

# black history in virginia

Black History in Virginia: A Journey Through Time and Triumph

**Black history in Virginia** is a rich tapestry woven with stories of resilience, courage, and significant contributions that have shaped not only the state but the entire nation. From the earliest days of African presence in America to the ongoing struggle for civil rights, Virginia holds a unique and profound place in the narrative of Black Americans. Exploring this history offers a deep understanding of how African Americans have influenced culture, politics, and society in Virginia and beyond.

## The Beginnings of Black History in Virginia

Virginia is often recognized as the birthplace of African American history in the United States. In 1619, the first recorded group of Africans arrived at Point Comfort (now Fort Monroe) in the Virginia Colony. This moment marks the beginning of a long and complex history of African Americans in Virginia.

## Early African Presence and Enslavement

The Africans who landed in Virginia in 1619 were initially treated as indentured servants, but over time, laws evolved to establish chattel slavery, binding African people and their descendants to a lifetime of forced labor. Jamestown, the first permanent English settlement, became a hub of plantation agriculture, relying heavily on enslaved labor for tobacco cultivation.

Understanding the legal and social framework of slavery in colonial Virginia helps explain how deeply entrenched the system became, influencing the social hierarchy and economy for centuries. Key laws, such as the Virginia Slave Codes of the 1700s, codified the status of enslaved people, stripping them of rights and legitimizing harsh punishments.

## Free Black Communities and Resistance

Despite the oppressive conditions, free Black communities began to emerge in Virginia as early as the 18th century. Some enslaved individuals gained freedom through manumission, purchase, or escape. These communities fostered culture, education, and religious practices, often centered around churches, which became vital hubs for African American life.

Resistance to slavery took many forms, from subtle acts of defiance to organized rebellions. The most famous of these was Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831, which shook Virginia and the nation, leading to stricter slave laws but also fueling abolitionist sentiment.

# **Black History in Virginia During the Civil War and Reconstruction**

The Civil War was a turning point for African Americans in Virginia. As the Confederacy fought to maintain slavery, many enslaved people seized the opportunity to escape and fight for their freedom.

## **The Role of Virginia's Black Soldiers**

Thousands of Black men from Virginia joined the Union Army, particularly in regiments like the United States Colored Troops (USCT). Their bravery and sacrifices were crucial in undermining the Confederacy and advancing the cause of emancipation.

## **Reconstruction Era Progress and Challenges**

Following the Civil War, Reconstruction brought significant but fleeting advancements to African Americans in Virginia. Freedmen gained voting rights, political representation, and access to education. For example, individuals like John Mercer Langston, born in Virginia, became prominent leaders advocating for Black rights.

However, the end of Reconstruction saw the rise of Jim Crow laws that enforced racial segregation and disenfranchisement. These laws would dominate Virginia's social and political landscape for decades, severely limiting opportunities for Black Virginians.

## **The Civil Rights Movement and Its Impact in Virginia**

The mid-20th century was a period of renewed activism and change for Black Virginians. The Civil Rights Movement brought national attention to the injustices of segregation and discrimination within the state.

## **Key Figures and Events**

Virginia was home to influential civil rights leaders such as Oliver Hill, a lawyer who played a pivotal role in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case that challenged school segregation. The case originated in Virginia and led to the Supreme Court's decision to declare segregation unconstitutional.

Additionally, the Massive Resistance movement in Virginia sought to oppose desegregation, leading to school closures and political turmoil. Despite these challenges, African American communities persisted in their fight for equality and justice.

## **Educational and Cultural Advances**

Black history in Virginia during this era is also marked by the growth of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), such as Virginia State University and Norfolk State University. These institutions became centers for higher education and leadership development within the African American community.

The arts and culture also flourished, with Black Virginians contributing to music, literature, and theater, enriching the broader American cultural landscape.

## **Preserving and Celebrating Black History in Virginia Today**

Today, Virginia honors its Black history through numerous museums, historical sites, and cultural institutions dedicated to preserving this vital heritage.

### **Notable Museums and Historical Sites**

- **The Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia** in Richmond offers exhibits and programs that highlight the contributions of African Americans throughout the state's history.
- **The Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site** commemorates the life of the first Black woman to charter a bank in the United States.
- **Fort Monroe**, where the first Africans arrived, is now a national monument recognizing its significance in Black history.

### **Community Events and Educational Initiatives**

Communities across Virginia host events during Black History Month, Juneteenth celebrations, and other cultural festivals that educate people about the legacy and ongoing contributions of African Americans.

Schools and universities integrate Black history into their curricula, encouraging students to understand the complexities and richness of Virginia's past.

## **Why Understanding Black History in Virginia Matters**

Diving into Black history in Virginia reveals stories of struggle, innovation, and triumph that are essential to comprehending American history as a whole. It highlights how African Americans shaped the economic, political, and cultural development of one of the nation's oldest states.

By exploring this history, we gain a more inclusive perspective that honors the voices and

experiences often marginalized. It also fosters a deeper appreciation for the ongoing fight for equality and justice, inspiring future generations to continue the work toward a more equitable society.

Black history in Virginia is not just a subject confined to textbooks; it is a living, breathing narrative that influences the state's identity today. Whether through visiting historical landmarks, engaging with cultural programs, or simply learning about the past, embracing this history enriches our understanding of Virginia and the American story.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the significance of Jamestown in Black history in Virginia?**

Jamestown, established in 1607, is significant in Black history as it was the site where the first African slaves arrived in English North America in 1619, marking the beginning of African American history in what would become the United States.

### **Who was Gabriel Prosser and what was his role in Virginia's Black history?**

Gabriel Prosser was an enslaved African American who planned a large slave rebellion in Virginia in 1800. Although the rebellion was thwarted, Gabriel became a symbol of resistance against slavery in Virginia's history.

### **What impact did the Virginia Black Codes have on African Americans?**

The Virginia Black Codes were laws enacted after the Civil War to restrict the freedoms of African Americans, controlling their labor, movements, and rights, thus perpetuating racial discrimination and inequality in the state.

### **How did the Civil Rights Movement manifest in Virginia?**

The Civil Rights Movement in Virginia included significant events such as the Massive Resistance to school desegregation, protests, and the work of leaders like Oliver Hill and Barbara Johns who fought for equal education and civil rights.

### **What is the historic significance of the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site in Virginia?**

The Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site in Richmond, Virginia, commemorates the life of Maggie L. Walker, the first African American woman to charter a bank and serve as its president, highlighting her contributions to Black economic empowerment.

## **How did Black churches influence African American communities in Virginia?**

Black churches in Virginia served as vital centers for spiritual life, social support, education, and organizing civil rights activities, playing a crucial role in sustaining and advancing African American communities.

## **What role did Virginia play in the Underground Railroad?**

Virginia, as a border state, was a crucial area for the Underground Railroad, providing routes and safe houses for enslaved African Americans seeking freedom in the North and Canada.

## **Who was Booker T. Washington and what is his connection to Virginia?**

Booker T. Washington was a prominent African American educator and leader born into slavery in Virginia. He founded the Tuskegee Institute and advocated for vocational education and economic self-reliance for Black Americans.

## **What contributions did African American soldiers from Virginia make during the Civil War?**

African American soldiers from Virginia served in the United States Colored Troops, fighting for the Union and the abolition of slavery, demonstrating courage and commitment to freedom despite facing discrimination.

## **How is Black history celebrated and preserved in Virginia today?**

Black history in Virginia is celebrated and preserved through museums like the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia, historical markers, educational programs, and annual events during Black History Month and Juneteenth.

## **Additional Resources**

Black History in Virginia: A Deep Dive into the Commonwealth's African American Legacy

**Black history in Virginia** is a profound tapestry woven through centuries of triumph, struggle, resilience, and cultural evolution. As one of the original thirteen colonies and the site of America's first permanent English settlement, Virginia holds a complex and pivotal place in the narrative of African American history. From the arrival of the first enslaved Africans to the Civil Rights Movement and beyond, black history in Virginia reflects broader themes of American history, including slavery, emancipation, segregation, and the ongoing quest for equality and recognition.

# **The Origins of Black History in Virginia**

Virginia's black history dates back to 1619, when a group of Africans, forcibly brought to the Jamestown colony, became the first recorded enslaved people in English North America. This moment marks the beginning of a centuries-long system of racial slavery that would shape the Commonwealth's social, economic, and political landscape. Unlike the later codified chattel slavery, the status of Africans in early Virginia was initially ambiguous, but laws soon institutionalized slavery, cementing a racial caste system.

The institution of slavery was deeply embedded in Virginia's agrarian economy, particularly through tobacco cultivation. Enslaved Africans and their descendants provided the labor that fueled Virginia's wealth and contributed significantly to the colonial economy. The demographic impact was profound; by the 18th century, enslaved Africans and free blacks made up a substantial portion of Virginia's population.

## **Slavery and Its Enduring Legacy**

Virginia's history with slavery was marked by both brutality and resistance. Enslaved people engaged in various forms of resistance—from work slowdowns and escape attempts to organized rebellions such as Gabriel's Rebellion in 1800. This planned uprising underscored the ongoing tensions within Virginia's slaveholding society and heightened fears among the white population, leading to stricter slave codes.

The American Civil War (1861-1865) was a turning point for black Virginians. Virginia, as a Confederate state, was deeply invested in preserving slavery, but the war's outcome led to emancipation. The 13th Amendment abolished slavery, and Virginia's black population began the arduous process of building new lives amid Reconstruction's challenges.

## **Post-Emancipation Developments and African American Communities**

Following emancipation, freed African Americans in Virginia faced significant obstacles, including discriminatory laws, segregation, and economic hardship. Despite these barriers, black communities established institutions that fostered education, religious life, and political engagement.

## **Education and Religious Institutions**

Education became a cornerstone of African American advancement in Virginia. Freedmen's schools, often supported by Northern missionary societies, emerged to provide literacy and vocational training. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) such as Virginia Union University, founded in 1865, played a critical role in higher education for black Virginians.

Churches also served as vital community centers, offering spiritual solace and a platform for social

and political activism. The African Methodist Episcopal Church and Baptist congregations were particularly influential, nurturing leaders and organizing efforts to challenge segregation and disenfranchisement.

## **Segregation and Jim Crow Era**

The post-Reconstruction period saw the rise of Jim Crow laws across the South, including Virginia. These laws institutionalized racial segregation in public facilities, schools, transportation, and voting rights. The 1902 Virginia Constitution introduced poll taxes and literacy tests that effectively disenfranchised most African Americans.

Despite systemic oppression, black Virginians cultivated vibrant communities, particularly in urban centers like Richmond, Norfolk, and Roanoke. These cities became hubs for black entrepreneurship, culture, and civil rights activism. The resilience demonstrated during this era laid the groundwork for future social and political advancements.

## **Virginia's Role in the Civil Rights Movement**

Virginia was a significant battleground during the Civil Rights Movement, embodying both the entrenched resistance to desegregation and the courageous efforts to achieve racial equality.

## **Massive Resistance and Legal Challenges**

Following the landmark 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared school segregation unconstitutional, Virginia's political leadership adopted the policy of "Massive Resistance." This campaign sought to block desegregation through legislation and school closures, notably affecting communities in Norfolk and Prince Edward County.

Black families and civil rights organizations in Virginia responded with persistence, challenging discriminatory policies through legal means and grassroots activism. The NAACP played a critical role in these efforts, supporting lawsuits and voter registration drives.

## **Key Figures and Milestones**

Several prominent African American leaders emerged from Virginia's civil rights era. Oliver Hill, a civil rights attorney, was instrumental in dismantling segregationist policies. Barbara Johns, a student activist from Farmville, led a 1951 strike that helped inspire one of the cases consolidated into *Brown v. Board*.

The gradual desegregation of Virginia's public schools and increased political representation for African Americans signaled important, though incremental, progress. These milestones reflected the broader national struggle for civil rights and social justice.

# Cultural Contributions and Modern Legacy

Black history in Virginia extends beyond political and social struggles to encompass rich cultural contributions that have shaped the Commonwealth's identity.

## Arts, Literature, and Music

African American artists, writers, and musicians from Virginia have made significant impacts both regionally and nationally. The Harlem Renaissance included figures with Virginian roots, while contemporary artists continue this legacy.

Virginia's musical heritage is notable for its contributions to jazz, blues, gospel, and hip-hop. Cities like Richmond have been epicenters for cultural movements, nurturing talent and preserving African American artistic traditions.

## Commemorations and Museums

Efforts to preserve and promote black history in Virginia have increased in recent decades. Institutions such as the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia in Richmond provide educational resources and exhibitions that highlight the African American experience.

Historic sites like the First Africans in Virginia Monument and the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site offer tangible connections to the past, fostering understanding and dialogue. These commemorations serve both as reminders of historical struggles and celebrations of achievements.

## Contemporary Challenges and Progress

While Virginia has made strides in acknowledging and honoring its black history, challenges persist. Issues related to racial inequality in education, economic opportunity, and criminal justice remain areas of concern. However, the growing emphasis on inclusive history and community engagement reflects a commitment to addressing these complexities.

The state's demographic shifts and political changes have also influenced discussions about representation and equity. Black Virginians continue to play vital roles in shaping the Commonwealth's future across all sectors.

## Exploring Black History in Virginia Today

For scholars, educators, and visitors seeking to understand black history in Virginia, numerous resources and landmarks offer in-depth perspectives. Walking tours, educational programs, and archival collections provide opportunities to engage with this multifaceted history.



By examining Virginia's past through the lens of African American experiences, one gains a deeper appreciation for the complexities of American history and the ongoing pursuit of justice and equality. Black history in Virginia remains a vital subject for study, reflection, and celebration, underscoring the Commonwealth's unique contributions to the national narrative.

## **Black History In Virginia**

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**black history in virginia: Virginia Black History Archives** , 199? The Virginia Black History Archives documents the history of African Americans in the Richmond and central Virginia area, primarily during the twentieth century. The Archives' web site provides a listing of its collections as well as links to either the documents and images which make up the collections or to the associated finding aids. Among the items available online are a collection of photographic images of African Americans dating from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; an online exhibit exploring the history of segregation in the Prince Edward County, Virginia, schools; transcripts of oral history interviews with African American Richmonders dealing with their memories regarding school segregation and desegregation and with the history of the city's Church Hill neighborhood and digitized images of the records of African American professional associations and black churches in the Richmond area.

**black history in virginia: Virginia Shade** Norman Schools, 2012 What do three hundred years of African American history look like in a small, southern town? Virginia Shade depicts just that a sometimes brutal, sometimes uplifting, but always human tapestry of two societies struggling through and beyond slavery. African Americans have been part of the town of Falmouth's history since its founding in 1727. Some were free, but most were slaves an African king and princess among them. During the Civil War, thousands of slaves crossed into the Union lines at Falmouth to claim freedom for themselves. After the war, however, fundamental equality remained elusive. Falmouth's African American children endured separate and unequal schooling during the Jim Crow era, and even the town's cemetery was segregated. Even so, it wasn't a simple matter of black versus white. From a slave owner who tried but was unable to manumit her slaves to a local church's public rebuke of a black member who'd run away from his owner, committing the sin of stealing himself, Falmouth's history reflects the contrasting attitudes and actions among its white citizens and institutions throughout the years. Author Norman Schools blends first-person accounts, contemporary poetry, and biblical allegory to give a vivid sense of time, place, and personal connection to Falmouth and its remarkable African American heritage.

**black history in virginia: A Different Story** Ruth Coder Fitzgerald, 1979

**black history in virginia: Black History in Virginia** , 2005

**black history in virginia: Virginia Landmarks of Black History** Calder Loth, 1995 The sixty-four sites described in this book are a testament to the contribution that Afro-Americans have made to Virginia history over the last four centuries. The buildings they constructed, the churches in which they worshiped, and the schools in which they studied preserve the story of these contributions in visible and often dramatic ways. These sites have been designated by both the state and national historical registers as worthy of preservation.

**black history in virginia: GVA-Black History: Virginia Profiles** , 2000 Gateway Virginia

again takes part in the month-long celebration of black history with 12 new profiles of historically significant African Americans who have Virginia connections.

**black history in virginia:** *Living Black History* Manning Marable, 2006-01-03 Essays examine the challenges faced by African Americans in preserving and shaping African-American history, exposing the myth and conflict surrounding such figures as Malcolm X, W.E.B. DuBois, and Booker T. Washington.

**black history in virginia:** *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present* Paul Finkelman, 2009 Alphabetically-arranged entries from A to C that explores significant events, major persons, organizations, and political and social movements in African-American history from 1896 to the twenty-first-century.

**black history in virginia: The 21st Century Black History** Lee Arnold Green Sr., 2022-05-23 *Black History in the 21st Century: From the Atlantic Slave Trade in America to Its Impact on African Americans Today* is mainly about the injustices suffered by African Americans in America, especially the impact of the Atlantic slave trade in America on the negro race today, to include people of color. The impact of the Atlantic slave trade in the twenty-first century is high-tech lynching in America, that is, without the noose around the neck of the African American. High-tech lynching is defined in this book as the following: There are two phases of high-tech lynching. The first phase is characterized by violence, death, and/or destruction by white racists, race haters, or white supremacists, practicing bad spirit principal part racist hatred of racism against African Americans on the streets, to include people of color. The practice of racism is the use of racial or racist epithets characterized by the sentiment of racial segregation, white cultural and political domination that characterizes discriminatory language and/or physical practice of racism that involves violence, death, and/or destruction against black Americans in America. These are racist incidents on the streets. That is the first phase of high-tech lynching in the twenty-first century in America. And then an African American takes his or her racist case to court for courtroom proceedings. This is the second phase of high-tech lynching in America in the twenty-first century, wherein the courtroom, the DA, or district attorney, become hairsplitters of the letter of the law and nitpick at the spirit of the law as to the alleged violation or crime to justify the action or bad behavior of racist white policemen or white supremacists, characterized by their bad spirit principal part racist hatred of racism. Therefore, high-tech lynching involves the judges of the courts in America that go along with their district attorney's travesty of justice or mockery of the justice system. To include the legislators who make the laws in America and oftentimes their designated juries based on their homogeneity of bad spirit principal part racist hatred. Therefore, high-tech lynching is the effect of America's Atlantic slave trade on African Americans today in this the twenty-first century, post-Jim Crow as a system of predatory laws and tyranny of racism practiced against African Americans.

**black history in virginia:** *The Harvard Guide to African-American History* Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, 2001 This massive guide, sponsored by the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard University and compiled by renowned experts, offers a compendium of information and interpretation on over 500 years of black experience in America.

**black history in virginia: A Short History of Blacks in Brunswick County Virginia 1700-2021** Cecelia Brooks, 2021-02-21 The book, *A Short History of Blacks In Brunswick County Virginia*, is a community effort to look into the history of African American Blacks in the Southside Virginia County of Brunswick. This short history asks questions of the life of Blacks who started out as indigenous North Americans, Africans, and people of multiple backgrounds, slaves and freed people who are known as Blacks. With so little historiographical data, there still is little written information to answer the many questions of the present generation. However, this book is the starting point of a community searching and finding illuminating information about its roots. The book also celebrates the victories the present generation and their forbearers' work to promote them. There are books and a museum about Saint Paul's College and its work to reach out and develop the lives of people the Brunswick community. This book takes the next step in spotlighting the community. The forward is by Dr. Barbara Jarrett Harris who is the epitome of a success story of

Black Brunswick County.

**black history in virginia: Our Heritage** Edna Hawkins-Hendrix, 1998

**black history in virginia: African Americans of Jefferson County** Jefferson County Black History Preservation Society Inc., 2012-09-18 Jefferson County can proudly claim a large number of firsts when it comes to African Americans in national history. The raid to free slaves that served as a catalyst for the Civil War was led by abolitionist John Brown in Harpers Ferry. The first man wounded in the rebellion was Heyward Shepherd, a free African American and a Jefferson County resident. Pres. Abraham Lincoln appointed Jefferson County native Martin Robison Delany as the first African American field officer of the Civil War. In 1906, the Niagara Movement, forerunner to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), held its first meeting on American soil on the Storer College campus. The first woman to become the coach of a men's college basketball team was also an African American from Jefferson County. Additionally, the Colored Horse Show held in Charles Town was the first of its kind for African Americans.

**black history in virginia: Afro-Virginian History and Culture** John Saillant, 2013-09-13 The essays in this collection offer new evidence and new conclusions on topics in the history of African Americans in Virginia such as the demography of early slave imports, the means used to regulate slave labor, the situation of female hired slaves in the backcountry, African American women in the Civil War era, and the Garveyite grassroots organizations of the 1920s.

**black history in virginia: Encyclopedia of African American History** Leslie M. Alexander, Walter C. Rucker, 2010-02-09 A fresh compilation of essays and entries based on the latest research, this work documents African American culture and political activism from the slavery era through the 20th century. Encyclopedia of African American History introduces readers to the significant people, events, sociopolitical movements, and ideas that have shaped African American life from earliest contact between African peoples and Europeans through the late 20th century. This encyclopedia places the African American experience in the context of the entire African diaspora, with entries organized in sections on African/European contact and enslavement, culture, resistance and identity during enslavement, political activism from the Revolutionary War to Southern emancipation, political activism from Reconstruction to the modern Civil Rights movement, black nationalism and urbanization, and Pan-Africanism and contemporary black America. Based on the latest scholarship and engagingly written, there is no better go-to reference for exploring the history of African Americans and their distinctive impact on American society, politics, business, literature, art, food, clothing, music, language, and technology.

**black history in virginia: Footprints of African Americans in Alexandria** Andrew Winfree, 2019-10-03 Footprints of African Americans in Alexandria is a thoughtful and focused book that is based on the premise of sharing knowledge, history, and inspiration regarding the African American experience, building on the knowledge with biographies of over two hundred individuals who have made or are making progress and positive changes possible.

**black history in virginia: Virginia in the War Years, 1938-1945** Joseph P. Freitas, 2014-07-18 Although World War II began as a war in Europe, many in the United States, foreseeing the inevitable, began to prepare for war, putting no faith in the Neutrality Act. Preparations for war, essentially ending the Great Depression, affected the entire country, with Virginia particularly playing a major role. More than one million service men and women came to Virginia. The sheer scope of the military development in Virginia of the Army, Navy, Coast Guard and Air Force, providing training bases and support facilities, underscores the national resolve to be prepared. The book includes the Civil Air Patrol, wartime industry, POW camps, U-boat attacks, the Beach Patrol and other Virginia-related topics.

**black history in virginia: An African American History of the Civil War in Hampton Roads** Cassandra Newby-Alexander, 2010 Through a fascinating narrative and stunning vintage photographs, readers will discover the struggles and triumphs of the African Americans of Hampton Roads. It was in Hampton Roads, Virginia, that hundreds gained their freedom. The teeming wharves were once a major station on the Underground Railroad, and during the Civil War, escaped

slaves such as Shepard Mallory, Frank Baker and James Townsend fled to Fort Monroe to become contrabands under the protection of General Benjamin Butler. Upon arrival in the region, many took up arms for the Union, and the valiant deeds of some placed them among the first African American Medal of Honor recipients. Join Professor Cassandra L. Newby-Alexander as she charts the history of this remarkable African American community from the Civil War to Reconstruction.

**black history in virginia: Fodor's Virginia And Maryland** John D. Rambow, 2005 Provides information on accommodations, restaurants, historic sites, recreation, and shopping

**black history in virginia: Black America** Alton Hornsby Jr., 2011-08-23 This two-volume encyclopedia presents a state-by-state history of African Americans in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. African American populations are established in every area of the United States, including Hawaii and Alaska (more than 10 percent of the population of Fairbanks, Alaska, is African American). Black Americans have played an invaluable role in creating our great nation in myriad ways, including their physical contributions and labor during the slavery era; intellectually, spiritually, and politically; in service to our country in military duty; and in areas of popular culture such as music, art, sports, and entertainment. The chapters extend chronologically from the colonial period to the present. Each chapter presents a timeline of African American history in the state, a historical overview, notable African Americans and their pioneering accomplishments, and state-specific traditions or activities. This state-by-state treatment of information allows readers to take pride in what happened in their state and in the famous people who came from their state.

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