

# Modern Day Pilgrimage to a Rural Promise Land

*On the fourth Sunday of this August, a 152-year long tradition, hundreds of Mac Wesley descendants are making a modern pilgrimage to their rural homeland.*

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- A few short years ago, most Americans had never heard the term "critical race theory." Now, the term is everywhere. Critical race theory and its acronym "CRT," make national and international headlines, fodder for talking heads and culture wars. However, the unrelenting assault on the freedom of truth and expression in the form of laws that censor and suppress histories, experiences, cultures, and viewpoints are hardly new. Erasure, the efforts to force collective amnesia are as old as conquest. The Roman decree, *damnatio memoriae* - condemnation of memory - punished individuals by destroying every trace of them from the state - and so on. It's simply a new popular catch phrase for an age-old power structure.



The Historic Mac Wesley Chapel, in southeast Kansas near the Verdigris River, and the Kansas/Oklahoma line, is getting a second wind. The Century and a half year old legacy begins redevelopment at the end of Summer 2023

[For most Black Americans, whose ancestry connects them back to an enslaved](#) Black tragedy, erasure was law. The only carrier of truth and customs came from within the family. According to Keira Wesley, a New York based author and producer, the critical breakdown of her family's history erasure is the result of systemized assimilation, "[Our entire public education system manipulated the history narrative](#). Mass media manipulated the narrative. Our families told the stories of our ancestors and the powerful, overcoming, and brilliant feats they lived through."

Keira Wesley is the great-granddaughter of a Black Exoduster who made his way out of Louisiana, through Mount Enterprise, Texas to an almost forgotten Black colony in southeast Kansas near the Oklahoma state line. An area that is a stone's throw away from Tulsa Oklahoma's Greenwood District, popularly known as Black Wall Street. An easy example of forced erasure. The Black Exoduster, Mac Wesley, Keira's great-grandfather, received news of his freedom in Louisiana, making an immediate and dangerous exodus, as the story goes, around 1877, with a first stop in Texas, where he found slavery still in effect. The familiar family story, written and spoken, maintains that Mac Wesley, who was taught to read by the plantation mistress, read a notice of the till program in Kansas, he then loaded up his wife Luvina and their small child with five other families on an ox-pulled cart for a five-week journey bound for Nicodemus, Kansas. The cartwheel broke short of their destination and they settled north of the Verdigris River, where he created a colony known as Sandy Ridge, Kansas. Mac Wesley bought 8 to 10-acre plots of land for thirteen of his seventeen children. Now, 152 years later, the story is fading.

For more than 100 years, family and congregants gathered for an annual basket dinner held the fourth Sunday in August to celebrate and honor the Wesley heritage and somehow his descendants lost interest. Keira's father is the last living grandchild of Mac Wesley and key pieces of the story are now locked behind the walls of dementia.

The Mac Wesley Chapel still stands and the nearby homestead of one of his sons, Leonard Wesley, Sr., where neglect is taking its toll. Many of Mac's children sold their land or were swindled out of it, save perhaps three heirs. But the footprint of their history is there. The handmade cement headstones on the graves of Mac and Luvina Wesley, their baby that died in infancy and other descendants are there. Answers to their newly lost identity.

During the pandemic stillness and the global witness of the George Floyd murder and protests, a new spark rippled throughout the nation. Legacy building became a bigger buzz word for Black Americans than the media's repetition of critical race theory. A new self-awareness that valued ancestry, with an insatiable thirst for identity arose. Sitting still opened the eyes of the young enthusiasts, or perhaps opened their ears to the whispers of the ancestors that we are our own liberators.



The family of Mac Wesley, a Black Exoduster, who gifted 13 of his 17 children land, has met annually for 152 years. Pictured (top) great-grandchildren of Mac Wesley at one of the basket dinners in the 1970s and pictured (bottom) grandsons of Mac Wesley st

Post pandemic, innovative farming is on the rise. Creative real estate developments and small business can be seen across the globe. And, the Wesley family, spotlighted in this literature, is preserving, and redeveloping the gift that Mac gave. However, before the shovel hits the dirt, they will begin their rebuilding with the gathering of their people, the uncovering, and the discovering of their story.

On the fourth Sunday of this August, that 152-year long tradition set by their patriarch, hundreds of Mac and Luvina Wesley descendants are making a modern pilgrimage to their rural homeland. Beginning Saturday, August 26 with a music festival that leads into the traditional church service and basket dinner, Sunday, August 27. Historians and videographers will be onsite throughout the event to capture new memories and with the larger intent of connecting the historical dots. Marsha Hayes, a Kansas historian, who has been collecting data on the segregated cemeteries in the area, stumbled across the Wesley fragments. She will join the family with her team to help document history.

Keira told us that when her son realized that he was only two greats away from an enslaved grandfather, the shock on his face spoke volumes. "The system is designed for us to forget," Keira resolved, "but identity is invaluable. Our identities and our privileges are deeply contextual, and we must know our foundation."

Descendants of Mac and Luvina are at the forefront of a nationwide campaign to document accurate history and contemporary experience of Black people. Modern history reveals, political conflicts that led to the development of slavery, the passage to America, the enslavement experience, abolition, and the contributions of Black Americans to society. But, by what lens? It goes beyond politics, school boards and censorship to ask: Whose suffering is recognized? Whose stories are told and taught? Whose dead are mourned?



Keira Wesley with her cousin James Wesley standing behind the hand-carved cement headstones (crosses) of their great-grandparents Mac and Luvina Wesley, who began their exodus in 1877 to their new promise in Kansas. The Spring Hill cemetery is segregated



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*Great-granddaughter of Mac  
Wesley*

Angelique Bourgeois  
HTQ Multimedia Group  
+1 646-924-7041

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