



## Resources and Recommendations for Black History Month

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Happy Black History Month! If you have not scheduled events and programs at your campuses or just want to learn more, please let me recommend several artistic and scholarly programs and endeavors that chronicle Black culture and history in post-Civil War United States.

As native or transplanted Texans, these historians, filmmakers, photographers, and choreographers touch lives each day through their scholarship, teaching, professional artistry, and activism.

One work, a brilliant twenty-minute film clip of a longer documentary that pays homage to emancipated freedom colonists and their descendants in Nacogdoches County, recognizes the integrity and hope of freedpeople following slavery's collapse.

Another documentary commemorates the genesis of the nation's most successful civil-rights organization in the history of the United States.

A Houston native and retired professional Broadway dancer brings to life on stage the cultural and political dialectics that covertly and overtly challenged White

supremacy during and after World War I, The New Negro Movement and Harlem Renaissance.

An award-winning filmmaker celebrates a successful neighborhood in Black Beaumont while remembering the race riot that prompted at least \$200,000 in property damage due to the leveling of businesses, churches, and one hundred Black-owned homes.

Myrtis Dightman, the first African American to desegregate the bull-riding sport in the United States and North America, at eighty-seven-years-old, attended the film premier of the film that chronicles his life. The film's executive producer, a native Louisianan living in Missouri City, has become part of the Dightman extended family.

And one award-winning scholar, a native Houstonian, hosts a weekly radio show that remembers the origins of rhythm and blues as well pontificates on its legacy in United States and world history. These excellent works and programs remind the world that African American history has and continues to inspire a world in need of inspiration.

If you do not know these extraordinary scholars and filmmakers, here is just a hint toward more about their scholarship and extraordinary work! Photographer and retired caseworker Richard Orton, the producer and director of *The Upshaws of County Line: An American Family*, highlights a family's determination to survive slavery, Reconstruction backlashes, and Jim Crow segregation. This film builds upon Mr. Orton's award-winning book that introduced the Upshaw family to the world through unforgettable photographs. Richard Orton is also on the board of the East Texas Historical Association. For more about Mr. Orton's work, go to <https://untpress.unt.edu/catalog/orton-upshaws-of-county-line/>.

Dr. Amilcar Shabazz, professor of Afro-American Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and the author of *Advancing Democracy: African Americans and the Struggle for Access and Equity in Higher Education in Texas* (UNC

Press, 2004), is one of the featured presenters in *The Niagara Movement: The Early Battle for Civil Rights*, produced by Buffalo Toronto Public Media. The exhilarating film discusses the events that propelled the establishment of the NAACP. Prof Shabazz, a native of Beaumont, is an award-winning scholar and the former president of the National Council for Black Studies. He is currently completing a biography of attorney and newspaper publisher Carter Wesley. Please show this film to your classes. Go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfEqTswP1Ro>.

Mr. Dwight Baxter began his career in the late 1970s in New York City. The son of a schoolteacher and a professional musician who played with the great Illinois Jacquet as well as other jazz giants, Dwight Baxter grew up in a community of artists and intellectuals in Fifth Ward, Houston. Beginning in high school he studied ballet at the Dance Theater of Harlem under the direction of choreographer Arthur Mitchell. He went on to graduate from CUNY with a BFA and went on to have a stellar career as one of the foremost African American dancers in the nation. His credits include Scott Joplin's *Tremonisha* (1976), *The Wiz* (1977), *The Last Dragon* (1984), *Cookie* (1989), and *Grind* (1985). Baxter retired in the 2000s and began a new career as a Houston-based choreographer, adjunct professor, and legislative aide. View his extraordinary body of work with [this search link](#).

Mr. Gordon Williams, the Lamar University Television Studios Operations Manager, a director, screenwriter, and producer, has produced two superb films, a documentary about Beaumont's first post-Civil War Black community and a brilliant docudrama. *They Will Talk About Us: The Charlton-Pollard Story* (2020) reminds audiences that even in the face of racial segregation and violence, African-descent Americans engaged in effective community building that transformed the lives of generations of Texans. The historical drama *The Example* examines the Beaumont Riot of 1943. Superbly produced, it recognizes the humanity and shortcomings in all the individuals involved in the tragedy. This drama is the first feature film about the riot. View his page at <https://www.gordonswilliams.com/>.

Dr. Gretchen Jackson-Odion, the producer of *Spurring Change: The Myrtis Dightman Story*, pays homage to the eighty-nine-year-old retired rodeo star from Crockett and his determination to succeed as a bull rider in Texas and North America. Currently a consultant on a new HBO feature film about the legendary Dightman, Prof Jackson-Odion has produced an inspiring story of hope, determination, and perseverance. She has produced four films in the last decade and has more on the horizon. Prof. Jackson-Odion is a professor of history at Houston Community College. [View her page at this link.](#)

The talented daughters of former city of Houston attorney and civil rights activist Gene Locke, represent the best of Houston, Texas. Novelist, screen writer, and television and film producer Attica Locke is a graduate of Northwestern University, School of Communications. Her screen writing credits include films with HBO, Disney, DreamWorks, Warner Bros, Paramount, Jerry Bruckheimer Films, and Twentieth Century Fox. Attica, named for the historic Attica prison rebellion of 1971, regularly produced episodes, along with wrote segments, for the popular series *Empire*. She won the 2018 Edgar Allen Poe Award for *Bluebird, Bluebird* (Mulhotland Books, 2017). The Edgar Allen Poe Society awards the prize annually for the best nonfiction, mystery fiction, television production, theatrical production, and film production published in the mystery subgenre of literature. Check out her page [at this link.](#)

Older sister Tembi Locke, an actor and film and television producer, earned her art history degree from Wesleyan University in Connecticut. An urban homesteader, runner, hiker, and social justice activist, the talented performer has appeared on television series, made-for-tv films, and in one feature film, including *Dumb and Dumber To* (2014) by Red Granite Pictures, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *Castle*, *The Jamie Foxx Show*, *Friends*, *House of Payne*, *The Mentalist*, and *Beverly Hills, 90210*. In 2022, Netflix aired the limited series, *From Scratch: A Memoir of Love*. Based on Tembi Locke's poignant memoir with the same name and published with Simon and Schuster, the autobiography tells the story of Locke's extraordinary love affair and life with first husband Rosario "Saro" Gullo, an Italian American chef

who died of cancer in 2012, as well as addresses the artist's grief. Actor and producer Reese Witherspoon and Margarette MacIntyre adapted the memoir for television. Actor Zoe Seldana played the starring role. View Tembi's page [at this link](#).

Finally, the brilliant Tyina Steptoe, the author of *Houston Bound: Culture and Color in a Jim Crow City* (University of California Press, 2015), is associate professor of history and the University of Arizona. Each Saturday afternoon Professor Steptoe hosts the radio show *Soul Stories*, bringing to life the blues and rhythm and blues music that inspired our parents and grandparents. You will find her Tucson show on KXCI (91.3). For details go to <https://kxci.org/programs/soul-stories/>. Professor Steptoe is currently completing a monograph on the history of queerness and rhythm and blues.

Please consider inviting these historians to your campuses, and introducing your students to their important works. You can contact these scholars and artists below.

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