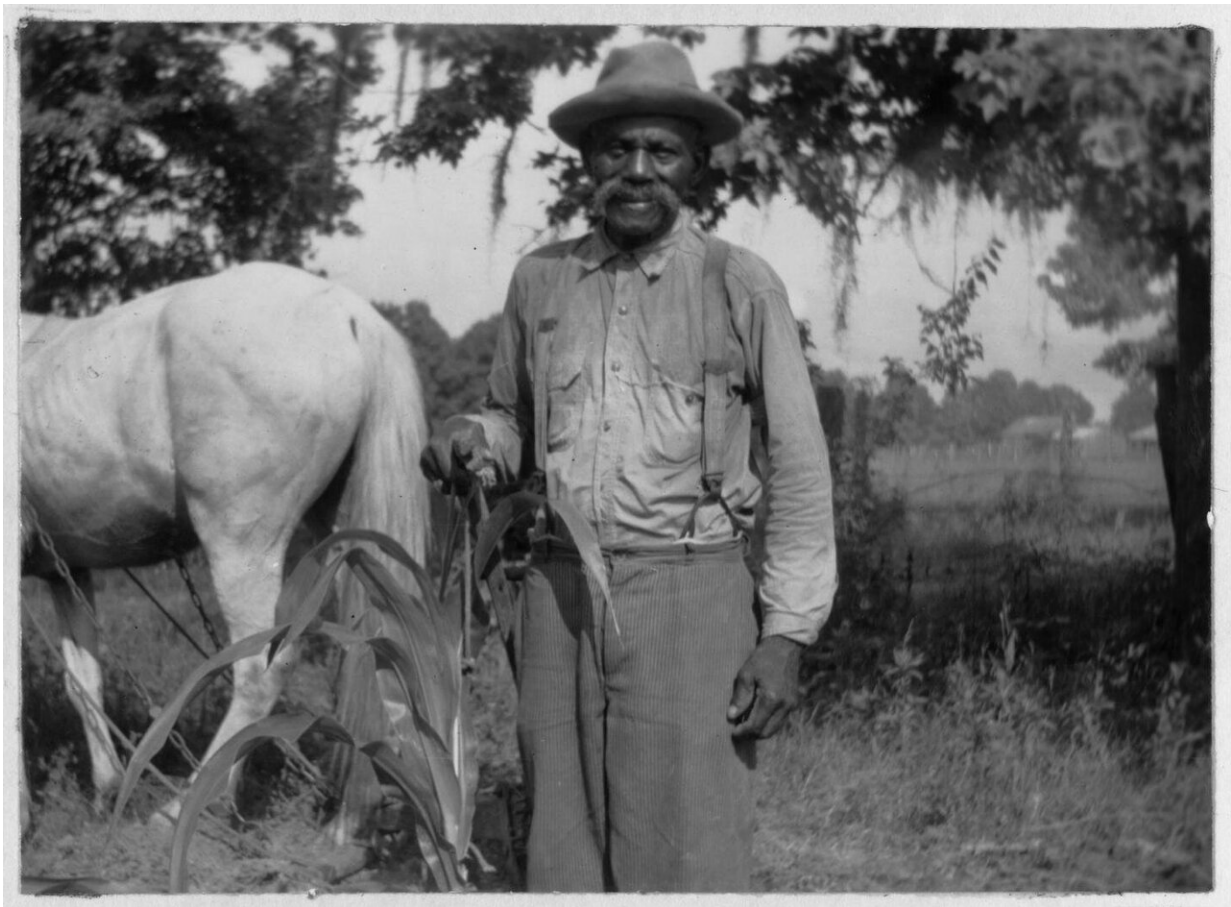


Distinctively Black names found long before Civil War

March 25 2021, by Jeff Grabmeier



Abe Livingston, a former slave, was photographed in Texas in the 1930s Credit: Library of Congress

Long before Tyrone, Jermaine and Darnell came along, there were Isaac,

Abe and Prince.

A new study reveals the earliest evidence of distinctively Black first names in the United States, finding them arising in the early 1700s and then becoming increasingly common in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

The results confirm previous work that shows the use of Black names didn't start during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, as some scholars have argued, said Trevon Logan, co-author of the study and professor of economics at The Ohio State University.

"Even during slavery, Black people had names that were unlikely to be held by whites. It is not just a recent phenomenon," Logan said.

Logan conducted the study with Lisa Cook of Michigan State University and John Parman of the College of William and Mary. It was published online this month in the journal *Historical Methods*.

The study focuses on names for Black males, partly because earlier research suggests less distinctiveness of Black women's names historically.

This research is a follow-up to a 2014 study by the same researchers that found distinctive Black names were being used in the period following the Civil War.

It was more difficult to find records that document the names of the enslaved, Logan said. Many official records only list slaves as numbers without names.

The researchers found three sources that did contain the names of enslaved people in the United States. Two of the three sources also included the names of the buyers or sellers of the enslaved, which

allowed comparisons between Black and white names. The researchers supplemented the evidence of racial name distinctiveness by analyzing white names in the 1850 Census.

The names given Blacks in the United States were distinctively African American, Logan said. None of them had roots in Africa. Many of them had Biblical origins, like Abraham and Isaac. Other Black names that appeared more frequently in one or more of the [data sets](#) included Titus and Prince.

Results showed a clear increase in the use of Black names over the period of the study. In one data set, 3.17% of enslaved males born between 1770 to 1790 were likely to hold a Black name, but that increased to 4.5% of those born between 1810 and 1830.

And they were truly distinctive from white people. Depending on the data source, enslaved people were more than four to nine times as likely to have a Black name than was a slave owner.

The appearance of distinctively Black names wasn't only the result of more African Americans using them, Logan said.

"Our results suggest a strong decline in the use of Black names among whites over time," he said. "The actions of both Black and white people fed into the process that resulted in distinctive Black names."

For [white people](#) born before 1770, more than 4.75% held Black names, but that declined to less than 2% for those born from 1810 to 1830.

Many of the Black names identified in this study were the same that the researchers found in the post-Civil War period, but there were some differences.

"Post-emancipation we found more Blacks being named Master and Freeman, which for obvious reasons were not found in the antebellum era," Logan said.

While this study revealed the existence and growth of Black names in the United States, it can't answer why it happened, Logan said.

"We believe these naming practices could say something about culture, about family, and about social formation among Black people of the time," Logan said.

"But we don't have any records of people talking about it at the time, so we're not sure. We know there's this pattern, but we can't say for sure what it means."

More information: Lisa D. Cook et al, The antebellum roots of distinctively black names, *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/01615440.2021.1893877](https://doi.org/10.1080/01615440.2021.1893877)

Provided by The Ohio State University

Citation: Distinctively Black names found long before Civil War (2021, March 25) retrieved 28 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-03-distinctively-black-civil-war.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.