

Title of the paper: Alex Haley, As A Family Genealogist Who Traced His Roots From His Ancestors.

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Alex Haley, a famous biographer, novelist and a family genealogist of an American writer. His most popular novel *Roots* is published in the year 1976.

Roots: The Saga of An American Family, has 688 page fictional description of the genealogy of his family beginning with a kidnapped his ancestors of village Gambia. *Roots* covering seven generations, the story did not stop here. Alex Haley went two centuries back to find the trace of Kunta Kinte's roots existence. Haley did claim that his actual ancestor was identified as Kunta Kinte as per the Griot, the story teller.

Haley learns about his family from Cynthia and researched for twelve years about the genealogy. Haley learns that Gambia River tribes have oral historians called griots. He travels to Gambia to learn about his ancestor Kunta Kinte. At Gambia he meets a griot Kebba Kanji Fofana who narrates the family history of Kinte at Juffure. The griot informs Haley that Kinte clan was originally from Old Mali and then moved to Mauritania before settling at Gambia. One of the Kinte boys did disappear from an adjoining forest at the age of 16 and was never heard

again. Then Haley seeks the help of the ship insurance firm Lloyds in London about British ships stationed at Gambia in 1767.

Alex Haley is the most read African Author ever – The Autobiography of Malcolm X (Which he co-authored with the black nationalist leader) sold six million copies in its first decade, Roots sold the same number in its first year alone. What's the strange about the spiffiness towards Haley is that his impact was felt in literary fiction, as well as by the 130 million American people who viewed the original adaptation of Roots in 1977.

Haley did not intend to call his work as nonfiction but his publisher insisted. The book went up to the top of best sellers list. In the first year alone the book sold 6 million copies, whereas, his first work on Malcolm X took a decade to touch that number. Haley did not find it necessary to qualify his findings with requisite references. The references shown by him as research were found to be shaky and in some cases downright false. The griot himself was found to have given a dubious family history to please the Americans in attendance. The Toby record also was found to lack credibility. Added to these inconsistencies, the suit of plagiarism marred Haley's reputation. Henry Gates Jr did not include Roots in the canonical Norton Anthology of African American Writing. Having said all of these, Roots did succeed in showing that slavery is not just a massive suffering of a whole set of people but lives of individuals uprooted from their homes and made to suffer at the hands of their masters. The society did not consider it then as a wrong practice to own slaves or subjecting them to abuses and rightly Mark Twain noted that even the church condoned slavery as a permissible practice.

Alex Haley published the previous year, the Saga charts lives of six generations of Haley's family, starting with a putative 18th century ancestor in the Gambia, Kunta Kinte, who is enslaved and transported to America, and put slavery and Africa back on the agenda. Alex Haley has started that he most emotional moment of his life occurred on September 29, 1967, when he stood at the site in Annapolis, Maryland, where his ancestor had arrived from Africa in chains exactly 200 years before.

Alex Haley's flaws as a historian, however, are his gifts as a writer. Haley's praise-worthy accomplishment is similar to that of his distant ancestor Kairaba Kunta Kinte: summoning the power of myth in a heroic effort to make his land a place where it is possible to live. Alex Haley shapes the narrative of his family's genealogy into a commentary on the nature of historiography itself.

Haley's idealized Mandinka society is preferable to a society structured around trade in human chattel. The representation of the Madinka belief system in the opening chapters of *Roots* establishes the theme of alternative modes of historiography as a structural element of the narrative as well as Haley's genealogical project itself.

Alex Haley's *Roots* protagonist Kunta Kinte had suffered a lot as a slave, a common man, a former, in his life. Haley deeply portrayed the discrimination of the black people, who met the racial and social problems widely in their daily life. Kunta Kinte has asked many more questions to his grandmother Kairaba Kinte and his ancestors about the slavery systems.

Haley dedicates 200 pages to a masterful description of Gambia- a country where ritual, religion and rhythms of daily life are intermingled with concerns of famine and worries about "toubob" (white people). Haley's fully developed characters and descriptions of a country rich in cultural history did much to move writers away from the Eurocentric and stereotypical depictions of Africa previously offered by the likes of Joseph Conrad, and provided the backdrop for a novel intent on empowering black people and former slaves.

Kunta's journey on the slave ships to America is a hellish as one could possibly imagine. Haley describes Kunta shackled in a "night marsh bedlam of shrieking, weeping, praying and vomiting". Unsurprisingly his graphic depictions sent shockwaves around a white liberal leadership and provided an African American and black diaspora an education about the slave trade that text books in western schools missed out.

At the heart of the *Roots* lies a battle for individual autonomy, against slave owners, and then against an America intent on marginalizing black people. One of the ways in which Kunta is shown to retain his autonomy is through the passing on of stories to his descendants, who marvel in the tales of their African heritage. This tradition is shown to have a continued throughout the generations, to Haley himself.

Haley reveals the power of oral history, and the possibility of recovering identity against the odds. Perhaps most important reason for the success of *Roots* was simply that Haley believed, and his readers believed. Alex Haley brought his

own passion to his work. His readers thrilled because Haley's own heart raced when he found documentary evidence of his ancestors.

Roots will continue to be a cherished work and an important event, not because of its veracity or lack of it, but because when he heard of Kunta Kinte from the lips of the Gambian, its author broke into tears. If you really want to get cosmic, you might say that the whole concept of the global village started not with the World Wide Web but with Alex Haley.

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