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Profile

Recognition -- For 40 years, I have sought recognition for African American contributions to the Revolutionary War. On two occasions, in bipartisan fashion, Congress declared them of "preeminent historical and lasting significance to the nation."

In 1980, renown Pennsylvania book collector [Charles L. Blockson](#), intent on proving his white teacher wrong, told me he asked her why his textbook did not mention black contributions; she replied, "they didn't do anything."

Discovery -- I fulfilled a childhood curiosity in 1979 when I discovered that the man in a photograph hanging in my maternal grandparents' house in Plainville, Connecticut is my great-great-grandfather, a casualty of the Civil War. His son married a black woman.

Acceptance -- Traveling around New England and Virginia to cemeteries, libraries, archives and town halls, by 1980, I had discovered three Revolutionary War ancestors. I learned the origins, as early as 1813, of the family of my black maternal great-grandmother on the James River outside Richmond. My white ancestors arrived in Boston in 1630. On the suggestion of Mr. Blockson, I became only the second black member of the Sons of the American Revolution.

Rejection -- In 1984, after four years of rejection and substantial media and legal pressure, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) signed a settlement agreement with Mrs. Lena Santos Ferguson, my aunt and a Washington, DC resident. The agreement ended membership discrimination and required the identification of all black patriots. The city council insisted on a second agreement that could have revoked the group's real estate tax exemption.

Acknowledgement -- As a factor leading up to the agreement, we watched [President Reagan](#) sign Public Law 98-245 in the Oval Office. The legislation calls for

the commemoration of the neglected role of African Americans in the fight for independence and freedom.

Suppression -- In 2008, after 24 years of [back and forth](#) over who can be called "black" and the sufficiency of the count, the revised research was published with the names of over 5,000 black patriots. Otherwise, [fewer than 2,000](#) would be known. And, one of their actual daughters, the [first black DAR member](#) in 1896, might still be anonymous. Newspapers at the time veiled her race. The year after publication, the DAR received a prestigious genealogical award. The DAR [denies the research](#) resulted from the 1984 agreement -- an affront to our attentiveness and the role played by serendipity in our family history.

Family -- But for the photograph taken of my white Civil War ancestor before the lethal battle at Cold Harbor, Virginia and preserved by his daughter-in-law, my black great-grandmother, none of this would have been possible. This has chilled the Fund's ability to employ the research wholeheartedly to promote the memorial and credibly inform prospective black descendants of Mrs. Ferguson's legacy. The DAR is saying to my aunt what Mr. Blockson's teacher told him, "she didn't do anything."

Proof -- Now available for download by anyone, Mrs. Ferguson remained steadfast until her death in 2004 that the 900-page book would be finished to her satisfaction. Her research, "Forgotten Patriots," has enabled two generations to discover lost heritage and Congress to assess the history's significance.

Resource -- Using the information, [cities](#), towns, [counties](#), and legislatures in 10 states sent more than [70 resolutions](#) to Congress in support of local patriots and the National Liberty Memorial. This document shows how 400 of Virginia's 600 black [patriots are connected](#) to virtually every General Assembly district.