

Legacies

A GUIDE FOR YOUNG BLACK WOMEN IN PLANNING THEIR FUTURE



BY CONSTANCE GIPSON AND HAZEL MAHONE, Ed.D.

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Vision 2000 Educational Foundation, Sacramento, California

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Hardcover edition: ISBN: 978-0-9897114-0-1

Paperback edition: ISBN: 978-0-9897114-1-8

First Edition

Book Designed Illustrated by: Debra Friday Scarpa with Design by Friday

Edited by: Dr. George King

Administrative Assistant: Leslie D. Earl

Administrative Assistant: Kim Lockhart

Front Cover Art By

Girl in a Red Dress. Laura Wheeler Waring, 1935, (1887-1948) 18"x 14" signed. Private Collection, Boston, MA.

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Published by

Vision 2000 Educational Foundation

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are deeply indebted to Em Johns Vaughn for her support and assistance in this project. Her voice is imbedded in the characters in this book. Her insight in the challenges that young women face in today's world made this book relevant to our target audience.

The authors wish to thank the many people and institutions who have contributed to this project. Our heartfelt thanks go to Marjorie Van Cura and the Michael Rosenfeld Gallery for the permission to use *Girl in a Red Dress* as our front cover. We are deeply appreciative of the assistance given to us by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

Grateful acknowledgement is made for permission to reproduce art work to the following: Jeff Zilm, Dallas Museum of Art; Thomas Whitehead, President, Cane River Art Corporation; Gitter Gallery; Corine Jennings, Kenkeleba Gallery; Jonathan Eaker, The Library of Congress; Kenneth Chandler and Tazwell Franklin, Mary McLeod Bethune Council House; John Benicewicz and Robin Stolfi, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Art Resources, Inc.; Marta Fodor, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Ida Jones and Joellen Elbashir, Moorland Spingard Research Center, Howard University; Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture; Stephen Saks, The New York Public Library; John Weingardt, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture; Edward Bray and Richard Sorenson, Smithsonian American Art Museum; Jackie Maman, The Art Institute of Chicago; Anita Duquette, Cian White, The Charles White Estate; Karen Fairbank, and The Whitney Museum of American Art, and VAGA; Mr. Leo Carty, St. Croix, artist, U. S. Virgin Islands; Monica Stewart, artist; and The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

We sincerely thank the following for their support and assistance in this project: Mari Evans, Doughtry Long and Sonia Sanchez, poets who gave permission to reprint their poems; Dr. Melba Boyd, Wayne State University and Phyllis Sherron for the Dudley Randall Estate; Harper Collins Publishers; Alicia M. Torello, Random House Publishers; Ms. Pat Thompson, Thompson & Thompson, Brooklyn, NY for the Countee Cullen Estate; Stacey Hayes and Robert Lockett, University of Georgia Press; Liveright Publishing Company; Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; Facts On File, New York, NY; Dr. Jonathan Earle, University of Kansas.



The three Marys of the African-American community represents the three cultures of African antiquity: Egypt, Benin and the Dogon of Mali.

*Starry Crown, 1987. John Thomas Biggers, American, 1924 - 2001. Acrylic and mixed media on Masonite.
Overall: 61 x 49 in. (1 m 54.94 cm x 124.46 cm). Dallas Museum of Art, Museum League Purchase Fund*

Introduction

To Young Women of African Descent

We hope this book will help you in discovering who your ancestors are and who you are. You are the descendants of an ancient people who lived on earth thousands of years ago. You are the descendants of women who led armies with vision, focus, and determination and who sat on thrones with strength and resilience. You carry within you the heritage of those who crossed deserts, savannahs, villages and oceans under horrific conditions. You are the legacies of people who survived the Middle Passage and came to the United States of America before waves of immigrants came to American shores. Others of you had ancestors who came later from Africa, Europe, or the Caribbean Islands. Whether the slave ship stopped in Barbados, Cape Verde, Trinidad, or South Carolina, you are the daughters of Africa. It is a heritage that includes resilience, fortitude, and perseverance that enabled ancestors to survive the slave coffles from the North to the South and the humiliations of Jim Crow.

Some of you have dark skin and some of you have skin that is very fair. Some of you have long straight hair and some of you have short curly hair. But you have a common heritage and are related to each other and must be rooted in blackness. You must never let people demean your ancestors and you must treat all your sisters with respect.

But we hope you will not be confined by blackness, nor let it define you. We hope you will not permit people to curtail your vision and activities because of their perceived ideas of blackness. You must take advantage of opportunities that were once closed to black people.

Legacies employs sixteen African Queens, nearly forty contemporary African American women, poems and artwork that we hope will assist you in self-realization and life guidance. We hope you will create a positive self-image derived from knowing that African American women are descendants of powerful women and empires that were notable in the world for their contributions, wealth, arts and intellect. New opportunities present themselves every day. The price has already been paid for you to enjoy the freedoms you have.

— *The Authors*

DID YOU KNOW?

The kingdom of Kush, located in what is now Sudan, was one of the most powerful black kingdoms in history. Kush was part of an area known as Nubia, a black country. Kush and Egypt traded with each other. Sometimes Egyptians bought or seized gold and cattle from Kush and they raided Nubia for slaves. Nubians were soldiers and police in Kush. It has been estimated that one quarter of Egypt's soldiers were black.

The Nubians had immense wealth. Their traders followed caravan routes and were said to bind their prisoners in gold chains. The first of the great Kushite rulers was Piye. His family ruled Egypt and Nubia from about 724 BC to 667 BC. The Nubians charged when they were middlemen for the Greeks and Romans. Their kings were buried with gold and ivory treasures. Taharqa was the most famous Nubian pharaoh. He was mentioned in the Bible in Kings and Esther. Taharqa constructed many temples before he was forced out in 664 BC by the Assyrians.

The histories of Egypt and Nubia are intertwined. Sometimes Egypt was the oppressor and Nubians were the oppressed. Sometimes it was the other way around. The Greeks and Romans were impressed with the wealth of the Nubians and their power. They called Nubia "Aethiopia"—Land of the Burnt Faces. Herodotus, the Greek historian, called the Nubians the "tallest and most handsome of men."

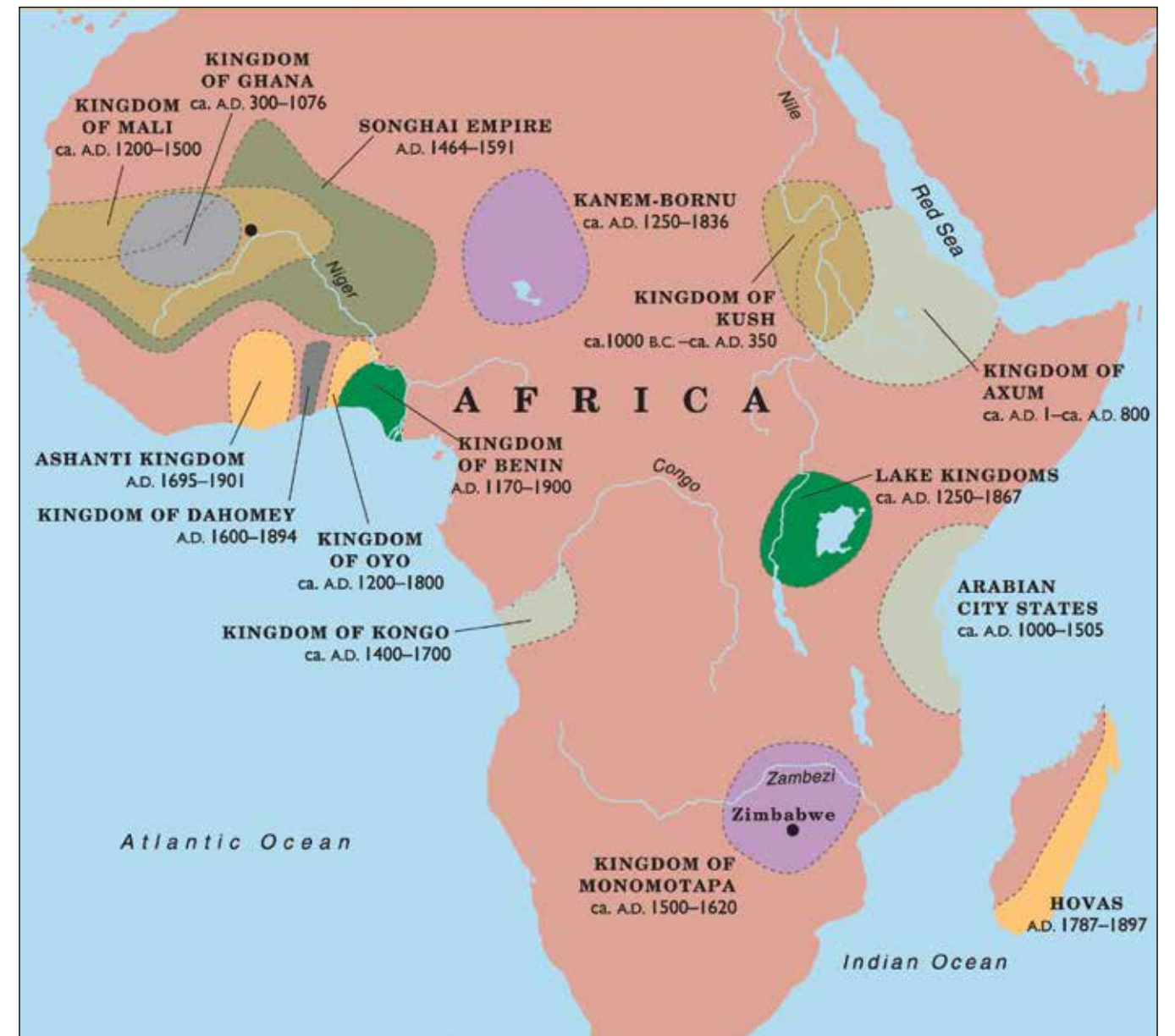
Nubia had enormous wealth due to their gold deposits. They were sophisticated and intelligent. They promoted the arts and were skilled in pottery and metalwork. Their language has never been deciphered. Egypt traded for incense, oils and perfume.

The Kushite queens helped decide who would be the next ruler. The next king was often the king's sisters son. Only through royal women could Nubians inherit the throne. The queens Amantore and Malakaye (6th century B.C) were well-known queens of Kush. They enjoyed banquets where they could enjoy music and dancers.

The Nile River played an enormous role in the histories of Egypt and Nubia. The Nile flows South to North. From June to September it floods the Nile Valley. It sometimes flows over big granite boulders forming rapids which are called cataracts. This made some parts of the river almost impassable and enabled the Egyptians and Nubians to stop any advances by enemy troops. The Nubian Kingdom was centered south of the third cataract. Their kings ruled northern Sudan and parts of Egypt. The Nubian rulers were impressive pharaohs. Their rule was called the twenty-fifth dynasty (730-656 BC). In 667 BC the Assyrians forced Taharqa to leave Egypt and Nubia was eventually defeated.

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MAP OF KINGDOMS OF AFRICA



*James Ciment. Kingdoms of Africa. ATLAS OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY.
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There are some acts of violence that are so terrible that they are iconic. The Assyrian massacre of the people of Thebes was such an act. Not only did they murder the people but they sacked the city and plundered the temples. This ended the Nubian rule of Egypt. The Aswan Dam flooded the ancient remains of Nubian culture between the First and Second Cataracts. Many Nubian artifacts were lost to civilization for all generations to come. The Aswan Dam created a lake that was 500 miles long. Another lake, the Merowe Lake at the fourth cataract provides electricity for the Nile Valley. But Nubians are protesting plans to build the Kajbar Dam north of Sudan which would inundate the whole Nubian culture and would destroy the Nubian heritage, land, and language.

EGO TRIPPING (*there may be a reason why*)

by Nikki Giovanni

I was born in the congo
I walked to the fertile crescent and built
the sphinx.
I designed a pyramid so tough that a star
that only glows every one hundred years falls
into the center giving divine perfect light
I am bad

I sat on the throne
drinking nectar with allah
I got hot and sent an ice age to europe
to cool my thirst
My oldest daughter is nefertiti
the tears from my birth pains
created the nile
I am a beautiful woman

I gazed on the forest and burned
out the sahara desert
with a packet of goat's meat
and a change of clothes

I crossed it in two hours
I am a gazelle so swift
so swift you can't catch me

For a birthday present when he was three
I gave my son hannibal an elephant
He gave me rome for mother's day
My strength flows ever on

My son noah built new/ark and
I stood proudly at the helm
as we sailed on a soft summer day
I turned myself into myself and was
jesus
men intone my loving name
All praises All praises,
I am the one who would save

I sowed diamonds in my back yard
My bowels deliver uranium
the filings from my fingernails are
semi-precious jewels
On a trip north,
I caught a cold and blew
My nose giving oil to the arab world
I am so hip even my errors are correct
I sailed west to reach east and had to round off
the earth as I went
The hair from my head thinned and gold was laid
across three continents

I am so perfect so divine so ethereal so surreal
I cannot be comprehended
except by my permission

I mean...I...can fly
like a bird in the sky...

*Ego Tripping. Nikki Giovanni. THE WOMEN AND THE MEN.
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GINGER BREAD MAMA

by Doughtry Long

i love you ginger bread mama
 ginger bread mama
 all sweet and brown

love you
 more than tired boys
 love collard greens and candied yams
 more than new watermelons
 do the sun.

before you,
 i was older
 and owned a sky of sleep
 and not even cowboy dreams
 were poets enough to wish me you.
 now in brownness warm
 everything is everything and
 our forms move in soft affirmations.
 trying not to wake up the sun.

*Gingerbread Mama. Doughtry Long.
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WHEN SUE WEARS RED

by Langston Hughes

When Susanna Jones wears red
 Her face is like an ancient cameo
 Turned brown by the ages.

Come with a blast of trumpets,
 Jesus!

When Susanna Jones wears red
 A queen from some time-dead Egyptian night
 Walks once again.

Blow trumpets, Jesus!

And the beauty of Susanna Jones in red
 Burns in my heart a love-fire sharp like pain

Sweet silver trumpets,
 Jesus!

*When Sue Wears Red. Langston Hughes. THE COLLECTED
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 edited by Arnold Rampersad with David Roessel, Associate
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*Girl in a Red Dress. Laura Wheeler Waring, 1935,
 (1887-1948) 18" x 14" signed.
 Private Collection, Boston, MA. Reproduction permitted by
 Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.*

NOTES TO PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Legacies is a career/life guidance book for African American girls and young women in grades 7-14. It will replace *Images* which was published by the California Department of Education. *Images* was purchased by school districts, parents, community based organizations and teachers throughout the nation. It was most effective when used by groups of girls led by an effective leader. The results included an increase in grade point averages, fewer dropouts, improved attendance, and a large drop in teen pregnancies.

Legacies, like *Images*, asks the following questions. Who Am I? Where Am I Going? And How do I Get There? In addition, *Legacies* assists teachers and students in meeting World History Standards. It assists black girls to see what their ancestors were doing in different times in world history. It introduces Central America, South America, and Europe. This book covers the many areas of Africa from which enslaved people were from, including Somalia, Kenya, the Sudan, Madagascar and Mozambique. Readers will hopefully be able to visualize their ancestors arriving from different parts of Africa and sent to different locations in the United States. One of the goals of *Legacies* is to strengthen the reader's knowledge of geography, particularly Africa, South America, the Caribbean and North America.

The format for the book leaves space for journaling and written responses by the reader. It is hoped that each reader will have her own personal copy. The privacy of each reader should be respected. This format worked well with young women who were in *Images* group, particularly those young women who were biracial, children of single parents, or who were foster children.

The achievement gap must include the issue of race. This book introduced a sizable number of ancestors who exemplify courage, responsibility, grace, and a number of other characteristics that are not typically associated with them and members of their family. This work may open doors to the kind of bold discourse that will help to eradicate the educational divide. It is equally important to bring this message to the African American community as a whole, because the support system to sustain students as they attempt to make the grade must come mainly from within that community.

— *Connie Gipson & Dr. Hazel Mahone*



*Homage to Black Women Poets, Elizabeth Catlett, 1984. Mahogany 69"x 15" x 13".
From the "The Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art" at Savannah College of Art and
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