



Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth-Century New York City

Carla L. Peterson

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Part detective tale, part social and cultural narrative, *Black Gotham* is Carla Peterson's riveting account of her quest to reconstruct the lives of her nineteenth-century ancestors. As she shares their stories and those of their friends, neighbors, and business associates, she illuminates the greater history of African-American elites in New York City.

Black Gotham challenges many of the accepted "truths" about African-American history, including the assumption that the phrase "nineteenth-century black Americans" means enslaved people, that "New York state before the Civil War" refers to a place of freedom, and that a black elite did not exist until the twentieth century. Beginning her story in the 1820s, Peterson focuses on the pupils of the Mulberry Street School, the graduates of which went on to become eminent African-American leaders. She traces their political activities as well as their many achievements in trade, business, and the professions against the backdrop of the expansion of scientific racism, the trauma of the Civil War draft riots, and the rise of Jim Crow.

Told in a vivid, fast-paced style, *Black Gotham* is an important account of the rarely acknowledged achievements of nineteenth-century African Americans and brings to the forefront a vital yet forgotten part of American history and culture.

Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth-Century New York City Details

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From Reader Review Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth-Century New York City for online ebook

Darina Davis says

I enjoyed this book very much. It was extremely detailed when possible on Carla Peterson's family history, displayed abilities of African Americans in New York to become educated and establish family businesses. A few questions remain, where the holes of research cannot uncover, but a good read to find out how some African Americans were able to secure a future during a racially charged atmosphere before the Civil War.

Deborah says

The overall information content is great. Sheds light on a part of history that few know anything about. As a genealogist/family historian, I wish there was more specifics on her family.

Emilie Burack says

Fantastic, deep look into a much overlooked chapter in NYC history. A must read for anyone wanting to discover more about African American history and the cultural upheavals of those struggling to make a life for themselves in mid 1800's NYC. Carla Peterson's vast research & detailed storytelling takes you back in time and makes you wish you could meet the intellectuals of the African American middle class who cared more about their children's futures than their own.

Joshunda Sanders says

There's lots of great historical context about the black elite in New York/Brooklyn in this book that is fascinating. It's not a strong narrative, but it is an important one if you're interested in the social lives and trades of blacks in New York City circa Reconstruction.

Jessica says

Black Gotham has many virtues. Chief among them is Peterson's ability to recreate 19th century New York City for readers. While Peterson makes clear that her focus is on black elites, she still details the life of lower class black New Yorkers making Black Gotham useful reading for anyone interested in Black Americans in ante- and postbellum New York. Moreover it becomes apparent that many upperclass Black Americans often found their positions far more tenuous than their white counterparts. Black Gotham distinguishes itself from other history writing by taking readers into the archive. In introductions and asides, Peterson reveals the tedious work of the historian. Like other historical writing, Black Gotham was pieced together from a variety of primary sources. Peterson; however, makes clear that much of her research was a combination of luck, conjecture and, most importantly, determination.

Kathleen Hulser says

Fascinating history in an unusually personal form, taking genealogy to a new level. Peterson explores the links of black families in antebellum New York offering a rich portrait of the connections between families that created the network of institutions that defined the first generation of free African American community. Maritcha Lyons, Patrick Reason, James McCune Smith, Thomas and George Downing -- abolitionists, businessmen, men of letters, philanthropists, charity workers, graduates of the African free school, political activists -- the pages are filled with intimate details about people who created the templates for black political aspirations to equality and urban status. Strong research and direct prose make this a gift to readers rather than a marker for academic tenure.

Amy says

Narrower focus than I realized, but good information.
