

# **Cooperatives & African American Economic Emancipation**

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**Cooperation Africa**

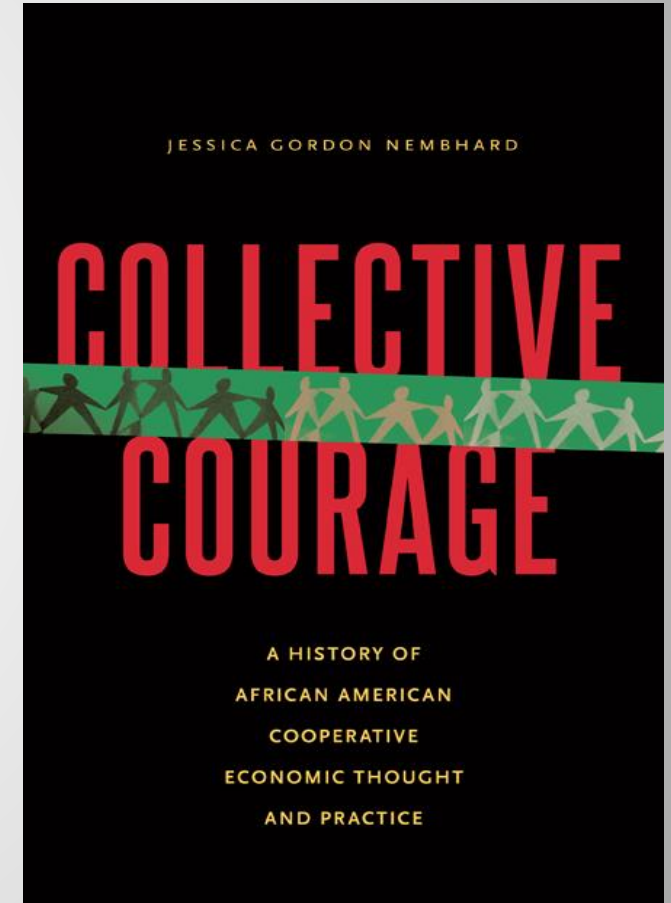
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# **Thanks & Acknowledgements**

- **Thanks to the organizers.**
- **Acknowledge original stewards of the land...**
- **Acknowledge our elders.**
- **Acknowledge our ANCESTORS (those enslaved, all those combatting anti-Blackness); recognize those who continue to labor without just compensation, those who practice resistance....**
- **Acknowledge those who use solidarity & cooperative economics for liberation.**

# Research on African American Cooperatives

- **Survival**
- **Resistance**
- **Prosperity**  
through economic cooperation
  - Jessica Gordon-Nembhard
- **psupress.org**
- **And Esther**  
West's 2020 study of current **Latinx Co-ops.**  
<https://uwcc.wisc.edu/research/latinx-cooperative-research/>



- **Importance of education, study groups and training – learning from each other, informal study, formal study and specific training**
- **Significance of organizational supports and deliberate co-op organizing**
- **Significance of community involvement, and solidarity**
- **Pooling of resources, access to non-exploitive resources**
- **Democratic participation and sharing of power, include voices of the marginalized and oppressed**
- **Women's leadership**
- **Participation of youth**

## **Lessons Learned**

- **Utilized by all populations, in every era, on every continent.**
- **Notions of the common good, the commonwealth, The Commons,**
- **Collectivism, mutual aid, revolving loan funds/rotating savings & credit/susu**
- **“Collective work and responsibility”**
- **Indigenous cooperative efforts - First Nations, early African civilizations, etc.**

## **Universality of Mutual Aid & Economic Cooperation**

- **Deliberate cooperative development – most number of co-ops when have Black organizations dedicated to co-op promotion and education [CFNACU, YNCL, BSCP, BPP, FSC etc.]**
- **Community support – community involved in starting the co-op; use the co-op; donate to the co-op; defend the co-op [North Carolina examples (schools and sewing co-ops), APR Masonry Arts, NYC co-ops in housing complexes, etc.]**

**Community and Organization Matter**

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# **African American Co-op Organizations**

- **1880s Colored Farmer's National Alliance & Cooperative Union**
- **1890s-1920s Ex-Slave Pension Society**
- **1910s-20s Universal Negro Improvement Association**
- **1918 Negro Cooperative Guild**
- **1920s-30s Colored Merchants Association**
- **1920s-30s National Association of Colored Farmers**
- **1930s Young Negroes' Co-operative League**
- **1930s-40s Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Ladies Aux**
- **1960s-70s Poor People's Corporation; Black Panther Party**
- **1960s-present: Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assist Fund**
- **1980s-Present: Nation of Islam**
- **2000s-Present: Green Worker Cooperatives; Cooperation Jackson; Us Lifting US; M4BL; etc**



- **Survival needs (1880s & 1930s)**
- **Active periods of race consciousness and transition (1880s & 1960s [and 2020s?])**
- **Need economic independence for political activism and civil rights (1880s & 1960s)**
- **Black organizations focused on economic liberation and deliberate co-op development (all 3 periods [and 2020s?])**

**Why 1880s, 1930s-40s, 1960s-70s?**

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- **Early labor union advocacy for worker control included co-op development.**
- **Connected to Populist movement – political rights for Black and White small farmers and laborers. Women's rights.**
- **Exs: Knights of Labor, Colored Farmers' National Alliance and Cooperative Union.**

**Populism, Labor, Co-ops Together 1880s**

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- **Black co-ops were often begun by educational or religious institutions or**
- **Started with a study group to study economic conditions and cooperative economics.**
- **Used mainstream cooperative literature and Black writings.**
- **Did study tours and learning journeys to other co-ops.**
- **Black leaders and writers promoted cooperative Education.**

**Education Matters!**

# **Young Negroes' Co-operative League**

- **George Schuyler (Pittsburgh Courier) calls on “Young Negroes” to save the race with economic cooperation.**
- **Founded in December 1930 by about 25-30 African American youth. With Ella Jo Baker**
- **Mission: co-op education and incubation in Black communities, and**
- **to keep control of the organization in the hands of young people; and “to bring women into the League on equal basis with men.”**

# **YNCL Long Term Goals**

- **a forum in each community where there are five or more members;**
- **a co-operative enterprise where each council exists;**
- **a co-operative wholesale establishment in each state;**
- **a co-operative bank in each community where there is a council;**
- **factories to produce such necessities as clothing, food, and shelter.**

# **Gary Indiana 1930s**

- **Started with study group to discuss disinvestment in community during Great Depression**
- **Weekly co-op education meetings for 18 months**
- **Night school co-op econ course at local Black High School (Roosevelt) 1933; by 1936 the largest academic class enrollment**
- **The early members of the study group started a women's guild, reputed to have kept the organization running and invigorated the co-op: Consumers' Cooperative Trading co.**
- **Reddix: The most important single factor in the co-op's success has been our education program.**

# **Consumers' Cooperative Trading**

- **1935 Consumers' Cooperative Trading Company in Gary Indiana established.**
- **By 1936 considered the largest grocery business operated by African American in the U.S. -total sales of \$160,000.**
- **The cooperative society established a credit union, co-op grocery store, co-op gas station, 2<sup>nd</sup> co-op grocery.**
- **Grocery co-op began to pay dividends of 2 percent on shares of stock owned in 1936.**

# **Cooperative Industries of DC**

- **Chartered in 1936 as a self-help cooperative in Lincoln Heights.**
- **Producer co-op of unemployed, unskilled workers and home-makers: sewing, canning, brooms.**
- **Began using a federal govt grant to help unemployed women.**
- **Bought a farm, becomes a hybrid worker and consumer co-op.**



# **Black Panther Party 1960s-70s**

- **1966 in Oakland, Inter-communalist, organized a host of "survival programs pending political revolution."**
- **Abolition and community organizing/econ dev.**
- **Organized co-ops and collectives – clothing factories, bakeries; plumbing repair, pest control, transportation for the aged; plus health care (free health clinics), and collective news (Panther newspaper); and communal housing.**
- **Distribution of free products donated or from co-ops.**
- **Free breakfast programs for children, history lessons.**

## **Cooperative Home Care Associates**

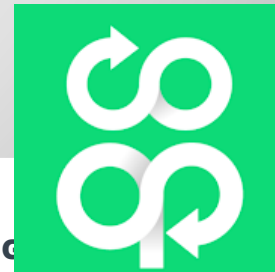
- **A worker-owned home health care cooperative in the South Bronx, NY, since 1987.**
- **Employs previously un- and low-skilled Latina and African American women.**
- **Non-profit training subsidiary provides state of the art high quality training.**
- **Leads the industry in above average wages, benefits, career ladder opportunities & mobility, leadership training, and low turnover.**
- **Largest U.S. worker cooperative – almost 2000 employees 70% owners.**

# Chi Fresh Kitchen

- Chicago-based women- and minority- owned business. Started 2020 during COVID.
- Serve daily meals - freshly cooked healthy food, rooted in the culture and traditions of the people being served.
- Structured as a worker cooperative (“where every worker has the opportunity to share in the governance and profits of the business”).

# The Drivers Cooperative

- Driver-owned ride hailing cooperative in NYC.
- Co-op Ride App launched in 2021.
- “For better pay in the short term, and a just, green transition of the industry in the long term.”
- Members of The Drivers Cooperative make 8-10% more on each trip than on Uber and Lyft.
- Profits go back to drivers as dividends.
- Democratic decision-making for drivers.
- Ease of use for riders, & solidarity.



# Transformation!

## Questions?

Thank You!

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Freedom Quilting Bee



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