The Matriarch: A Historical Review of the Life of Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf

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Abstract
Through reading *Warmth of other suns* by Isabel Wilkerson as a class project, I was introduced to the history of the Great Migration, the exodus of African Americans from the oppressive Jim Crow laws in the South. Learning about the personal experiences of individuals who took part in the Great Migration, and their inability to shed racism and oppression in the North and West, led me to a deeper understanding of the many social, economic, and political challenges faced by African American citizens. This understanding prompted in me an interest to learn more about the African American culture, in particular the multidimensional and evolving roles of African American women. Throughout history a plethora of African American artifacts and cultural information have been lost due to institutional neglect. Lack of education about the importance and process of preservation has been a contributing factor in this loss of cultural history. Researching and documenting the life of an African American woman, Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf, and her evolving role from orphan to matriarch is one step in rectifying the neglect that has resulted in the grave scarcity of African American historical material.

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Dr. Betty Brown-Chappell
THE MATRIARCH
A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF THE LIFE OF
ADA MAE WOODSON BROWN METCALF

By
Pamela Gesund

A Senior Thesis Project Submitted to the
Eastern Michigan University
Honors College
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation
with Honors in Social Work

Approved at Ypsilanti, Michigan, on this date April 9, 2012
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Abstract

Through reading *Warmth of other suns* by Isabel Wilkerson as a class project, I was introduced to the history of the Great Migration, the exodus of African Americans from the oppressive Jim Crow laws in the South. Learning about the personal experiences of individuals who took part in the Great Migration, and their inability to shed racism and oppression in the North and West, led me to a deeper understanding of the many social, economic, and political challenges faced by African American citizens. This understanding prompted in me an interest to learn more about the African American culture, in particular the multidimensional and evolving roles of African American women. Throughout history a plethora of African American artifacts and cultural information have been lost due to institutional neglect. Lack of education about the importance and process of preservation has been a contributing factor in this loss of cultural history. Researching and documenting the life of an African American woman, Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf, and her evolving role from orphan to matriarch is one step in rectifying the neglect that has resulted in the grave scarcity of African American historical material.
The Matriarch

Introduction

My research into the life of Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf, through the collection of historical data and family artifacts, has afforded me the opportunity to learn of the impact that one woman can have on generations to follow. In addition to discovering the evolving role of Mrs. Metcalf during her ninety-seven years and the influence she has had on her descendents, this qualitative study has raised my awareness to the importance and urgency of preserving the personal histories of African American individuals and their families. The collection and preservation of Mrs. Metcalf’s life history, with the creation of a training module to educate social work students about the importance of such preservation, will be a contribution to the enrichment of resources available pertaining to African American family histories. This archival project will be part of a larger project, the Brown-Chappell Archives, which is being developed for donation and display at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in early 2013.

Purpose of Study

My goal is to develop a teaching and learning module that will demonstrate how an African American family participated in the great migration from the south during the early 1900s and the concurrent evolving role of an aging African American woman. I hope to build upon my knowledge of the great migration gained from specific readings such as Warmth of Other Suns and compare this to the Brown family history, which I will trace in census documents and archival collections being prepared for the Wright
Museum. Thus, I look forward to gaining an understanding of how one family fits into a larger social event.

Method

I began this project by collecting from family records and through communications with Betty Brown-Chappell such pieces as photographs, artifacts, census reports, demographic historical data, and a letter from Mrs. Metcalf. Through time spent with the archivists employed at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, Michigan, I learned aspects of archival methods, including the importance of using materials free of acid, lignin, and Polyvinyl Chloride for the preservation of paper-based artifacts. Additionally, humidity, temperature, light, pollutants, and the natural oils in the skin can cause chemical reactions that accelerate deterioration. For this reason, all artifacts were handled with gloves and stored in archival approved containers in a moderate climate away from light. Before placing them in storage, I made digital copies of all documents and photos, digitally restoring the items that had already begun to deteriorate. While I used the basic archival methods that were taught to me, archiving is a profession that requires an in depth education in the standards and practices used to ensure the long-term preservation of historical records and artifacts.

After gathering archival and census data, I constructed a timeline to mark meaningful life events for the Brown family. (NOTE: I recorded dates for only one grandchild, Dr. Brown-Chappell, due to time constraints). I chose to include various world events into the timeline (Appendix I) to provide a focus on the life of Ada Mae in the context of evolving economical, political, and cultural events in the United States. Due to the nature of the information gathered for this report, my thesis advisor and I have agreed
that, except for direct quotes and specific facts, I will not use parenthetical citations for personal communications. Further, while it is inappropriate in the African American culture to refer to an elder by their first name, within the text of this paper, in concurrence with her granddaughter, Betty Brown-Chappell, I will refer to Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf hereafter as Ada Mae.

**History of Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf**

According to her obituary, Ada Mae Woodson was born in Owenton, Kentucky in 1888. She was the child of a black woman and a white man; purportedly her father was Jewish (B. Brown-Chappell, personal communication, February 15, 2012). Ada Mae was born approximately twenty-three years after the issuance of President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that “all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State [of the Confederate States of America that did not return to Union control by January 1, 1863] . . . shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free” (National Archives, 2012). When the Civil War ended in 1865, the Reconstruction (1865-1877) began with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which abolished slavery and involuntary servitude in all states. In 1865 and 1866, in response to the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment, numerous laws known as Black Codes were enacted in the states of the former Confederacy. These laws were enacted to control the social boundaries between whites and former slaves that had been removed. The ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, which granted equal protection and due process to anyone born in the U.S, and the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, which granted to all men the right to vote (National Archives, 2012) abolished the
Black Codes, yet many of the provisions would later be used to establish new oppressive laws in the South (Lynch, n.d.).

During the Reconstruction period, the people in the South were under the protection of northern troops. The federal government took control of the South, giving freed men the right to vote, marry, go to school, open businesses, and even run for office. When the North withdrew its protection at the end of the Reconstruction in 1877, those in power defied the new Amendments and repealed the African American’s right to vote. Southern state legislatures began developing and implementing informal and discriminatory legislation that would strip away each freedom and license that the Reconstruction era Amendments granted to Black citizens, even prohibiting casual and incidental contact between the races. These informal regulations would come to be called Jim Crow (Wilkerson, 2010) and would stay in effect from 1877 until the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Lynch, n.d.).

It is questionable whether Ada Mae’s conception between a black woman and a white man was the result of a consensual union, given that interracial unions in 1888 Kentucky violated Jim Crow. Jim Crow laws brought many other regulations that stripped from the black people of the South their dignity and former freedoms. In many Southern states, African Americans were forbidden to vote, to testify in court against a European American, or to ride the train where they chose. They could not disobey an order or leave a job without permission without the threat of being lynched. Black people were expected to step off the sidewalk when a white person was walking on it. And even though the Federal Civil Rights Act of 1875 outlawed segregation, there were separate
public restrooms, restaurants, doctor's waiting rooms, and even separate windows at the post office (Wilkerson, 2010).

Ada Mae was sent to and raised in an orphanage for unknown reasons. She is listed as a domestic servant for the Stafford family in Sweet Owen, Kentucky in the Twelfth Census of the United States (Appendix V) in the year 1900. This census lists her as being fourteen years of age. There is a discrepancy between the recorded age and birthplace of Ada Mae in the census and the date and place of birth listed on her obituary. According to her listed date of birth on the obituary, she would have been twelve at the time the census was taken. (Perhaps two years were added to her age in order to obtain the position.) The reason for the discrepancy between birthplace is yet unknown. According to Mrs. Metcalf's great granddaughter, Alea Brown, Ada Mae "recalled sleeping in the closet of one of the children's rooms at the Stafford home and eventually leaving because of the advances of one of the men there" (A. Brown via B. Brown-Chappell, personal communication, January 12, 2012). While it is noted in her obituary (Appendix IV) that Ada Mae attended public school in Owenton, the extent of her education is unknown. Upon reading a hand-written letter to her granddaughter, Betty Brown (Appendix III), I would suspect that her education was not extensive.

Based on information found on the obituary of her oldest son (Appendix IV), it appears that Ada Mae was sixteen-years-old when she gave birth to Harry Curtly Brown in 1904. Another discrepancy is discovered through information gathered. As indicated by Alea Brown, 1910 records state that Ada Mae had been married for eight years at the time, placing her marriage to Garfield Brown in 1902, though family recollection states that Ada Mae and Garfield were married the same year that Harry C. Brown was born (A.
Brown via B. Brown-Chappell, personal communication, January 12, 2012). Ada Mae and Garfield Brown produced a total of eight children. One child, Raymond, died in infancy. The date of his birth and death are unknown at this time. According to the Fourteenth Census of the United States (Appendix V), the birth order of their surviving children is as follows: Harry, Leroy, James, Goldie, Herbert, and Benjamin. Estella was not yet born.

Garfield Brown was a sharecropper in Kentucky. Many African Americans quickly became trapped in debt as landowners implemented a sharecropping system. Sharecropping emerged after the emancipation of African-American slaves. Without any land of their own, many blacks worked portions of land owned by whites for a share of the profit from the crops. The sharecropper would run a tab for the seed, food, and equipment they needed throughout the year, and when it came time to settle up after harvest, most times the landowner would tell the sharecropper that he either broke even or was even a few dollars short, creating a debt to be carried into the next year. As that deficit grew, the sharecropper found it impossible to escape from the situation. Sharecropping was considered to be the new form of slavery (Wilkerson, 2010). According to family, Garfield was not one to “put up with being shorted by the landowner when his crop came through” (B. Brown-Chappell, personal communication, February 15, 2012) so he moved his family often. The children were born in various cities in Kentucky due to Garfield’s difficulties with paying bills that he considered to be inaccurate (2012).

Allegedly, Garfield’s temper was not reserved for only those for whom he worked, but it also affected his wife. Garfield was physically abusive toward Ada Mae
Brown and those who showed her attention. Apparently, an unknown man (perhaps a gardener or other type of worker) was showing Ada Mae attention, which displeased Garfield. Garfield beat her and told her to stay inside the house. Feeling that this man was trying to “steal Ada away,” he shot and killed the man at the man’s place of business. Garfield was released on bail with money obtained through the mortgaging of his parents’ house. He and his family left Kentucky for Chicago, Illinois, where Garfield would begin using the alias, Tom Brown. In their hurried departure, the family accidentally left eighteen-year-old Harry Brown behind. Neighbors in Kentucky took up a collection to reunite Harry with his family in the North.

The family settled in Evanston, Illinois, a city near Chicago. Purportedly, they settled in Evanston because that was as far north as the train would travel. According to the mother of Betty Brown-Chappell, Clara Lucille Brown, Garfield continued his abuse. This abuse led to the separation of Ada Mae and Garfield Brown somewhere between 1945 and 1949. It is believed that, after the separation, Garfield shot at Ada Mae as she was returning from a “night out.” After the shooting, Garfield left the Chicago area and settled in Bangor, Michigan, purchasing sixty acres of farm land. Following the separation from Garfield, Ada Mae obtained employment as a servant to a white family near Evanston, Illinois. While the exact date of her employment is unknown, there is an understanding that the salary and circumstances for this type of work was much better in the North than it was in the South. Though separated from Garfield, Ada Mae never filed for divorce; she remained married to Garfield for the entirety of his life.

While Ada Mae was separated from Garfield, her son, Harry Brown, was earning money as a taxi cab driver. He soon realized that he could make more money if he owned
his own cab. His success in this venture allowed him the opportunity to start his own taxi
cab service, the West Side Cab Company. He hired his brothers and together they
experienced their first business success. Harry later learned barbering skills from an uncle
in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and soon opened a barbershop in Evanston. His shop did well,
which led to further business opportunities, including a barber and beauty shop and a
barbeque. The success of Harry Brown and his brothers allowed them to purchase an auto
repair shop at 1923 Hartrey in Evanston, Illinois. They then renovated the repair shop
into a home for their mother, Ada Mae. Granola Brown (who married Harry’s younger
brother, James) lived in a two-family flat next door and Harry and his wife occupied the
other flat. According to family records, Granola Brown is the widow of James at the time
of the repair shop purchase, placing the purchase of the shop as occurring some time
during or after World War II since James died of pneumonia during the war. Ada Mae
would reside at 1923 Hartrey until shortly before her death in 1985.

After the death of Garfield Brown (the date of his death is unknown at this time),
Ada Mae Brown met, and then married, Frank Metcalf. Family records show that they
married between 1957 and 1959. It appears that Ada Mae received a small settlement
from the sale of Mr. Brown’s estate with which she added a family room to her small
house in Evanston.

Family reports that she took great pride in keeping her home clean and orderly.
When her grandchildren came to visit, before the addition of the family room, they were
told to “sit perfectly still so we would not break anything. Relief came when the family
room was finally added to the home” (B. Brown-Chappell, personal communication,
February 15, 2012). Ada Mae’s dedication to cleanliness and orderliness can be observed
in the photos collected from members of the Brown family (Appendix II). Reportedly, her other areas of competence included ironing sheets, pillow cases, and table cloths. Ada Mae also possessed the talent of crocheting, a craft that she learned while she was living in the orphanage. She produced pieces such as pillows, camisoles, and doilies (Appendix III), many of which she used to decorate her home. Ada Mae had other interests as well. She loved tea so much (drinking five to six cups a day) that the family called her the “tea hound.” She also enjoyed flower gardening and watching wrestling matches on television. “I remember her watching these matches. She loved to smoke cigarettes, and so there she was with a cigarette in her hand and shouting for her favorite wrestler to win” (B. Brown-Chappell, personal communication, February 15, 2012). One of Ada Mae’s favorite pastimes was entertaining. Many of the items she used while entertaining her guests, items such as tea pots, cups, bowls, and even a crumber (Appendix III), were given to her by her white employers. She took great care of her belongings, using them only for special events.

Ada Mae worked the majority of her life as a servant and washer woman for white families in order to provide for her own family. She worked hard as a domestic servant into her eighties. Her granddaughter, Betty Brown-Chappell, recalls seeing her on several occasions walking to work. “She was close to eighty years of age and would walk three to four miles one way in orthopedic shoes to her employer’s home. Her shoes were worn, they were like blocks, yet she would make it to her employer’s house, which was three to four miles one way” (B. Brown-Chappell, personal communication, February 15, 2012). Perhaps it was because of her example that most of her children went on to become productive members of society.
Harry Brown was very successful. He founded and operated the first black-owned fleet of cabs, the West Side Cab Company in Evanston, Illinois. He went on to open a barber and beauty shop, and later, a barbeque. For a number of years he was the president of an African American social club, the Bachelors and Benedictts. This was a private social club that catered to the middle and upper class and paralleled the white social clubs in the area that prohibited Black membership. Harry also acted as president of the Twentieth Century Golf Club in Evanston, Illinois. During his term as the golf club’s president, he was featured in Jet Magazine presenting a trophy to Althea Gibson (the first African American woman to win at Wimbledon) for winning a golf tournament at the club (JET, 1961). Additionally, Harry served for a time as president of the Evanston Hospital Board and, according to the information on his obituary, was elected as the Mayor of Bronzeville, winning on the platform: “Help create jobs for colored men” (Appendix IV). He would go on to take ownership of approximately thirty-four pieces of real estate.

Meanwhile many of Harry’s siblings did well. Leroy Brown worked as a carpenter in Kerhonson, New York until his retirement. James Brown was working at the West Side Cab Company at the time of his death during World War II. Goldie Brown Hawkins worked at Harry’s Beauty Salon (owned by Harry Brown). Concurrently, she and her husband, Roosevelt Hawkins developed several rental properties. Herbert Brown served three years in the Army Air Corps during World War II; he would have likely been a mechanic given his lack of education past high school. Following his service in the military, he barbered at Harry’s Beauty Shop and worked at a factory. An accident in the factory required the amputation of Herbert’s lower arm. Benjamin Brown, the father
of Betty Brown-Chappell and youngest son of Ada Mae and Garfield, lived in rural Michigan and worked as a molder at Bohn Aluminum and Brass for over thirty years. He also owned his home and the prosperous Brown and Sons’ Blueberry Plantation for many years. Raymond Brown died in infancy, and Estella Brown died at the age of thirty-five from complication due to alcohol (Brown & Williams, 1995). A number of Ada Mae and Garfield Brown’s grandchildren and great grandchildren have gone on to earn degrees and have entered the professional world.

Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf passed away on September 2, 1985. In her ninety-seven years, she experienced life in the oppressive Jim Crow South, married an abusive sharecropper, was a participant in the Great Migration, and worked hard for white families in order to provide for her own family. Ada Mae began her journey as an orphan and servant and went on to produce one hundred and sixty-six direct descendents. It would take a woman of strength and resistance to walk in her shoes. Reflecting on the life of Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf, I view her as the epitome of a family matriarch.

**Limitations**

While I was successful in getting a substantial amount of history about the Brown family through census records, historical documents, and family collections, much of the information pertaining to Ada Mae Woodson Brown and her family has been lost due to neglect, deterioration, and faded memories. Some of the dates listed in the time line had to be estimated based on world events and documented family recollections. Further limitations include time restraints and lack of funding.
Conclusion and Implications

The more I discovered about Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf and her strong character, the more I thought about my own grandmother and of the similarities between the two women. My Grandmother was a young child when she moved with her family from Poland to Detroit in the earliest part of the twentieth century. She later married and gave birth to two sons, losing her youngest in his infancy. Shortly after the death of her son in the early 1930s, she lost her husband (my paternal grandfather) to tuberculosis and was left to raise her oldest (my father) on her own. The abovementioned events took place during the Great Depression, a time that was not easy for the majority of people in this country, yet my grandmother succeeded in providing for herself and her son through hard work and dedication. Family history and my own memories have left me with the impression that my grandmother was a strong woman. Ada Mae experienced some of the same circumstances as my grandmother did, but she also had the additional challenges of abuse and prejudice. Photos of Ada Mae depict a woman small in stature, yet I continue to envision her as a tall and tough woman. Even in the face of adversity, I am left with the impression that Ada Mae stood tall and proud. Based on the information I have regarding Ada Mae’s life and of the events she experienced throughout her life, I get even a greater sense of womanly strength.

Ada Mae’s relationship with Garfield Brown was an abusive one. By today’s standards she would have access to resources that would help her leave such a situation, but we have to recognize the marriage in the proper historical context. She was wed around the year 1903. At that time, women did not yet have the right to vote or to advance in education. Furthermore, a woman holding a lucrative career was almost non-
existent. The situations were much worse for Black women. Even though women won the right to vote in 1920 with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, oppression toward women was still present, and it would be years before discrimination based on gender and race would be outlawed (Barber, 1998). With that being said, the information that I have gathered brings me to the conclusion that Ada Mae was strong and independent in spirit.

Ada Mae managed to separate from Garfield between 1945 and 1949, a time when most women were stay-at-home wives and mothers. It was a time when women were not recognized outside of the home and were not afforded the opportunities that were given to men. Reflecting on Ada Mae’s strong character and her willingness to stay with a violent husband, I am under the impression that she withstood abuse in order to keep her family together. I feel comfortable in my belief that Ada Mae’s strength in character coupled with strong work ethics gave her the chance to break from this abusive relationship. I further believe that her hard work not only allowed her to gain independence, but also inspired her children to strive for success. My interpretations are based on the information I have gathered; however, it should be stated that this exploratory qualitative research does not provide reliable evidence that can be used to make definitive statements and conclusions.

Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf’s life history shows the impact that one person can make in this world. She worked hard for the majority of life without making a fortune. She did not have a lot in terms of finances, but she still portrayed elegance. Her possessions were important to her; enough so that the family has kept them protected years after her passing. Without proper preservation, her history could eventually be lost,
keeping future descendents from knowing the evolving role of this strong woman and the part she played in making them who they are today. Attempting to interpret the life of Ada Mae based on limited information was a challenge for me. In order to address some of the unanswered questions that arose during this study, I would need to locate more in-depth records and, after receiving Human Subjects clearance, interview family members. If time and funding permitted, I would contact as many of Ada Mae's descendents as possible. Further, I could access state and federal historical repositories.

Many might wonder why it is important to document the history of an individual such as Ada Mae. While studying the everyday life of Black people, W.E.B. DuBois wrote "We have the record of kings and gentlemen ad nauseam and in stupid detail; but of the common run of human beings, and particularly of the half or wholly submerged working group, the world has saved all too little of authentic record and tried to forget or ignore even the little saved" (Stewart). DuBois is stating that one need not be of royalty or of the esteemed male population in order to make an impact in this world. The personal histories of all individuals, including their challenges and achievements, play an important role in making this nation what it is today. Unfortunately, a great amount of information that illustrates the individual and collective efforts of women and men in building strong families and communities is at risk of being lost if it is not properly preserved.

As a consequence of both archival neglect and racial prejudice, many of the contributions made by African Americans are not recorded. Many history books neglect to show the depth of racism and oppression that has been present over the course of American history. The shared experiences of black American citizens fleeing the early
twentieth-century south and their inability to shed racism and prejudice in the North and West fueled the civil rights movements of 1964 and 1968. How many other personal experiences such as these have been or will be lost that could be used to bring about even greater transformation toward the betterment of race relations? There must be more education in the importance and methods of documentation and preservation. My hope is that social work students will see this project and realize that preservation of family history is not only a hobby, but an urgent necessity so as not to lose the rich history of those who could have a powerful impact on making this world a better place for all.
References


Appendix I

A Timeline of Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf's Life
Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf
Born: July 4, 1888 in Owenton, Kentucky

1888
- National Geographic Society founded.

- At the 1888 Republican National Convention (Chicago), Frederick Douglass becomes the first African American to receive a vote for President of the United States in a major party's roll call. (He received one vote on the fourth ballot.)

1889
- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is established

Grover Cleveland (D) serves as President of the United States from March 4, 1885 – March 4, 1889.

Benjamin Harrison (R) wins Electoral vote in 1888 election. He serves as President from March 4, 1889 – March 4, 1893.

Sixty-nine black Americans are known to have been lynched in 1888.
1890

- **The Women's Suffrage Groups Merge** – The nation's two largest women's organizations, the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Women's Suffrage Organization merged to form the National American Women's Suffrage Association. NAWSA was dedicated to obtaining the vote for women.

1891

- **Yellowstone Becomes First National Park** – A vast area of Wyoming and Colorado was set aside to become Yellowstone National Park. Yellowstone marked the first concrete action by the federal government to preserve parts of the western wilderness, which was rapidly being settled.

1892

- **Ellis IslandOpens** – The flood of immigration forced the federal government to open up a new center for immigrant processing in New York harbor.

- **Homer A Plessy** refuses to go to segregated railroad car (Plessy vs Ferguson)

- **University of Chicago** opens (October 1)
1890 - 1899

- World's Columbian Exposition opens in Chicago

- The Safety Appliance Act is passed - the first federal railroad statute to require safety equipment in the workplace (the law applied only to railroad equipment).

1896

- The Supreme Court of the United States hears the Plessy vs Ferguson case and holds the Louisiana segregation statute as constitutional.

1898

- African American Postmaster Frazier Baker and his infant daughter, Julia, are lynched in Lake City, South Carolina

Grover Cleveland (D) is inaugurated as 24th US President (his 2nd term). He serves as President from March 4, 1893 – March 4, 1897

William McKinley (R) is inaugurated as 25th US President. He serves from March 4, 1897 – Sept. 12, 1901
1900

- Census Record shows Ada Mae Woodson as 14-year-old house servant in Kentucky¹

1901

- President William McKinley is Assassinated (Shot on September 6 and dies September 12, 1901)

1903c

- Ada Mae Woodson marries Garfield Brown

1904

- Birth of Harry Curtly Brown (Oldest son of Ada Mae Woodson Brown and Garfield Brown) March 22

1906

- Birth of Leroy Brown (2⁰ son of Ada Mae Woodson Brown and Garfield Brown)

¹ Discrepancy between Ada Mae obituary and Twelfth Census Record of the United States
1900 – 1909

1908

- Birth of James Brown (3rd son of Ada Mae and Garfield Brown.) James died during World War II of natural causes.

- Henry Ford produces the first Model T. It was assembled at the Piquette Avenue Plant in Detroit on October 1, 1908.

1909

- The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organization formed to promote use of the courts to restore the legal rights of black Americans, is established on February 12.

- African American Matthew Henson and Admiral Robert Peary become first to reach the North Pole on April 6, 1909.
1910 – 1919
U.S. population: 93,402,151
Black population: 9,827,763

1910 • “The Crisis” magazine (the official publication of the NAACP, edited by W.E.B. DuBois) makes its debut on November 1, 1910

1910 • Segregated neighborhoods legalized by the City Council of Baltimore with the December 19, 1910 passage of the city ordinance designating the boundaries of black and white neighborhoods

1910 • Birth of Goldie Brown (1st Daughter of Ada Mae Woodson Brown and Garfield Brown)

1911 • The National Urban League (NUL) is established (October, 1911) in order to help African-Americans secure equal employment.
1910 – 1919

1912  • Woodrow Wilson is elected 28th President of the United States

1913  • Jubilee year celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation

• Harriet Tubman dies. Harriet Tubman (former slave, abolitionist, and freedom fighter) dies on March 10, 1913

• Federal segregation (April 11, 1913) The Wilson administration begins government-wide segregation of work places, rest rooms, and lunch rooms.

1914  • World War I begins in Europe

• Birth of Herbert Brown (4th son of Ada Mae Woodson Brown and Garfield Brown) 1914c
1915
• Booker T. Washington (renowned African American spokesman) dies on November 14, 1915.

1916
• Birth of Benjamin Franklin Brown (5th son of Ada Mae Woodson Brown and Garfield Brown)

1917
• America enters World War I on April 6, 1917. More than 370,000 African-Americans were in military service, with more than half serving in the French war zone.

• A race riot takes place July 1 – 3 in East. St. Louis, Illinois. (Becomes known as one of the bloodiest race riots in the nation's history.)

• NAACP protest (Thousands of African-Americans march down Manhattan's Fifth Avenue on July 28, protesting lynching, race riots, and the denial of rights.)

• The Supreme Court strikes down the Louisville, Kentucky ordinance mandating segregated neighborhoods.
1918 • World War I ends.

The widespread northern migration of African Americans (known as the Great Migration) began during WWI. By 1930 there would be 1,035,000 more black Americans in the North and 1,143,000 fewer black Americans in the South than in 1910. Much of the migration was due to the restrictive “Jim Crow” laws of the South. The Great Migration to the North would last into the 1970s.

1918 • The Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill is introduced to the United States Congress by Republican Congressman Leonidas C. Dyer of Missouri.

1919 • "Red Summer." Twenty-six race riots occur between the months of April and October throughout the nation.
1920 – 1929
U.S. population: 105,710,620
Black population: 10,463,131

1920
• Passage of the 19th amendment, affording women the right to vote.

• The beginning of the Harlem Renaissance

1920
• Birth of Estella Brown (youngest child of Ada Mae Woodson Brown and Garfield Brown)

1922c
• Ada Mae and Garfield Brown with children hurriedly migrate north to Evanston, Illinois. It is reported that Garfield killed a man in Kentucky, hence the swift move. Harry was accidentally left behind but is reunited with family through the help of family friends. (Personal correspondence from family member)

1922
• The Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill is prevented from passage due to filibuster by Southern white Democrats.

1923
• President Warren G. Harding dies on August 3, 1923. Vice President Calvin Coolidge succeeds him as President and serves until March 4, 1929.
1920 – 1929

1925  •  Malcolm X (Black Nationalist leader) is born on May 19, 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska

1926  •  Dr. Carter G. Woodson launches Negro History Week (The second week of February is chosen, between the birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln, evolving into Black History Month in 1976.)

•  A group of African American women are beaten by election officials while attempting to register to vote in Birmingham, Alabama

1928  •  Minnie Buckingham Harper becomes the first African-American woman to serve as a member of a state legislative body in the United States. She was appointed by Governor Howard Gore on January 10, 1928 to fill the unexpired term of her husband, E. Howard Harper.

1929  •  The Stock Market Crash of October, 1929 (known as the most devastating stock market crash in the history of the United States) signals the beginning of the Great Depression
1930 – 1939
U. S. Population 122,775,046
Black population: 11,891,143

1930  • The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching is founded in November 1930 in Atlanta, Georgia, by Jessie Daniel Ames

1931  • The “Scottsboro Boys” are arrested. Nine black teenagers are arrested for the alleged assault and rape of two white girls on the Southern Railroad freight run from Chattanooga to Memphis on March 24, 1931. The boys’ fight for justice spans two decades.

1935c  • Repair shop built, later to become a home for Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf in the 1940s. Ada Mae’s sons, following her separation from Garfield Brown, collectively purchase a small repair shop located at 1923 Hartrey Dr. in Evanston, Illinois and remodel it into a home for Ada Mae.

1935  • President Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act into law on August 15, 1935

1938  • Crystal Bird Fauset is elected to the Pennsylvania House on November 8, becoming the first African American woman state legislator

1939  • Germany starts World War II by invading Poland on September 1, 1939.
1940 – 1949
U. S. Population 131,669,275
Black population: 12,865,518

1940c • Benjamin Franklin Brown (youngest son of Ada Mae Woodson Brown and Garfield Brown) is voted “Best Dressed” in Evanston, IL

1941 • The Imperial Japanese Navy strikes the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on the morning of December 7, 1941

• The United States Congress declares war upon the Empire of Japan on December 8, 1941 in response to the attack on Pearl Harbor

1941–1944c • Herbert Brown (left) serves in the Air Force

• Herbert’s wife, Louise Brown (right). She is known by many as “Big Red”
1940 – 1949

1941 – 1944c  •  Benjamin F. Brown (left) serving aboard the USS Arkansas

1942  •  Race riot breaks out at the Sojourner Truth federal housing project in Detroit on February 28, 1942 after white picketers protested African-American families moving in.

1943  •  The Detroit Riot of 1943 (June 20 – June 21)

Twenty-five blacks and nine whites were killed in the violence. Of the twenty-five African Americans who died, seventeen were killed by the police. Of the nine whites who died, none were killed by the police.

1944  •  Recy Taylor is abducted and raped at gunpoint by seven white men in Abbeville, Alabama on September 3, 1944.
1945  •  On May 7, Germany surrenders to the Western Allies and the Soviet Union

• On September 2, 1945, Japan surrenders to the Allies, bringing an end to World War II.

1946  •  Betty Lou Williams (Granddaughter of Ada Mae Woodson and Garfield Brown) is born to Clara Lucille Williams & Benjamin Brown on November 21. Betty’s parents were not married at the time of her birth. They met before WWII at McDonald Douglas Aircraft Co. where her mother worked assembling planes and her father was a janitor. When her father returned from the war, they conceived Betty and left for California to escape the negative opinions of their family and friends in Evanston, IL who knew that Franklin Brown was still married at the time to another woman. Despite the circumstances, Lucille Williams’ older sister, Johnnie and her husband, Gene, welcomed the young couple into their San Francisco home.
1940 – 1949

1946 • The Shelley family challenges the racial property covenant in St. Louis, Missouri (a covenant in which building owners agreed not to sell to anyone other than a Caucasian) by purchasing property on Labadie Avenue (left). The restrictive covenant is upheld by the Missouri Supreme Court.

1948 • On May 3, 1948, the United States Supreme Court renders decision in favor of the Shelley family (regarding restrictive covenant) stating that racially restrictive covenants “cannot be enforced by courts since this would constitute state action denying due process of law in violation of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.”

1945 – 1949c • Garfield and Ada Mae separate. Garfield was an abusive husband and while separated, shot Ada Mae as she was returning from a night out. Garfield moved from the Chicago area to Bangor, Michigan. Ada Mae and Garfield remained legally married for the entirety of Garfield’s life.
1950 – 1959
U. S. Population 154,233,234
Black Population 15,042,286

1950 • Althea Gibson becomes the first African-American to compete at the U.S. National Tennis Championships at Forest Hills, New York on August 22nd

1950 • Korean War begins on June 25th

1951 • The NAACP assists Oliver Brown (whose daughter was denied entrance to a public elementary school due to segregation policies) by requesting an injunction that would forbid the segregation of Topeka's public schools. The U.S. District Court for the District of Kansas heard Brown's case from June 25-26, 1951. Upholding the 1896 decision in Plessy v. Ferguson, the court rules in favor of the Board of Education. Brown and the NAACP appeal to the Supreme Court on October 1, 1951

1952 • Malcolm X is appointed as a minister and national spokesman for the Nation of Islam.
1953 • The Korean War ends on July 27th

1954 • The Supreme Court rules in favor of the plaintiffs in the case of Brown v. Board of Education, requiring the desegregation of schools across America.

1955 • Fourteen-year-old Emmett Till (left) is brutally murdered for allegedly whistling at a white woman in Mississippi. Two white men charged with the crime are acquitted by an all-white jury. Coverage of the case acts as a catalyst to the civil rights movement. Till’s mother insisted on an open casket in order to show the world what was done to her son. (The photo of Emmett Till’s mother (right) was taken when her son’s casket arrived in Chicago, Till’s hometown.

1955 • The start of the Montgomery Bus Boycott (December 1st) after Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white passenger.
1950 – 1959

1955 • Estella Brown (youngest child of Ada Mae and Garfield Brown) passes away at the age of thirty-five from complications due to alcohol.

1956 • The United States Supreme court rules the Montgomery, Alabama segregation law as unconstitutional. Atherine Lucy Foster becomes the first African American to enroll in the University of Alabama.

1957 • The Arkansas National Guard is called in to prevent nine African American students – known as the “Little Rock Nine” – from entering Little Rock High School (now called Central High School).

1957 • Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and others form The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Dr. King is named President of the

1957 – 1959e • Ada Mae Woodson Brown marries Frank Metcalf
1960 • **Boyon v. Virginia** The Supreme Court rules in favor of Bruce Boynton (a black interstate bus passenger arrested for refusing to leave a whites-only section of a bus station restaurant) finding that restaurant facilities in bus terminals that primarily exist to serve interstate bus passengers cannot discriminate based on race according to the Interstate Commerce Act. The decision desegregated all interstate transportation facilities, including bus terminals.

1960 • Five generations are featured in the news. Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf is shown on the right.

1961 • **The Freedom Riders** - A group of men and women board buses headed for the deep South to test the 1960 Supreme Court ruling outlawing segregation in all interstate public facilities. Though they were met by hatred and violence, the Riders' efforts transformed the civil rights movement.

Dwight D. Eisenhower (R) is inaugurated as the 34th President of the United States. Eisenhower serves as President from January 20, 1953 – January 20, 1961

John F. Kennedy (D) is inaugurated as the 35th President of the United States. Kennedy serves as President from January 20, 1961 – November 22, 1963

Lyndon B. Johnson is inaugurated as the 36th President of the United States. He serves as President from November 22, 1963 – January 20, 1969
1960 – 1969

1963 • Martin Luther King Jr. is arrested in Birmingham for violating Alabama’s law against mass public demonstrations. While in jail he composes “Letter From Birmingham Jail” in response to local religious leaders’ criticisms of the demonstration.

1963 • The 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama is bombed on September 15, 1963, killing four girls. The explosion contributed to support for passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

1963 • The Civil Rights March on Washington. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers his famous “I Have a Dream” speech from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial August 28, 1963.
1963 • John F. Kennedy is killed by an assassin as his motorcade drives through Dallas, Texas on November 22, 1963.

1964 • US Civil Rights Act of 1964 becomes law, prohibiting discrimination of all kinds based on race, color, religion, or national origin. The law also provides the federal government with the powers to enforce desegregation.

1965 • Malcolm X is assassinated in New York City on February 21st

1965 • Dr. Charles H. Wright establishes Detroit's first International Afro-American Museum on W. Grand Blvd

1965 • United States sends first troops to Vietnam

1965 • Betty Lou Brown graduates from High School in South Haven, Michigan in June
1965 • Congress passes the Voting Rights Act of 1965, making it easier for Southern blacks to register to vote. Literacy tests, poll taxes, and other such requirements that were used to restrict black voting are made illegal.

1967 • Thurgood Marshall becomes first African American elevated to U.S. Supreme Court

1968 • Martin Luther King is assassinated on April 4th as he stood on the balcony outside his hotel room. Escaped convict and committed racist James Earl Ray is convicted of the crime.

1968 • President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968 on April 11, prohibiting discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing.

1968 • Shirley Chisholm becomes the first black woman to serve in the United States Congress.

1969 • Betty Brown graduates University of Michigan with Bachelor's of Pre-Social Work and Sociology.
Richard M. Nixon (R) is inaugurated as the 37th President of the United States in 1969. Nixon serves as President from January 20, 1969 – August 9, 1974.

Gerald Ford is (R) is inaugurated as the 38th President of the United States after the resignation of Richard Nixon. Ford serves as President from August 9, 1974 – January 20, 1977.

Jimmy Carter is inaugurated as the 39th President of the United States. Carter serves as President from January 20, 1977 – January 20, 1981.

1970 – 1979
U. S. Population 203,211,926
Black Population 22,580,289

1971 • **In Swann v Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education**, the Supreme Court upholds the constitutionality of court-ordered plans to achieve desegregation of schools, affirming the busing of schoolchildren in Charlotte, North Carolina on April 20th.

1971 • **Betty Brown graduates University of Michigan with MSW**

1972 • Shirley Chisholm runs for President of the United States, becoming the first African American and the first woman to run for president.

1972 • **Erma Henderson** becomes first Black woman to serve on Detroit’s City Council.

1974 • President Richard M. Nixon resigns from the Presidency due to the effects of the Watergate Scandal.

1975 • **Betty Brown and Michael Chappell marry on October 1st**
1975 • The Fall of Saigon brings an end to the Vietnam War

1977 • Betty Brown Chappell is President-Elect of Michigan Society of Gerontology

1978 • Regents of the University of California v Bakke. The Supreme Court case decision upholds the constitutionality of affirmative action, but imposed limitations on it to ensure that providing greater opportunities for minorities did not come at the expense of the rights of the majority (June 28).

1978 • Michael Jahi (means dignity) Chappell is born November 1st in Southfield, Michigan to Betty Brown and Michael Chappell. (Michael Jahi is the Great Grandson of Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf and Garfield Brown)

1979 • Hazel Winifred Johnson becomes the first Black woman promoted to the rank and position of Brigadier General, Chief of the Army Nurse Corps in September of 1979
1981 • Charles "The Tuna" Chapman becomes the first African-American to swim across the English Channel on August 24th


1983 • Herbert Brown (5th child of Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf and Garfield Brown) passes away at the approximate age of 69

1984 • Jesse Jackson runs for President of the United States as a Democrat

1985 • Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf passes away on September 2, 1985 at the age of ninety-seven
1980 – 1989

1987 • Space Shuttle Challenger explodes seventy-three seconds after liftoff on January 28

1987 • Carrie Saxon Perry is elected mayor of Hartford, the first female African-American mayor of a major American city.

1988 • Jesse Jackson runs for President of the United States a second time

1989 • The Fall of the Berlin Wall. After thirty-eight years of restricting traffic between the East and West German sides of the city, German citizens are allowed to travel freely between East and West Germany for the first time.

1989 • Leroy Brown (2nd son of Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf and Garfield Brown) passes away on April 16, 1989 at the age of eighty-three
George H. W. Bush (R) is inaugurated as the 41st President of the United States in 1989.
Bush serves as President from January 20, 1989 – January 20, 1993

William Jefferson Clinton (D) is inaugurated as the 42nd President of the United States in 1993.
Clinton serves as President from January 20, 1993 – January 20, 2001

1990 – 1999
U. S. Population 248,709,873
Black Population 29,986,060

1990 • Iraq invades Kuwait on August 2nd, setting into motion the beginning of U.S. involvement in the Gulf War.

1991 • Operation Desert Storm begins on January 17th with air strikes against Iraq. Iraq responds by sending eight Scud missiles into Israel.

1991 • Betty Brown-Chappell graduates from University of Chicago with PhD

1991 • Harry C. Brown (oldest son of Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf and Garfield Brown) passes away on July 11, 1991 at the age of eighty-seven

1992 • Benjamin Franklin Brown (youngest son of Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf and Garfield Brown – Father of Betty Brown-Chappell) passes away on May 21, 1992 at the age of seventy-six
1992 • Betty Brown-Chappell becomes Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan, School of Social Work in Ann Arbor, Mi teaching courses which emphasize policy, management, and community organization methods.

1992 • Goldie Hawkins (oldest daughter of Ada Mae Woodson Brown Metcalf and Garfield Brown) passes away in November, 1992 at the age of eighty-two

1993 • Ruth Bader Ginsberg becomes second woman to serve on the Supreme Court

1994 • Nelson Mandela is elected President of South Africa

1996 • Betty Brown-Chappell becomes a professor at Eastern Michigan University, School of Social Work in Ypsilanti, Mi. Courses taught by Professor Brown-Chappell emphasize policy methods, gerontology specialization, and field practice.

1999 • Betty Brown-Chappell is a participant in the Writing Fellows Program at Eastern Michigan University
2000 – 2012
U. S. Population 281,421,906
Black Population 34,658,190

2002 • Betty Brown-Chappell serves as President of National Association of Social Workers, Michigan Chapter, 2002 - 2004

2003 • Betty Brown-Chappell is the recipient of the College of Health and Human Service Everett L. Marshall Award for Distinguished Service

2004 • Betty Brown-Chappell serves as Co-Chairperson of the National Association of Social Workers, 2004 - 2005

2008 • Barack H. Obama becomes first African American elected as President of the United States. (Currently serving as 44th President of the U.S.)

2012 • Doctor Betty Brown-Chappell receives the Martin Luther King Humanitarian Award on January 16, 2012