

AN African-American Perspective

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Election Day is HERE!

vote!

November 2nd

Your golden opportunity to make your voice heard!

You are going to vote aren't you? Of course you are. there are some who don't want you to vote.

General Election will be held Tuesday, November 2nd. Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. Here are a few frequently asked questions:

Q: How do I find out if I am registered to vote?

A: By calling the Registration Office 570-327-2267.

Q: If I missed voting last year, am I still registered to vote?

A: Under the new Pennsylvania Voter Registration Act you can be purged from the registration list for not voting in 2 Federal Elections.

Q: How do I find out information about the candidates?

A: Listen or read what the news media has to report, more important go to the candidate debates or talk to the candidates personally. The Election Bureau will

never give out information concerning candidates view points.

Q: Why can I not vote in the primary if I am not registered as a Republican or Democrat?

A: Pennsylvania has what is called a closed Primary, which only allows Republicans and Democrats to vote for candidates. If there is a referendum on the ballot, all registered voters may vote for the referendum regardless of party affiliation.

Q: Why should I vote when it really doesn't mean anything?

A: Your vote is very important. There have been many candidates in Lycoming County that have won the election by one vote.

Q: In the November Election when I vote straight

party, may I also vote for a candidate of another party?

A: Yes, you may vote straight party and also vote for a candidate of another party. The tabulation system will count all of the straight party votes and for the office you voted for another party candidate, the system will not count the straight party vote, but will count the candidate of your choice.

Q: How old do I have to be to get registered to vote?

A: You have to be 18 years of age by the day of the ensuing election.

For information about your registration status please visit the website below:

<https://www.pavoterservices.state.pa.us/Pages/VoterRegistrationStatus.aspx>

The Living Legacy of Margaret Hagan

To understand where we are, we must recognize where we came from. For African-Americans peeling back the pages of their history in the United States is painful. Most black families had little to look upon with pride. Often stories of past generations were whispered in hushed tones of shame. We did not want to talk about the slavery times and the things we had to do to survive. For many black families their ancestors are unknown ghosts.

Occasionally, a story of an extraordinary individual or an act of incredible courage and defiance filters down from one generation to the next. The oral tradition acts as a family's buffer against the crushing weight of a hostile social system.

Sheila Gregory Thomas acquired such a story from relatives when she was a little girl. The story weaves across the eastern United States, briefly touching down in Williamsport. There are a few gaps, and some points of the story still need clarification but the history of Mrs. Thomas' family has allowed it to thrive for nearly 200 years.

Sheila Gregory Thomas' story starts with the incredible Margaret Hagan, the alleged granddaughter of the infamous Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, Roger B. Taney (pronounced Taw-nee).

Long before Taney was on the Supreme Court, he (according to the family lore) fathered a daughter by a Black woman (possibly a slave that he owned). His daughter named Jane or Serena, was a free woman but was bought (for marriage) by a man who was a visiting Prince from Madagascar named Jeremiah (Po) Mahamitt. Mr. Mahamitt sent word back home that he had taken a bride in the United States and his family disowned him.

Remaining in the U.S., Jeremiah Mahamitt raised race horses in Maryland. He and his wife had a daughter, Margaret. When Margaret was of sufficient age, she moved to Williamsport as a trained nurse and ultimately became a successful businesswoman. She operated an Electric Bath House at 581 East Third Street after the Civil War. She also lived in Eagles Mere for a while. The Daily Gazette and Bulletin on June 29, 1895 said of her, "Born in obscurity and reared in poverty during that period when her race was withering under the slave driver's whip, she had no opportunity of securing a complete portion of that which was being distributed among the more fortunate of earth, an education. Yet with a will born of deter-

mination, she commenced preparing to meet the battles of life, which her great strength of mind and natural skill has enabled her to triumph over thus far along the thorny paths time."

Margaret Hagan was known as a miracle healer. Hundreds were "given up to die by physicians have been cured and sent home rejoicing by Mrs. Hagan."

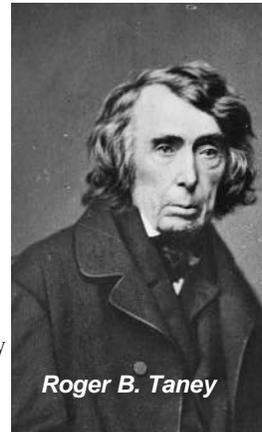
It wasn't easy for Mrs. Hagan during the early days as a nurse in Williamsport. She "found obstacles to contend with that she had not expected, chief among which, being the race she belong to. In her own words, 'colored people weren't in it in Williamsport at the time.'"

Sheila Gregory Thomas gives us a road map to present day, "It was during Grandma Hagan's years in Williamsport that my father, then a young boy, visited her frequently. He spent his summers at her mountain vacation home in Eagles Mere, Pennsylvania. My father related several Grandma Hagan stories to me during my childhood."

Margaret had married twice. From her marriage to Isiah Whiting (12/18/1850), she gave birth to Fannie Whiting who married James Monroe Gregory, a Howard University Professor and a biographer of Fredrick Douglass.

Monroe and Fannie had four children. Mrs. Thomas' father was the youngest sibling. According family records (W. Wilson Fall) Mrs. Thomas' father was a writer, an actor and an educator, "T.M. Gregory, well known writer for the CRISIS Magazine of the NAACP, former principal of Atlantic City High School, and activist in the New Negro Theater Movement. Gregory attended Harvard and graduated in 1910, the Director of the Drama Department at Howard University in Washington, D.C."

In 1918, T.M Gregory married Hugh Ella Hancock of Austin, Texas. Their offspring were writer/poet Yvonne (deceased), Thomas Montgomery, Jr. (deceased), Hugh Hancock (deceased), Eugene Chandler (deceased), Mignon (deceased), and writer/former television producer Sheila Gregory Thomas, who resides in Washington, D.C.



Roger B. Taney

Margaret Hagan came to Williamsport and became a successful businesswomen.

According to the family legend, Chief Justice Tawny was the grandfather of the black woman in the news clipping below.



Margaret Hagan



Col. Gregory is greeted by Amb. Rajonaorivelo of Madagascar.

BLACK HISTORY

Black Astronaut's African Roots Bring Him Acclaim In Republic Of Madagascar

The director of research for a celebrated Black family in the nation's capital found that almost two centuries of "oral history" and some last-minute negotiation paid off handsomely.

The end result was that her cousin, U.S. astronaut Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, the first Black American to command and pilot a spacecraft, was guest of honor at "Malagasy Day" for the country's 31st independence anniversary program in Bethesda, Md. And the year before, the colonel was picked by President George Bush to head the U.S. delegation to the country's 30th anniversary celebration in

For years, Sheila Gregory Thomas, delved into the history of her family with only the ba-

ries handed down from generation to generation. In the early 1920s, her great-great-great-grandfather came to the U.S. from the Indian Ocean country of Madagascar off Africa.

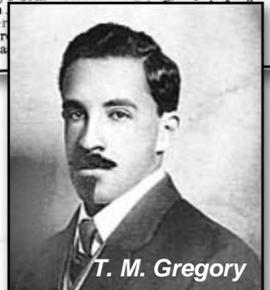
The family presence in the U.S. had been reinforced by her father, Thomas M. Gregory, an Atlantic City high school principal and later a Howard University English professor. A former TV producer and show host, Ms. Thomas talked so much about the family's historic links to the country that the exploits of the astronaut made him a hero in Africa.

It happened that the U.S. ambassador to Madagascar, Howard K. Walker, a Black Washingtonian, had heard about the family relationship and put the astronaut's name in the hopper for a visit. His appearance was front-page news for the entire country. The U.S. Information Agency further promoted the story.

A few years ago when Col. Gregory commanded the spacecraft, he photographed the topography of Madagascar and the pictures became valuable as heirlooms. He is scheduled to go again into space this November.

At the D.C. celebration, Madagascar Ambassador Piarrot J. Rajonaorivelo talked about the many Americans who have Malagasy ancestry, and noted that this was the first attempt to develop an ongoing relationship between the two groups. He also

Margaret's descendants include an astronaut and a writer for the NAACP.



T. M. Gregory



Margaret's great-granddaughter Sheila Gregory Thomas has visited Williamsport recently to do more research on her family.

Taney's Worst Judicial Decision.



Dred Scott

The Dred Scott decision of 1857 clarified the legal status of slaves in the United States. Some historians blame the Supreme Court's ruling that blacks were nothing more than property with the outbreak of the Civil War. The Supreme Court codified the long held notion that blacks were inferior to whites and had no legal status to petition the court for their rights.

In the case, U.S. Supreme Court, DRED SCOTT v. SANDFORD, 60 U.S. 393 (1856), DRED SCOTT, PLAINTIFF IN ERROR, v. JOHN F. A. SANDFORD., December Term, 1856

The basic ruling of the United States Supreme Court, announced by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, was that the framers of the Declaration of Independence were honorable men, therefore, when they held slaves while declaring universal human rights, they obviously could not have intended to include those of African descent, for that would have made them hypocrites rather than hon-

orable men. Taney found it was "just and lawful" to reduce the black man to slavery "for his own benefit." *Taney also pointed out that if blacks were citizens, they could do things protected by the Constitution, such as speak their mind, go as they please, and keep and carry arms wherever they went, which would produce "discontent and insubordination among them, and endangering the peace and safety of the State."* This is what the Honorable Justice Taney had to say:

"The words 'people of the United States' and 'citizens' are synonymous terms, and mean the same thing. They both



Chief Justice R. B. Taney

describe the political body who, according to our republican institutions, form the sovereignty, and who hold the power and conduct the Government through their representatives. They are what we familiarly call the 'sovereign people,' and every citizen is one of this people, and a constituent member of this sovereignty. The question before us is, whether the class of persons described in the plea in abatement compose a portion of this people, and are

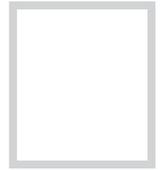
constituent members of this sovereignty? We think they are not, and that they are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word 'citizens' in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States. On the contrary, they were at that time considered as a subordinate [60 U.S. 393, 405] and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race, and, whether emancipated or not, yet remained subject to their authority, and had no rights or privileges but such as those who held the power and the Government might choose to grant them.

It is not the province of the court to decide upon the justice or injustice, the policy or impolicy, of these laws. The decision of that question belonged to the political or law-making power; to those who formed the sovereignty and framed the Constitution. The duty of the court is, to interpret the instrument they have framed, with the best lights we can obtain on the subject, and to administer it as we find it, according to its true intent and meaning when it was adopted."

The Supreme Court went on to say that blacks "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect."

Essentially, the Supreme Court of the United States said that blacks from Africa were inherently inferior. And whether free or not they had no rights under the U.S. Constitution.

(Note: There have been reports that Judge Taney fathered black children. It has been said that his black daughter settled in Williamsport, PA. -Editor.)



At the Movies: The Black Panther Story.



1960s was a time of social and political change around the world. Many colonial nations established their independence during the 60s, finding new political footing. Other nations experienced significant political strife. In the US, a battle raged between the government and burgeoning political groups advocating mostly for under-represented citizens. Among these groups the Black Panther Party (BPP), a political organization grounded in Black Nationalism and advocating for social change for African-Americans. Considered to be one of the most significant social, political and cultural movements in US history, the Black Panther Party was established in 1966 but was all but disbanded by the early 1970s. Today, many continue to wonder how such a strong political organization could have experienced such a rapid demise. While debate lingers today about what factors led to that demise, many former Panthers and others contend that it was solely the result of a government conspiracy.

From the mid-1950s throughout the 1960s accusations abounded about a covert FBI program bent on disrupting political organizations in the US. The disruptions ranged from the trivial (reprints of articles forwarded to college administrators) to the degrading (coloring books distributed by the FBI

in the name of BPP, advocating children to celebrate violence). Later, graver assertions arose: the FBI was feeding information to police departments which—knowingly and unknowingly—carried out assassination plots at its behest.

To many, these stories appeared circumspect and baseless, and the controversy went unnoticed. But the disturbances—aimed primarily at Black political organizations, most notably the Black Panther Party—continued and affected liberal and conservative organizations alike, from the Communist Party to the Ku Klux Klan. Only when activists broke into an FBI office in Media, Pennsylvania in 1971 was the truth confirmed about a secret program run by the FBI called COINTELPRO. Among the documents later discovered was a memo by the notoriously overzealous FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover, which said, “the purpose of the counterintelligence action is to disrupt the BPP and it is immaterial whether facts exist to substantiate the charge.”

The documents were damning and COINTELPRO was abandoned the same year. An investigation launched in 1976 by a subcommittee of the United States Senate, known as the Church Committee, concluded that, “the techniques [used by

the FBI] would be intolerable in a democratic society, even if all of the targets had been involved in violent activity, but COINTELPRO went far beyond that. . . .” Later, the committee deemed many of COINTELPRO’s actions to be illegal.

Today, opinions vary widely about how significantly the actions of COINTELPRO were in the demise of the BPP. Many blame COINTELPRO solely for creating distress and fomenting irreparable damage between community members and police. Others attribute the demise of the Panthers more to the strife within its ranks.

The fact remains that the assassination of BPP members like Bobby Hutton and Fred Hampton live on as examples of this tragic chapter in American history. Many believe today that as many as twenty BPP members were assassinated as part of the program, for which the FBI claims no part. The fact that Hoover and the FBI kept COINTELPRO hidden for so long only serves to foster plausibility in the conspiracy.

Night Catches Us

Written & Directed by Tanya Hamilton
Starring: Anthony Mackie, Kerry Washington
In Theaters December 3