



2-16-2018

## “Be Carefully Taught”: African Americans in Adams County in the 20th Century

Jennifer A. Simone  
*Gettysburg College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/compiler>

 Part of the [Military History Commons](#), [Public History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

**Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.**

---

Simone, Jennifer A., "“Be Carefully Taught”: African Americans in Adams County in the 20th Century" (2018). *The Gettysburg Compiler: On the Front Lines of History*. 262.  
<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/compiler/262>

This is the author's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/compiler/262>

This open access blog post is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact [cupola@gettysburg.edu](mailto:cupola@gettysburg.edu).

---

# “Be Carefully Taught”: African Americans in Adams County in the 20th Century

## **Abstract**

Every year over a million visitors flood Adams County, Pennsylvania to tour the famous, or rather infamous, site of the Battle of Gettysburg. While most visitors primarily come to Gettysburg to learn about the battle, many leave with understandings of the unending impact of the Civil War on race relations. However, for a town that sparks such a progressive mentality in some, Adams County, and specifically Gettysburg, is often criticized for being ‘frozen in time,’ unwilling to keep up with progressive race relations after the battle ended. A panel entitled “Black Experiences in Adams County in the 19th & 20th Centuries” sponsored by the Adams County Historical Society and the Gettysburg College History and Africana Studies departments, addressed the importance of remembering this African American story. The panel included Gettysburg College Professor Scott Hancock, author Peter Levy, and Adams County residents Darryl Jones and Jane Nutter. [excerpt]

## **Keywords**

Adams County, African American History, Black experience, Civil Rights Movement, Segregation

## **Disciplines**

History | Military History | Public History | United States History

## **Comments**

This blog post originally appeared in [The Gettysburg Compiler](#) and was created by students at Gettysburg College.

# THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

## ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

---

### “Be Carefully Taught”: African Americans in Adams County in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

By [\*Jennifer Simone '18\*](#)

Every year over a million visitors flood Adams County, Pennsylvania to tour the famous, or rather infamous, site of the Battle of Gettysburg. While most visitors primarily come to Gettysburg to learn about the battle, many leave with understandings of the unending impact of the Civil War on race relations. However, for a town that sparks such a progressive mentality in some, Adams County, and specifically Gettysburg, is often criticized for being ‘frozen in time,’ unwilling to keep up with progressive race relations after the battle ended. A panel entitled “Black Experiences in Adams County in the 19th & 20th Centuries” sponsored by the Adams County Historical Society and the Gettysburg College History and Africana Studies departments, addressed the importance of remembering this African American story. The panel included Gettysburg College Professor Scott Hancock, author Peter Levy, and Adams County residents Darryl Jones and Jane Nutter.



*Crowds gather to listen to the panel on February 6, leaving standing room only. Photo credit: Adams County Historical Society*

The Great Migration in the early 20th century shaped the nation as six million African Americans moved from the Southern United States to urban cities elsewhere. The experience of African Americans in Northern cities has been highly discussed in recent scholarship, yet often left unattended are rural areas like Adams County. More specifically, within Adams County, there is also a portion of the story left incomplete—the story of the African Americans who lived with the legacy of the Civil War years after the last shots were fired and the Gettysburg Address was delivered. In a town dedicated to preserving history, one will see acres of preserved land, hundreds of plaques, and over one thousand monuments placed throughout town; yet despite all of this preservation, hidden before the visitors' eyes are the black experiences in Adams County in the years following the war.

The goal of this panel was to paint a picture of what life was like for African Americans in Adams County in the 19th and 20th centuries since so much of it is lost to history with only oral tradition to keep the memories alive. Gettysburg College is dedicated to educating youth, and according to Jane Nutter, this is nothing new. She explained how 49 years ago, in 1969, she was sitting in a lecture by renowned African American anthropologist Dr. Louis E. King in the exact building she was currently speaking in. Growing up, she and other young, poor African Americans would come to the College to expand their understanding about what was going on in the world. She expressed immense gratitude for these opportunities and challenged the audience to use these experiences to become enlightened and then enlighten others as well. Remembering a quote she heard at that lecture 49 years ago, she warned the audience, “You’ve got to be carefully taught.”

You do have to be carefully taught. In a country where the 13th Amendment abolished slavery and the 14th Amendment guarantees equal protection, it seems that all is well. However, upon hearing the testimonies of African American Adams County residents Jones and Nutter, it became clear that the Civil War did not end the struggles within the African American community. Though Jones admits they ‘had it pretty good’ growing up, he and Nutter both recognized the racial inequality that shaped their lives. Segregation marked many aspects of their lives from residency to education.

Concerning residency, African Americans were restricted to living on certain streets, all in the ‘Third Ward’ of Gettysburg. If attempts were made to live outside of the Third Ward, requests were never granted, and it was no coincidence. Nutter explained that it is painful to know the truth, but so important. The truth is, though African Americans were no longer enslaved, most African Americans in Gettysburg in the 1950s did domestic work for white families. Nutter’s mother did so, but she always made it clear to Jane that “I may be a maid, but I’m not a servant.” African Americans often found themselves having to advocate for themselves and the rights that should be naturally endowed upon them, as for all people. Adams County was one of the last counties in the country to get food stamps, something highly ironic for an agricultural community. Though great quantities of food were produced in the area, it was not accessible to the poorer residents who did not have food stamps. They only received food stamps once

someone personally called officials concerning the issue. This delayed effort was largely due to resistance within the white community to food stamps, believing that they would be mostly for African Americans—an inaccurate assumption because most recipients were white.

When it came to education, there was also a delayed effort. York schools were only reintegrated in the 1950s, and though Jones and Nutter went to integrated schools, Civil Rights Era antipathy was evident. From resistance to being admitted into the gifted program to being discouraged from going to college, African Americans were often degraded by teachers and guidance counselors simply because they did not share the same color of skin. One's heart could not help but ache when hearing Nutter recall a story of high school homecoming. She celebrated, remembering how her friend Missy was the first black homecoming queen in her high school, but her face turned grim as she recalled that when the photographer came to take a picture of the homecoming queen he said "*you?*" when he saw Missy. She called upon the audience to imagine Missy being their child and the immense hurt they would feel. While African Americans were no longer enslaved as they once were before the Civil War, they were still enslaved in an unequal society.

The news is filled with stories of protesters fighting for Confederate monuments to stand, something Nutter found troubling since African American schools and churches have often been torn down in silence. It is no secret that the Civil War did not free African Americans from the chains of their past and we cannot change the past; however, by being informed today, we can shape the future. We, as intellectuals and concerned citizens, have a responsibility to take this knowledge with us and use it to shape the world. As Jones explained, this is not some noble mission. It is just being a decent person, and "I'm hoping that because you're in here [or reading this] that you are that already."