whatever the easiest rail line was to get up that kind of North to South connection there.

Adrienne: Especially since there were people in the South who were actively trying to limit people from leaving their towns. If you read newspapers, like there are literally articles that are criminalizing, like northern labor agents who are coming down south to try to recruit Black workers. Like I said, they're trying to keep certain newspapers from entering the South, because they know that it's going to influence the minds of these folks who rightfully are looking for better opportunities in the North.

So, what is going to be your easiest path? Are you going to be able to drive? Are you going to be able to take a train? Are you going to be able to catch a bus? Maybe actually what you're going to have to do is catch a boat, which if you think about along the East Coast, you know, that's a thing. If you're close to the water in Georgia or something like that, maybe you're heading to Baltimore and then catching the train or something like that up to Philadelphia. Yeah.

Selena: We're going to take a quick break, but stay tuned, because when we come back, we'll dive into some of the records and where you can find your ancestors in these stories.

[Break]

Selena: Welcome back to Resurrecting Voices. We're here talking about the Great Migration with the great Adrienne Whaley. I'd love to talk more about the impact, Adrienne. This is a contemporary topic in terms of what we have been covering on this podcast so far. So can you break down for us some of the impact, specifically here in Philadelphia?

Adrienne: Yeah. We've got all of these people who are coming to Philadelphia. And let me just give you some numbers, because I think it's helpful to understand the scale of this. So, in 1890, there are about 39,000 Black folks in Philadelphia. By 1930, there are around 220,000 people of African descent in Philadelphia.

Selena: Wow.

Adrienne: By 1970, there were about 654,000 people of African descent. So just think about the scale of that change, moving into the city, bringing their language, bringing their food, bringing their music, bringing just their ways of being, bringing their religious practices, all of that.

All of that is coming into Philadelphia and it's meeting up not only with the Black community that's already here, but also with the diverse white community that's already here, and other folks who were also living here. So it's becoming this really interesting, not going to call it a melting pot, but it's at least a salad bowl of different peoples who are mixing together, right? And all of them are bringing their cultures, and identities, and all of these different things.

So what does that mean? At a base level, is the development of these African American communities all around the city. And part of that is, people just want to live near their friends and their family, right? And so, if you have folks who started a migration before you, they were the beginning end of that chain migration, you want to live near where they are so that you can maintain your relationships and build your community and be with folks that are comfortable to you.

But there are other factors at play here. For one thing, racial zoning is happening all across the United States. Racial zoning basically means that there were literal laws that were put in place that said that African Americans couldn't live or buy property in neighborhoods that were predominantly white, and vice versa. So white individuals could not live or buy property in neighborhoods that were predominantly African American.

That was legal until 1917, when the Supreme Court case ended that practice. So what happens immediately after that? Restrictive racial covenants are put in place in neighborhoods all across the nation. And what this means is that either at the neighborhood level or specifically in deeds, right? So property documents that we can all access. If you own a home, look at your deed and see if it says something about who can or cannot live in your home. So it might have been people of African descent. It might have been Eastern Europeans as well. It might have specifically mentioned that Jewish people were unwelcome in that property or in that neighborhood.

I've seen examples that talk about quote unquote "Mongolians," I think it said. So any group of people that were deemed racially, ethnically, or religiously undesirable that could be essentially written into either home or sort of unspoken, or maybe spoken, but unwritten neighborhood agreements. Those were in place from about 1917 to 1948 when they were made illegal by the Supreme Court.

But then there's redlining, which comes in play when we think about how loans are handled, and which neighborhoods lenders deem are going to be the riskiest areas for loans to not be repaid and made whole upon. So across the nation, we know that neighborhoods that were predominantly African American, those would be the only places essentially that people of African descent were able to live, because they couldn't get loans to live in other areas. There's a book that talks about this called *The Color of Law*, which is really, really interesting.

So what's happening, because of all of those processes, plus the desire to naturally want to live near people that you know and like, it's condensing Black communities into neighborhoods both in Philadelphia and in lots of these other places like, you know, in Chicago, Bronzeville, in New York City, in Harlem, right? There are places like this all across the nation.

So you've got the development of Black neighborhoods, which in turn allows for all sorts of other forms of culture to really be growing and developing. So we talked about Dizzy Gillespie and John Coltrane. So

think about the blues music of the South coming up and meeting some of the musical traditions of the North, and how all of that turns into its own interesting soup of new music.

Think about the storytelling traditions that come from the South and mix with some of the stories and experiences of new lives and lifestyles in the North. All of that is happening and is resulting in an explosion of poetry, and literary works, and all sorts of things like that.

It's also creating opportunities for self-help organizations, because people are seeing who needs help, in what ways they need help, why they need help, and thinking about how they can create the circumstances to help themselves when people and organizations outside of their communities are unwilling to do so.

So think about like the NAACP. They're founded in 1909 in New York City. Think about the National Urban League. They're founded in 1910 in New York City, and they actually are a consortium of three different organizations, one of which was specifically for the protection of Black women who were arriving in New York City from places like the South. Think about something like the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, they're founded in 1925. All of these organizations are coming up and they're responding both to struggles that are happening in the South, and also the struggles and situations that migrants are facing in northern communities.

In Philadelphia specifically, for example, the Committee on Negro Migration was formed in 1917. It included folks from the Philadelphia Housing Authority. It included people from Mercy Hospital. It included representatives of Black churches, folks from the Travelers Aid Society, right? So all the sorts of people that would be encountering these new migrants who were coming from the South and who would be experiencing their need for housing, for well-paying jobs, for healthcare, and all sorts of things like that.

And all of this is energizing people. It's creating this moment in time where people feel like so much is possible. So when people talk about the New Negro Movement, when people talk about the Harlem Renaissance, which is in all of these major cities, not just in Harlem, in New York City, they're talking about this moment of possibility, this feeling of opportunity that's coming from folks who are turning the page from enslavement. They're trying to turn the page from Black Codes, and from Jim Crow, and live these new and interesting life experiences.

This is also the moment, by the way, that the Negro Motorist Green Book starts being published in 1936, and it actually continues to be published until I believe 1966, because folks are thinking about, okay, what are the businesses, what are the organizations that are going to serve us that want our business? What are the places that it's going to be safe for us to stay at when we're traveling across the nation, either because we're migrating, or maybe because we're trying to visit family back home?

And even just like as folks who are living today, think about how many of your Black friends or Black community members spend part of their summer visiting a grandparent, right? Or how many of your friend's parents had that experience. That's a legacy of the Great Migration, going home, visiting the people that you left behind. Because that's the other thing we have to think about, is that for the 6 million people who moved out of the South, they left folks behind. And that's its own story.

Selena: We'll need a podcast episode just for that one.

Stephanye: Going back to this whole thing about class and this long-standing Black Philadelphia community, we had an organization called Jack and Jill that was founded here in Philadelphia in the 1930s. And it wasn't nine at the time, but the Black Greek Letter Organizations that were popping up around the country also had early chapters in Philadelphia as well.

So for anyone that's not familiar with the Divine Nine or Black Greek life, these are all fraternities and sororities that were founded mostly at historically Black colleges in the early 1900s. These were all organizations where founders were from Philadelphia, they established graduate chapters and undergraduate chapters here in Philadelphia.

Adrienne: The Boulé is founded here in Philadelphia. So many organizations.

Stephanye: Also, too, we have to talk a lot about how Philadelphia is at the epicenter of, you know, these kind of upper-class Black organizations, also political organizations. You know, we think about a lot of the churches here have been doing political work that we talked about on this podcast, since the 1800s, 1700s, honestly. Philadelphia was really at the epicenter of all of those things, historically.

Adrienne: Yes. Heavily.

Stephanye: Not to give us too much, but I think it might have been Michiko talking on her episode that said Black Philadelphia informs Black America in so many ways.

Adrienne: Yes. Absolutely.

Stephanye: So when you're talking about the impact I'm seeing— not because I'm a biased Philadelphian, but I'm seeing the ripple effect come out of our city.

Selena: That's a great point. And I don't want to get too off topic here, but something, something that you said, again resonated with me. When you're talking about housing—and this is more on the tail end of the period that you are referencing— but in the 1950s, from 1952 to 1957, a housing development called Greenbelt Knoll was created in Philadelphia by a man named Morris Milgram. It was the first planned racially integrated development in Philadelphia and one of the first in the United States, and it was intended to be integrated housing in the 50s. And it's still there. It's in the Northeast, a very quiet neighborhood off of Pennypack Park.

Morris Milgram, the man who developed it, was a white Jewish man from New York. That was just like his passion. And it just made me think of this moment too, where we're starting to see purposely planned integrated housing. It's not just occurring naturally, we're developing it. So that may or may not relate to what you're saying, but it just made me think of it.

Adrienne: I mean, I think it's definitely about how you meet a need. If you're having this many people move into a city, how are they intersecting with all of the other folks who are already there? And how are they going to have their basic needs met?

Selena: As an aside, the Morris Milgram papers are at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. But I will say, Reverend Leon Sullivan did live there at Greenbelt Knoll. And he's an interesting example of the Great

Migration having come from West Virginia, which is not so far away, but still. Far enough to be considered as part of the Great migration.

Adrienne: Far enough. Yes. Different life experience.

Selena: So jumping forward a little bit, now that we're in the 21st century, we might be seeing the Great Migration in reverse. Millennials in particular are heading back south, and I'm just wondering if either of you have any ideas whether you're noticing this, or wondering what's prompting the move, and what do you think is the future of Black settlement patterns?

Adrienne: There's a book from Ira Berlin that talks about four Great Migrations specific to people of African descent. And so one of them is from, it's the forced migration from Africa over to the colonies that become the United States. One of them is from basically the sort of East Coast, I believe, sort of into the interior, and then down into the South. And then it's from the South up to the North, and then from the North back down to the South.

But basically, historian Ira Berlin identifies four Great Migrations for people of African descent. The fourth one that he identifies is the one from the North back down to the South. So you've got these 6 million people who are moving from the Black Belt, from Texas and Louisiana, Alabama, North Carolina, all these different places. They end up in Chicago, and Baltimore, and Boston, and Portland, Oregon, and they're building these lives for themselves and trying to find better opportunities, et cetera, et cetera. And then they have kids. And then maybe those kids have kids.

And they see a couple of things. For one thing, living in cities can be hard. Living in cities can be nonstop busy. It can be crowded. It can be loud. It might feel like there's more crime, violent or otherwise, in those spaces. And you don't have as much access, easy access, to nature. And so, some folks start to look for places that don't have as much of that, places that feel calmer, places that feel closer to nature.

Living in cities can also be expensive, and it can be hard to find the kind of housing that you want. A lot of folks who are looking at this trend of especially younger folks moving back down south is a search for land. I think that what a lot of folks are also experiencing is that they've got ancestral connections in the South. And at a point in time when genealogical research is like, what, the fastest growing hobby maybe in the entire world, there are lots of people of African descent who are looking for connections to their ancestors, looking for connections to their roots. And some of our families still have land in the South.

And so I think that some folks are looking back and trying to build connections to those spaces and to the people who lived on that land before them, and to try to remember where they came from to better understand who they are today. So I think those are just some of the reasons that people are choosing to move back from the North down to the South. But Stephanye, I don't know, did I miss anything? Do you have other thoughts?

Stephanye: No, Adrienne, I think you nailed it. I will add, I noticed that a lot of the northern folks that went to HBCUs in the South remained in those cities, especially if it's like an Atlanta or a Charlotte. I went to college in 2003, and Atlanta was really bubbling at that time. And I remember Charlotte was like, trying her best, but you go to Charlotte now, it's a completely different city. It's bustling, it's busy and folks like, "Well, I went to Johnson C. Smith, I had a good time. I really love Charlotte, so I'm going to stay."

So I think a lot of the millennial HBCU graduates have just stayed at whatever city their school was in, and it just offers them something better than being at home. And you know, when you're in a city that's far away, you don't go home that much anyway, so wherever you're in school starts feeling more like home after a while.

I will also say too, that people want to slow down. And you can slow down in the South in a different way that you can't in a LA or Chicago and definitely in a New York or even a San Francisco. And with the pandemic, I think that really brought on for a lot of young people, like "I don't have to do this." I don't have to get up at 5 a.m. so I can be in this office at 8 a.m.

Adrienne: The rise and grind mentality.

Stephanye: Listen, and like working 80 hours because actually, now my job is completely remote so I can move somewhere else. I can be in the South. I can have a bigger house.

Adrienne: You can have chickens.

Stephanye: Yeah girl, have all those things. And a lot of geriatric millennials, as you were saying, have been sharing stories online about inheriting this land down south and being like, "Oh I'm this cool city slicker, but actually it would be interesting taking on this land that my family has for however many generations."

I actually have one friend, it's a whole, actually a crew of us that were all living in New York and have since moved back home. And you know, moving home used to be like shameful thing. Especially if you lived in New York, it's like, you don't move home, like what do you do after New York? You are able to create the life that you want, and when you leave New York, people feel you can't do that in another city.

I have a friend, she's originally from Columbia, South Carolina, and was living her best New York life after she went to NYU. And she recently moved back home and has this cool ranch with horses and donkeys, just living this very amazing life. And it's like, you can make space that you want. You have more space to create and dream in the South. And your industries aren't just relegated to LA or New York anymore. You can build those things in southern cities, who are looking for more industry so they can not lose all these young people who are from there who are running up to the North for jobs.

Again, your Charlottes, your Atlantas, your Nashvilles, your Memphis, any college town, obviously they're all booming and bustling, and younger folks are like, "Okay, I can stay here. It's not as country as I thought."

Adrienne: Yeah, it's the opportunity that people didn't have when they were leaving the South. It's been created now. It's a part of the New South, right? This space that is getting more progressive politically in a lot of different places.

Katy: I mean, we got Georgia as a swing state now, basically. Who knew? Lots of people knew, but you know, anyway.

Selena: We're going to take one more break for Bella, our audio technician's sake. And then when we come back, stick around to hear from our professional genealogist, Katy Bodenhorn-Barnes.

[Break]

Selena: All right, welcome back listeners. We have Katy Bodenhorn-Barnes and Adrienne Whaley here who are going to share with us ways that our audience can map their own ancestral migration stories.

Katy: God, where to even start? You mentioned earlier, we were talking about deeds when we were talking about covenants and stuff, so where do you get those deeds? Well, a lot of them are going to be at the city archives if your people were in Philly. But, if you've got land down south or in another state, a lot of those deeds have been digitized and they're on FamilySearch.org, which is free.

Adrienne: Can I tell you my favorite thing from Roots Tech? So for those of you listening who don't know what Roots Tech is, it's the largest genealogy conference in the United States and maybe, possibly in the world. They have an on-site version out in Utah, and then they also have it virtually. And it was the weekend at the very end of February, the beginning of March. And I attended virtually so that I could listen in to all the cool sessions.

One of the things that FamilySearch, the Church of Latter Day Saints, announced is full-text searching specifically for deeds and other land records, which may also include wills, I believe, so that you can literally just look for a name, a cluster of names, keywords. You didn't used to be able to do this, but now, listeners, you can do this and see if you can find some deeds on your family's properties, or just wills for family members who've passed away. And that can be looking in the northern cities that people migrated to, or it could be for the areas that people migrated from. Definitely worth checking out.

Katy: Yeah, and that can be critical because as you're saying, prior to this new development, usually wills and deeds were pretty much only searchable by the name of the person who wrote the will, or the people involved in the deed transactions.

But deeds will often go further into who are the neighbors? This property that you've got adjoins other people's property, like it's next door to John Jones and Robert Smith, or whoever. And that helps you kind of build an idea of what the neighborhood looked like and also determine if your people were the people that are being described in that document. Did your great-great-grandpa marry a girl from nearby? You know, it can be kind of difficult to trace families, so as much as possible, you want to be able to map those neighborhoods and understand who was living where at what time so you can differentiate between other people.

Adrienne: They're chock full of information for digging. What's your next favorite source?

Katy: With Great Migration as the theme, I think it will depend on whether you already know where your family came from or not. So the easy answer is going to be to start with the census, I think, because the census is pretty much always going to give the birthplace of each person, at least from 1870 onward.

One really simple strategy with using the census is to look at the birthplaces of the parents and then the birthplaces of their kids. So if you're noticing that there's a difference, then that can indicate that there was a move at some point. You can even determine based on the ages of the kids, doing that math, when they might have moved.

This is something I've encountered a lot in my research where, you know, if you've got a common name, for example, and you're trying to connect them from Philly down to Alabama, if you've got that common name, you want to have that timeline of knowing when they might have left Alabama, and when they might have shown up in Philly, or wherever it was they went. And that can help you again differentiate between other people in the area with the same name.

Adrienne: Yeah, absolutely. And I think what's so useful about the census is not only can you look and sort of try to understand that from the age of the kids, but you can also look at the gaps between the kids. And you can also think about, for the difference between maybe the younger children are born in a northern state, the older children are born in a southern state. Now think about, are there other records that might help you to get even more specific? Because the federal censuses are taken every 10 years. So what other records might exist in between?

And actually for some states, a fair number of states, there were other censuses that were taken. For example, I've got family in New Jersey, and they took census enumerations on the fives, right? So in between 1900 and 1910, there's a 1905. Between 1890 and 1900, there is an 1895, there's a 1915. So you can start to close these 10-year gaps and really narrow down when the event that you're looking for took place.

Katy: And those other records too can be really helpful in tracing if they went somewhere in between. So I researched a family once that came from Alabama and ended up settling in New York, but along the way, it turned out they'd made a pit stop for a couple of years in Ohio. And the only reason I knew that was because I ended up finding a marriage record in Ohio for the father of this family to a subsequent wife, and also the Ohio death certificate of a baby that they had together.

And it gave the birthplace of the second wife as this small town in Alabama where I suspected they had come from. And so even though that second wife was not, you know, my client's ancestor, that was still evidence that, okay, this is the same family from this little town in Alabama. And then they went to Ohio and here are the years that I know they were there before they ended up in New York. And so, with just these little pieces of data, you can really fill in a lot of a story.

Adrienne: I wonder if that was my family, because we had that movement from Alabama to Ohio, and then someone did end up in New York. So we'll talk about that.

Katy: This was actually a jazz musician too, so. Yeah.

Adrienne: Ooh, interesting. Well, vital records in general, I think, are just really helpful. So birth, marriage, and death records, because they're going to tell you, like a birth record is generally going to tell you where at least the mother was born, possibly the father as well. And you're going to get to see again that difference between parent and child, if that exists. Sometimes marriage records are just like, here's the bride, here's the groom, they both consent, that's it. But sometimes they provide a lot more information, especially the more recent marriage records.

Death certificates are often useful because they tell you where people were born in addition to the certificate being produced where the person died. They might also tell you where the person's remains are going to go. And sometimes, that is not in the city where the person passed away. And this happens in my family, where people actually get buried at the family cemetery in the South, even though they passed away in the North.

And it also gives you information about who the informant was, where's the informant living? Because that's going to give you some useful information as well, geographically.

Katy: Yep. And that leads into kind of a bigger strategic tip that I want to leave for listeners, which is that if you want to connect these family members, you've got to keep a broad kinship perspective, not just the nuclear family.

So you talked about having people back home that didn't come up north, for example, that you're going back down, you're visiting grandma and your cousins. And one of those people, one of those cousins might be an informant on a death certificate. That's another person that might be connected that could help you make sure you know who all of these different family members are, where they were located. You don't want to look at people in silos.

Adrienne: It's that, what is it, the FAN network? I think Elizabeth Shown Mills calls it friends, associates and neighbors, all of the members of the community. And those are folks who, if you're thinking about it, a chain migration during the Great Migration, it might not have been a family member that moved North first. It might have been a church member. It might have been someone that you went to school with. They are a part of that FAN network. Yeah.

Katy: And maybe your ancestor didn't leave good records about who their parents were, but it could be their cousin did, or one of their siblings, and you can then triangulate it from there. It's just a good strategy to have a lot of different data points to pick from.

Adrienne: Exactly. So this is random and you have to really, really dig for like a needle in a haystack with this. But oral histories are also spaces where you might be able to find information about your family. And if not about your family, then about the community that your family was a part of.

I always encourage people to see if for the time and the place that you are looking at, were there oral histories that were gathered that will help you to understand what that community looked like? It might not mention your great-grandmother, but it might talk a lot about the church that she attended. You know, it might not mention your great-uncle, but it might talk about the school that he and his siblings went to. And that's context, and that's really going to help you understand.

My favorite oral history source for thinking about the Great Migration are the WPA Slave Narratives. So we're talking 1930s, we're talking Great Depression, the government is trying to put out-of-work writers back to work. They assigned them to go out and to talk to people with all different kinds of life experiences.

And then the Born in Slavery Project, 2,300 narratives, oral histories with people who were born into slavery in like the 1850s, 1860s, who were being recorded talking about their lives. And in some cases,

these folks are also being photographed. There's around 500 photos that are associated with that project. Again, this is context. This is understanding the world.

The American Life Histories Project is separate from the Born in Slavery or the Slave Narratives Project. The American Life Histories Project, the documents for which are held by the Library of Congress, it includes around 2,900 documents that include interviews with Americans from all walks of life who are speaking to interviewers between the mid to late 1930s and the mid to late 1940s.

You can imagine, there are so many people living in the United States at this point in time that it would feel like you'd have to be very, very lucky to be able to find an interview that has to do with your own family member. I happen to be one of those very, very lucky people, because the brother of my great-great-grandfather, whose name was Rufus Littlejohn, his brother, Jilson Littlejohn, was interviewed for the American Life Histories project.

It's amazing because it gives me the names of some of his family members. It talks about his memories of his grandmother. It talks about an experience that he had when he and his family were still enslaved. And it helps me to confirm research that I had been doing for a number of years before I found this document.

It's also amazing because, at least to some extent, we know that sometimes these interviews, or maybe even often these interviews are mediated by the people who are recording and then writing out the interviews, but you get some sense of how he spoke, right? You get some sense of how he communicated.

And because of sort of the color of his life experiences, you really start to understand that this was more than just a name on a document. He was a real person. And thanks to him, my own direct ancestor also becomes even more of a real person as well.

Amazing. And lucky for me, it confirmed other research that I had already done. So it did not send me into a tailspin thinking, "Oh God, I've done the wrong thing for 10 years." Always nice when that happens.

Selena: Before we wrap, I do have a question. So we talk about federal census records and vital records, where are we finding those types of things? Where are we directing people to look for them?

Katy: The censuses are largely digitized online. You can get them at FamilySearch.org, which is free. You can get them on ancestry.com. You can get a lot on those big genealogy websites that we're all super familiar with. With vital records though, it depends on the state. So, for example, Pennsylvania has their birth and death certificates online. But other states may not, like Florida, for example, they'll give them to you, if you request them, but you've got to write them and send them a check for like 25 bucks, and then they'll mail it to you. So, you can get it, it's just not online.

And then there are other states like Mississippi that have a more hard and fast policy of, "Nope, these are not public record." And then even with states like Pennsylvania, there's blackout dates, so that means if the person died recently, then you may have more trouble accessing the record because of privacy laws. Generally speaking though, across most states, when we're talking 20th century, as long as the person died at least like a generation or so back, or you know, prior to the 1970s, '80s a lot of those records are more accessible now, but it just depends.

Adrienne: Yeah. Can I tell you one of my other favorite oral history sources since we're focusing in on Philadelphia? So number one, Temple University has two great physical repositories for information. Number one, the Blockson collection is amazing for African American life, history, and culture just in general. And then they also have the Urban Archives, which has lots of fascinating information about life in Philadelphia and just thinking about urban communities. But they also have these two really good digital projects. One of them is called Going North, and the other one is called the African American Migration to Philadelphia Oral Histories Project.

Check both of those out if you are interested in hearing and reading the experiences of real Philadelphians who either migrated north from the South or who were already in Philadelphia and who were experiencing the influx of migrants coming from the South. It'll give you a really interesting view of what the city was like.

And if you're listening and you're not from Philadelphia, just Google "oral histories," "Great Migration," and your city, or your county, or your state. And there is a pretty solid chance, especially if you were living in one of the northern cities that people migrated to, that you'll be able to find information.

But even if you are, let's say that you live in the South and you are descended from the people who stayed, check out places like UNC and other southern colleges and universities, because they have amazing oral history archives that focus on life in the South. And a part of life in the South in the 20th century is reckoning with the fact that 6 million people of African descent left.

Katy: Yeah, I think there's this misconception that with genealogy, everything you need is going to be in one place. You just pay one subscription fee, and you've got everything at your fingertips, and if it's not on there, it must not exist. And that's just not the case. You've got to be a detective. You've got to keep sleuthing, and talking to other researchers and experts, and be flexible. Be a good Googler.

Adrienne: Got to get out there and look. One of the other really interesting resources—and I'm actually working with a set of these right now—funeral programs for people in your family and for family friends, right? That friends, associates, and neighbors network. Because oftentimes in that life biography that talks about, you know, "This person was born on such and such a date and was called back by the Lord on such and such date..."

They tell you everything in between, including often "So and so and their family moved north to New York City in 1925, and so and so began working at blah, blah, blah, and changed to this church." That is such interesting information. And collecting funeral programs has become a project now of a number of different African American genealogical societies, African American museums, other community history museums, and universities.

And so, there are collections all across the United States that specifically focus on African American funeral programs that have anywhere from 100 to 500 to several thousand of them in their collections. And oftentimes, they're searchable either by name and/or by keyword. Just imagine what you might find if you put in the right search terms.

Selena: That's great. Do you have an example of an institution that does that?

Adrienne: I think that the International African American Museum down in Charleston, I believe that they are collecting funeral programs. In Augusta, Augusta or Atlanta in Georgia, there's an organization that's collecting them. There are some small African American history and genealogy organizations in New York, and up in like the Middle West and whatnot that are collecting them. I gave a presentation on researching Black women between 1900 and 1940, and the ridiculous amount of resources that exist that we just don't know about. I'm going to send you all of that info.

Selena: Yes, and we are going to include so many of those resources in our show notes, which has a full transcript and a resource guide. Thank you so much, Adrienne, for everything, for your time and your knowledge today.

Adrienne: Thank you for having me. This was fun. We had a lot of really interesting conversations on mic and off.

Selena: Thank you Katy and Stephanye for your time, and for the knowledge that you shared with us today.

A special thank you to Bella, our audio technician, and of course, the Library of Congress for bringing this project to life. If you are interested in learning more about what you heard today, please make a research appointment at HSP. You can come and physically hold and read some of these documents, sift through our archives yourself.

We're open to the public Tuesday through Friday. Make an appointment, submit questions to our librarians, and more at hsp.org. For updates on this podcast, as well as other fun HSP news and tidbits, follow us on social media @historicalpa. Thank you for tuning into this episode of *Resurrecting Voices: The Philadelphia Black Experience*.

Credits

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Boll Weevil,” performed by Irvin “Gar Mouth” Lowry and Willie “Red Eye”

Williams, provided by Library of Congress. Lomax, John A, Ruby T Lomax, Willie "Red Eye"

Williams, and Irvin "Gar Mouth" Lowry. Boll Weevil. near Varner, Arkansas, 1939. Audio.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/lomaxbib000342/>.

Additional audio clips sourced from freesound.org.

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