

# Roots by Alex Haley—a book to read to find out just what freedom means

We have black American friends who have no names. Their surnames are taken from the plantation "massas" who owned their ancestors. Slavery robbed millions of their freedom, but of their names, and their whole cultural tradition. Alex Haley is a black

American writer who was haunted by a name he'd heard in family legends. "The African," said his aged grandmother, "was called Kunta and once lived near the Kambay Bolongo." Haley traced the name to its roots, and found the key to his past. The result is an absolutely staggering book - *Roots* - which took

Haley twelve years to research and write. He estimates that he travelled half a million miles, pouring through microfilmed deeds and documents, interviewing African villagers, and cross-checking and verifying the scraps of family history that had been passed down to him orally.

In his passion for veracity, he booked passage on a freighter from Africa to America. Each night he slept below decks, lying on dunnage planking stripped to his underwear and tried to imagine the terror and misery experienced by Kunta, his great-great-great-great-grandfather as he and other

captives were taken as human cargo to the New World. In Annapolis, he found a microfilmed advertisement in antique typeface. "Just Imported...to be sold for cash...a cargo of choice, healthy slaves." One of those slaves was Kunta, oldest son of one of the oldest and best known

clans in Gambia. The resulting chronicle of seven generations of a black American family is compulsively readable. A beautifully reconstructed retelling of Kunta's boyhood reveals him as a member of a gentle, organized and civilized society where family ties were strong, and where the children

were educated to read and write, and to follow the Moslem religion. At 16, Kunta was abducted by slavers while he was in the forest cutting wood to make a drum for his younger brother. Desperate with fear and rage, he and hundreds of other captives were beaten, branded and shackled for

the horrendous crossing to the new world. The agony of the crossing is unforgettable. Kunta was auctioned off. Rebellious, he tried to escape four times, determined to return to his family in Africa. The fourth time, he was captured by "crackers" who gave him the choice of castration or am-

putation. He chose the latter and for the rest of his life, limped on one foot. His captors hacked the other one off with an axe. Although he was given the name of Toby, he clung to his African name, and stubbornly taught his daughter smatterings of African vocabulary.

His daughter was sold away, for the "sin" of learning to read and write. Her son, "Chicken" George, became a famous game-cock trainer and doggedly saved gambling profits to buy his freedom. By the time he had enough accumulated, he was coolly informed that the price of slaves had gone up, and hope of freedom vanished.

When emancipation came, George took his son and granddaughter along with a load of freed slaves to Tennessee.

The tiny granddaughter was Haley's grandmother. She continued the family tradition of telling the old story of Kunta who had been abducted by slavers.

These are the bare bones of the story, but the saga is so rich and detailed, so full of insight, irony and cruelty, that the reader emerges with a new view of that period of history.

In Juffure, the Gambian village where Kunta was born, it was traditional for a father to hold his newborn babe under the stars and whisper his name to him, before anyone else was told. Thus a child was the first to know who he was. Alex Haley, in this massive and very moving book has told 25 million black Americans who they are.

If you want to know something about what freedom really means, and about the in-dominability of the human spirit, read *Roots*. You'll never forget it.

*Roots*, by Alex Haley. Double day pub. 587 p.p. Price \$15.95.

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## Driving under suspension

**Suspended**  
A 25-year-old Midland man who drove while his license was suspended was fined \$150 in provincial court Thursday.

Paul Duval was stopped at 2:45 a.m. on October 5 by a police officer who discovered his license had been suspended for one year for careless driving in 1975.

Duval's attorney told the court the license had originally been suspended on October 1, 1975, and under normal circumstances would have been re-instated by the time of the offense in question. He pointed out that Duval had appealed the suspension, and that the suspension had not been in effect until the appeal was denied in January of 1976. His client, he said, had honestly believed the suspension was finished on October 1 of this year.

**Impaired**  
A 60-year-old Wyebridge man, whose car was struck by another vehicle on September 26 at 5:05 p.m. on County Road 23, was convicted in provincial court Thursday of impaired driving.

Police were called after the accident, and they noticed an odour of alcohol on the breath of Henry Forget. They also noticed he was unsteady on his feet, and subjected him to a breathalyzer test. The result was 160. Forget's attorney pointed out that the accident had not been his fault, and the judge fined him \$150, telling him it was a shame he had to have his first brush with the criminal law at the age of 60.

**Impaired**  
A 55-year-old Midland man was also fined \$150 in provincial court Thursday on a charge of impaired driving.

Oliver Lapensee pleaded guilty to the charge which arose out of an accident on Highway 27 at 4:00 p.m. October 6. Lapensee's vehicle struck another vehicle from behind, and investigating police noticed he was swaying on his feet. He was fined \$150 or 15 days in jail.

Your generous assistance during the YMCA campaign will be an investment in this community.