

# **Field Hollers and Freedom Songs: The Anthology**

Featuring the collected works from the Sweat Equity  
Investment in the Cotton Kingdom Symposium

Edited by

**C. Sade Turnipseed**

Khafre, Inc; Mississippi Valley State University

**Series in American History**



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-a Khafre, Inc production-

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In this body of research, we acknowledge the elders, who are still with us; and the ancestors who once sat in their log cabin/shotgun houses, surrounded by cotton fields, and imagined a brighter day not for themselves, but for their progeny. They may have been enslaved in America or just worked as though they were...and never officially thanked. This book honors the legacy of those people. This effort is not only to thank them for their survival strategies and visionary work, but also to make a deliberate effort to give them the dignity of proper research, respectful analysis, and truthful documentation.

I must, also and always, thank my parents Mr. Theodore Jim Turnipseed and Mrs. Bonnie Lou Thompson-Turnipseed the people who gave me the ability to appreciate the untold narratives about Mississippi, the Delta, and Cotton Pickers around the world. In addition, this anthology is in acknowledgement of the priceless investment made by my Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU) family, specifically Dr. Kathie Golden for her trust in me and the confidence of investing her personal time and effort in the completion of this book; and Jackson State University (JSU) Master of History Student Lauren Barksdale for her support in the editing of this work. My appreciation does indeed extend to all the beautiful unnamed and unknowable people, who for over 7000 years, spent their entire lives plowing, planting, and picking cotton around the world. A special shoutout to the contemporary people of Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, Brazil, China, Pakistan, India, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Mexico, Australia, and other cottonpickin' places.

I especially thank Drs. Carroll Van West, Louis Woods, Mary Hoffschwelle, and Thomas Bynum of Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), for planting and helping me to nurture the “seed” and the love I hold for African American studies. I truly appreciate their reassurance that my passion was worthy of a PhD in Public History. As a result of the focused work of my dissertation, the series of annual symposiums, the *Sweat Equity Investment in the Cotton Kingdom*, generated not only this book but a more informed audience within the state of Mississippi. I must also thank Dr. Constance Bland, Provost (former), MVSU for her unwavering support; and Dr. Donna Oliver, MVSU's first and only female president; as well as all subsequent Presidents: Drs. Alfred

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A proper thanks and appreciation is also extended to my legion of friends, and sponsors, most specifically: Mr. Ed Dwight, Helen Sims, Mrs. Linda Rule, Delridge LaVeon Hunter, Greer Smith, Shakia Bell, Robert Terrell, John McCall, Donell Maxie (whose face adorns the cover of this book), Sherill Morris-Francis, Cynthia Honore'-Collins, Curressia Brown, Al White, Dr. Richard Mushi, Dr Mario Azevedo, the Khafre, Inc team, Mississippi Humanities Council, Planters Bank, my students, and all the contributing authors for their generous support throughout this journey.

# Dedication



**Figure 0.1.** Sharecropper's house, Arkansas. Ben Shahn, Photographer. 1898-1969, Library of Congress, call # LC-USF33-006047-MI [P&P] circa 1935.

This body of research and reflections are dedicated to the elders and those wise ancestors who once lived in their log cabin, surrounded by cotton fields, dirt roads, ponds, and nearby woods. They sat on the porch and imagined a brighter day for themselves, and their progeny. They may have been enslaved workers who built America; but they were never fully respected, nor appreciated for their contributions. This anthology honors the legacy and historic work of those people. This effort is to thank them and to share their vision. This is a deliberate effort to give them the dignity of proper research, respectful analysis, truthful documentation, and scholarship about the things that made them

**HOLLER!**

This we offer as a sincere token honor and appreciation, because we hear you!



**THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO:**

Theodore Jim Turnipseed, Sr.

Ida Bell Wells-Barnett

Fannie Lou Hamer

Constance German Bland

Rochelle (Shelley) Norris

And, of course

Grandmama'nem ...



## Preface

Southern identity in America grounded its beliefs in the notion that Whites/Europeans are inherently superior to Blacks/Africans and Indigenous Americans. Plantation owners and white supremacists' legalized the terror of Africans and others in America through "Black Codes" and Jim Crow policies. The victims were those who dared to claim their rights to freedom, justice, and equality; and, thereby, imposed violent tactics on melanated people throughout the world.

The contents of this anthology include essays, articles, lyric poetry, proverbs, speeches, slave narratives and proposals that reveal a tortured "cotton-pickin' spirit" embedded deep in America's soul ... "it makes you want to *holler!*" That spirit rendered in chants, yodels, and field hollers is also known as the Blues, Spirituals, Gospels, Jazz, Country, Soul, Hip-Hop music, and Freedom Songs. While the "soul of America" was born in the Antebellum South through the tearful occupation of planting, chopping, picking, and ginning cotton; rice, indigo, sugar cane, and tobacco too was brined within a system of enslavement, sharecropping, day labor, and international trade that provided America its foundational "greatness."

This collection of writings is selected from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Sweat Equity Investment in the Cotton Kingdom Symposium* that takes place annually within the revered chambers of one of America's youngest Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), The Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU). These Symposia became a platform for the old and new progressive, and dare I say "woke," voices in the American South. This book represents new voices, old screams, and the persistent hollers of people who once tilled, planted, picked, and spun cotton in the American South ... We heard you!





**TAMFOA BEBRE**

~The enemy will stew in his own juices~

Symbol of importance of learning from the past

*ADINKRA Symbols*

cultural codes and images of the Akan and Asante people of Ghana



# Introduction

Carroll Van West, PhD

*Middle Tennessee State University, Center for Historic Preservation*

Throughout the second decade of the twenty-first century, a group of scholars, community activists, government officials, musicians, storytellers, and heritage leaders gathered at Mississippi Valley State University, Itta Bena, Mississippi to hold the annual “Sweat Equity Investment in the Cotton Kingdom Symposium.” Originally organized by the non-profit Khafre, Inc., and the university, the symposium addresses both contemporary and historic issues facing residents of the Mississippi Delta. Preserving and celebrating culture is always at the forefront along with the recognition that culture and heritage are not only central to the region’s identity, but they are also central to the region’s future opportunity.

The annual gatherings are truly multi-disciplinary with historians, anthropologists, musicians, artists, writers, truth seekers, sociologists, geographers, and residents, long-term and recent, earnestly debating and exploring in open, creative forums. Be prepared to have your assumptions challenged, for the participants ask questions about what matters now, just not what happened in the past. What I have heard—and what you may gain from reading the different essays of this fascinating volume—is both simple, and profound: we have survived; we will decide. Control over what the Delta means, and can be, is now in the hands of those who built it, who lived it, and not just who owned it. The time of outsiders imposing meaning, history, and significance on the Delta is over. As a land owned most often by those who did little of the labor, the dominant narrative ignored, or at least demeaned, the value put into the land by the enslaved and the later sharecroppers and tenants. No more. Those with sweat equity in the land and its stories have stepped forth to reframe historical and cultural narratives. Foremost among these efforts is the public-private partnership to build a Cotton Pickers’ National Memorial in the heart of the Delta on the campus of Mississippi Valley State University. Here, finally, the labor, pain, and sacrifice of planting, keeping, and picking the crop that made the South profitable can be recognized, interpreted, and, most importantly, remembered. As Dr. Cassie Sade Turnipseed of Mississippi Valley State University asserts, “While the ‘soul

of America' was born in the Antebellum South through the tearful occupation of planting, chopping, picking and ginning cotton, rice, sugar, indigo and tobacco, it was brined within a system of enslavement, sharecropping and international trade that provided America its foundational 'greatness.'"

Exploring this legacy and reality--be it through carefully crafted history, or the recorded words of the slave narratives, or poetry, or songs, or sermons, or this collection a particular strength, a grounding in the messy truths of our region, and nation. Throughout these essays, the contributors insist: stop the lies, half-truths, and convenient tales, and tell the truth, finally, and for once. Such determination and frankness provide hope for all of us.

PAGES MISSING  
FROM THIS FREE SAMPLE

# Contributors

Authors who responded to the call for participation in the Annual Sweat  
Equity Investment in the Cotton Kingdom

**Betty Crawford** documents the truthful history of Mississippi's "New South," in recognition of the people who prospered from the cotton business and in honor of the cultural contributions of the people who planted, chopped, and picked it.

Crawford is a multi-faceted media visual artist, and native of the Mississippi Delta. Crawford has dedicated over 24 years of service to her community and is an advocate for the "Mule Train" project which was part of the 1968 Poor People's Campaign. For the past 19 years, Crawford also serves as a member of the Mule Train Historical Society.

Throughout her lifetime Crawford produced visual art that is at the forefront of cultural development in the Mississippi Delta, and throughout the country. Crawford has received numerous awards and recognitions, including a national recognition in the USA Congressional Records, honored by the Honorable Bennie G. Thompson, U.S. Representative for the State of Mississippi for her commitment to preserving the Mississippi Delta's rich history and heritage. As an artist, Crawford's mission is to educate, inspire and leave a significant legacy.

**Bro. Reginald Martin Crenshaw**, OHC, is a member of the Order of the Holy Cross. Currently, he is a member of the Congregational Development Volunteers in the Diocese of Toronto and serves as a parish selection coach and Appreciative Inquiry Coach. He is also a member of the Reconfiguration Team of the diocese. Brother is an anti-racist trainer and activist, a spiritual director, and a leadership development consultant for the diocese. He has also served as the Head of interim ministry in two parishes in this diocese. Since 1993, Br. Reginald has been a significant leader in the formation and implementation of antiracism programs and activities in three Dioceses: The Dioceses of Chicago, New York, and Toronto. His primary work has been as an educator. He has served as a teacher, Vice-Principal, and acting Principal in schools in New York City. He was an adjunct Professor of Theology for two years at New York Theological Seminary, teaching courses in Liberation Theology and Church History. He graduated with a BA in Latin American History with a Theology minor. He has an MA in Education with a specialty in Curriculum Development and a Doctorate from Columbia University in NY in the Fields of Religion and Education.

**Dr. Thomas J. Durant, Jr.**, a native of Mansfield, Louisiana, earned his bachelor's degree at Grambling State University, his master's degree at Tuskegee University, and his Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His professional career includes Professor of Sociology at Virginia State University and Professor of Sociology at Louisiana State University. He is a former Director of African and African American Studies at Louisiana State University. He is an author, entrepreneur, scholar, speaker, and community volunteer. He has published numerous articles in scholarly journals and received numerous academic and community service awards. He is currently Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Louisiana State University and Emeritus Professor of Urban Higher Education at Jackson State University.

**Maxine Fair** is a writer and poet from the Hill Country in Mississippi. Born and raised in the Cotton Fields of Choctaw County, Ms. Fair released her inaugural book of poetry "Country Girl," under the editorial guidance of Red Clay Publishing, in 2006.

**Skylar J. Hinton** was born in Indianapolis Indiana, but was raised in Greenville, Mississippi. He Graduated in 2017 from Leland High School, where he was an honor student and Mississippi Scholars. Skylar also Lettered in Football, and Baseball. He received a full Scholarship from Mississippi Valley State University majoring in Mass Communications. It was there he developed a passion for writing short stories and learning the History of his people. As a youth, Skylar was active in his community as a youth advocate and activist. Skylar believes, just like his mother, that the only true way to preserve life is to tell our stories and pass them on from one generation to the next. Skylar resides in Baytown, Texas, and is employed with Solutran, where he is one of the youngest team leaders.

**Dr. Howell** is the former Director of the Winterville Mounds in the Mississippi Delta near Greenville, Mississippi, a 12-mound Mississippian pre-Columbian Native American city of the Lower Mississippi River Valley. Dr. Howell was a working musician-composer based in New York City from 1982-2006 and was an active participant in the 'Downtown Music Scene'. During that time, he played guitar and/or trumpet with John Zorn, Don Cherry, Elliot Sharp, Yo Lo Tengo, The Fred Frith Guitar Quartet, and others, and composed for traditional and untraditional ensembles. His work is featured on over 50 LPs and/or CDs and he has toured extensively throughout Europe and North America.

**Delridge L. Hunter** has a Ph.D. in Africana Studies from the Union Institute and University in Cincinnati, Ohio. ABD Cornell University, MSCMH Northern Illinois University, AB Prairie View A&M University. He is Emeritus Professor of Integrative Studies in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Medgar Evers College, the City University of New York. His work centers on the paradigm he has developed over the past 40 years, called “Law of Position, a Position Theory.” His specialty is Black Popular Culture. His most recent published works are: 4 Works in Sage Encyclopedia of Africa American Heritage (2015), “The Blues Aesthetics”, “The African Heritage of Blues”, “Slave Culture and the Development of Black Popular Culture”, and “Sorrow Songs: An Early Form of the Blues”.

**Hermon Johnson, Sr.** is an expert on the historic black town of Mound Bayou, Mississippi. During the Civil Rights Movement, Johnson worked with many historic and important figures, including John Lewis and Julian Bond. He also had an occasion to meet secretly with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr in Mound Bayou. During the Emmett Till trial, Johnson was one of the drivers that drove Mamie Till and gained first-hand knowledge about the tragic event. Fannie Lou Hammer became a friend of the family, and Johnson and his children visited her regularly after his Saturday radio shows where he worked as one of the first black disc jockeys in Mississippi during the 1960s. Because of his work and association with these leaders, the Sovereign Commission and the FBI tracked him throughout the Movement.

After the Civil Rights Movement, Johnson focused on reviving and bringing economic development to historic Mound Bayou. He served as Alderman/Vice-Mayor for Mound Bayou for 30 years. He founded the Mound Bayou Development Corporation where he worked with the Coretta Scott King’s Corporation and started the Mound Bayou Brickcrete Factory. He scouted and found land for the establishment of Delta Health Center, the first rural health center in the country, bringing much needed medical services and jobs to the town and area.

After a devastating tornado destroyed areas around Inverness Mississippi in 1972, Johnson founded the Delta Housing and Development Corporation, which helped build houses and provide housing assistance to communities throughout the Mississippi Delta. Mr. Johnson co-founded a non-profit with his sons Hermon Jr. and Darryl, The Mound Bayou Movement, which continues to bring revitalization to the Mississippi Delta Area and Mound Bayou Mississippi in particular.

**Carla Keaton** received her degree in Painting and Physical Anthropology from Arizona State University in Tempe, AZ. Her artwork has been featured in galleries across the country. In January 2016, Carla was awarded the Artist Research and Development Grant from the Arizona Commission on the Arts, the State of Arizona, and the National Endowment of the Arts for her project, “The Sharecroppers and the Cotton Pickers of the Southwest.” Carla taught high school art and is a contact illustrator for the magazine, “Anthropology News”, as well as a children’s book illustrator. The owner of two art galleries in Arizona: “Gallery Serendipity” and “Keaton Fine Art: A Global Encounter” in Superior, Arizona, Carla has instructed paint night events since 2014.

**Marline A. Martin** is an artist, arts administrator, curator, writer, and storyteller. She holds Master of Fine Arts from the City College of New York and is a recipient of many awards including 2018 Mind-Builders Visionary Award, the 2017 Arts Mid-Hudson Individual Artist Award, the 2012 Zeta Phi Beta Community Partner Award and the 2008 Harlem Women of Excellence Award for the Arts.

**Dr. Richard Mushi** is Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Social Sciences at Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU). Dr. Mushi has acquired substantial experience in teaching, research, data analysis, program evaluation, and writing grants in public health problems and health disparities, environmental management, emergency evacuations, privatization, economic growth and human development, K-12 teaching, learning experiences, and most recently, rural-urban landscape and African American experiences. Dr. Mushi holds a Ph.D. in Public Administration, a master’s degree on Public Policy and Administration from Jackson State University, and a BA in Public Administration and International Relations from the University of Dar-es-Salaam in Tanzania.

**Olutimi James Osasona** is presently a Senior Planning, Research and Statistics Officer at the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Abuja, Nigeria. Until his present appointment, he has worked with the International Cultural Relations Department of the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, Abuja, Nigeria for over seven years, and is a recipient of 2021 Public Service Award of Outstanding Performance. He is a prolific writer and public speaker on subjects of Pan Africanism, public policy, and contemporary issues in Africa in relations to the Western States with the hopes of igniting the conscience and consciousness of all people of African descent to solving the African question and building a desirable and prosperous United States of Africa.

**Tanya Y. Price** is a cultural anthropologist and former Assistant Professor of Anthropology at North Carolina A&T State University, specializing in African Diaspora Cultures, public policy and race. She studied traditional African percussion extensively with the late Grandmaster of djembe, Mamady Keïta, and has played her djembe around the world. Currently, Dr. Price offers workshops and lessons in traditional African drumming, teaches at Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio and works with K-12 schools in the Greater Cincinnati area.

**Claudia Stack's** background includes a B.A. from St. John's College (1988) and an M.Ed. from Harvard University (1992). She worked for over twenty-five years in education, with a focus on at-risk and first-generation college students. Stack's publications include numerous articles on African American school history and on rural life. Her documentary films about historic African American schools have earned awards and were screened at the National Trust for Historic Preservation's conferences about Rosenwald schools in 2012 and 2015. They have also screened at film festivals, colleges, libraries, and many other venues. Stack completed "Sharecrop" and "Sharecrop: Delta Cotton" in Fall, 2017, documentaries that showcase the oral history of the South's "forgotten farmers."

**Clifton L. Taulbert** was born on the Mississippi Delta during the era of legal segregation where he completed his secondary education. Today Taulbert is the President and CEO of The Freemount Corporation (a human capital development company) serving clients nationally and internationally-Fortune 500 Companies, small businesses, federal agencies, professional organizations, community colleges, and K-12 leadership. Additionally, entrepreneur Taulbert is the President and CEO of Roots Java Coffee, an African American-owned national coffee brand, importing coffee from Africa. Taulbert shares his entrepreneurial journey with others as a Thrive15.com mentor.

**Dr. C. Sade Turnipseed** is an Assistant Professor of History at Jackson State University and an Adjunct Professor at the Mississippi Valley State University, both historically Black universities (HBCUs) located in Mississippi. Dr. Turnipseed is the executive director of Khafre, Inc., a 501 c3 non-profit organization based in the Mississippi Delta, whose mandate is to lead the international movement to erect a series of monuments and historical sites in honor of, and in dedication to, the legacy of cotton pickers and sharecroppers throughout the world; particularly in the Mississippi Delta AKA the Cotton Kingdom and other cotton producing countries.

**Brian Williams** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geosciences at Mississippi State University. Dr. Williams is a broadly trained human geographer whose work brings together political ecology, critical race scholarship, environmental justice, and agri-food geographies. His research traces the political, cultural, and ecological dimensions of agricultural and environmental change in the United States South. Focusing on the development and legacy of cotton plantation agriculture in the United States South, alongside rich histories of agrarian resistance and community development, his work examines the ideas about race and nature, which shape pesticide usage, the continuities between plantation agriculture and contemporary industrial agriculture, and the implications of Black geographies for contemporary agri-environmental justice.

**Golden Winter** (Robin White) is a graduate of Indiana University Northwest, with a BS in Criminal Justice and a master's degree from Union Institute and University in Social Issues, Leadership, and Public policy. Winter has a career of nearly 40 years in the National Park Service where she preserves, protects, interprets, and educates on the past and present of America's Civil Rights Movement. She served 10 years at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, where she began as a park aid and earned the titles of Urban Coordinator, Volunteer Coordinator, Junior Ranger Coordinator, and Weekend Supervisor. Winter served as Education Specialist at Petroglyph National Monument, and in 1992, she co-founded the Rites of Passage Program, an excellence in education, life skills, and leadership gang intervention and prevention program that still operates today. She has also served as the Chief of Interpretation at Brown v. Board of Education and as Education Specialist and Chief of Interpretation at New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park.

Dr. Turnipseed,

*You picked several extra rows on the behalf of our shared history.*

*I congratulate you for catching the truck on early mornings when others  
were asleep.*

*You are at the weigh-station for all of them and all of us.*

Sincere Congratulations,

Clifton Taulbert



**HOTEP!**