

How We Got Over

Growing Up in the Segregated South: A Collection of Narratives

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The Timely Case for a 2021 Bookshelf Must-Have

[DALLAS, TEXAS, December 3, 2021] As the midcentury dawned, 225 graduates of the all-Black Peabody High School Class of 1968 in Alexandria Louisiana entered the world at the height of the Deep South Jim Crow rule. In *How We Got Over*, two dozen of the classmates share stories of inequality, endurance and success, chronicling childhood, early adult life and beyond. The combined work was completed in the middle of the 2020 global pandemic after 10 months of Zoom group meetings and countless one-on-one telephone discussions and back-and-forth editing rounds.

The idea started in fall 2020, when Helen Benjamin participated in a Zoom professional development session on diversity, equity, and inclusion. The segment on redlining sparked her attention, taking her back to early childhood in the all-Black Rapides Parish community she grew up in. “I was immediately transported to the 1950s, to my old neighborhood in Alexandria because we lived in an area similar to the setting described. It limited our economic and intellectual growth, as well as our ability to live healthy lives.” From the epiphanous moment, Dr. Benjamin called on fellow classmates to tell their stories, and the plan to document history took off.

Edited by Dr. Benjamin, a retired educator and current higher education consultant, and coeditor Jean Nash Johnson, a former veteran newspaper writer, editor and columnist and current Dallas freelance writer/editor, *How We Got Over* features four parts. Each part begins with an introduction that sets up relevant historical context for the reader, and each part houses six essays. Part One documents the Rapides Parish 1799 U.S. Census numbers, 175 enslaved Blacks, 530 whites, and the resulting impact on population growth by 1860. In Part Two, readers get a crash course in Alexandria’s and Louisiana’s Civil War and Reconstruction period, highlighting the horrific Colfax Massacre of 1873 and ending with the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court *Plessy v. Ferguson* separate but equal ruling. Part Three ushers in the 20th century with Louisiana’s establishment of a public education plan for all schoolchildren, while Part Four addresses the Civil Rights era and the continued struggle for equal protection under the rule of law.

With the history backdrops, the essays galvanize this effort. Each comes with a unique voice and its own story style. The hunger from the contributors to leave a legacy becomes an obvious common thread. The legacy theme is a win for the reader, as the storytelling organically reveals the day-to-day of Black life during the period and the practical customs families relied on to get around, get over and survive institutional racism. The touches of sincerity, the compelling moments of humility, hardship and humor will draw reader appreciation, empathy and affection.

Here are a few story highlights:

- The Big Escape from Central Louisiana to The Big Apple after graduation in search of self-worth.
- A Great Migration to Detroit in adolescence, and the reverse course South for salvation.
- A Family Tree history traced back to the African homeland.
- Realities of 1950s and 1960s plantation living for Black family survival.
- The trauma of witnessing a lynched body hanging from a tree at the nearby community center.
- Vietnam and wartime honor among first Black Baby Boomers serving in the military.

American Black history is unique history. American Black history is indispensable history. The Middle of the 20th century wasn't long ago. This volume's goal is to enlighten the unwilling and the unaware about the centuries old difficult journey of Black people from the first enslaved Africans in the early 1600s, to the post Civil War freed humans in 1863, to the 20th century Jim Crow survivors and Civil Rights advocates and the Black Lives Matter activists of this millennium. It also aims to buttress and galvanize the wokeness in those who understand. Every history classroom and home library should clear a place on the bookshelf for *How We Got Over*.

Available December 3, 2021 in Paperback and Kindle on [Amazon](#)

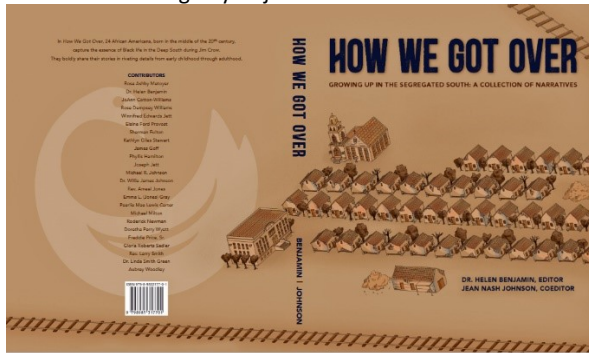
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