

# BLACK FOLK

## THE ROOTS OF THE BLACK WORKING CLASS

An award-winning historian illuminates the adversities and joys of the Black working class in America through a stunning narrative centered on her forebears.

Spanning two hundred years—from one of Kelley's earliest known ancestors, an enslaved blacksmith, to the essential workers of the Covid-19 pandemic—Black Folk highlights the lives of the laundresses, Pullman porters, domestic maids, and postal workers who established the Black working class as a force in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Taking jobs white people didn't want and confined to segregated neighborhoods, Black workers found community in intimate spaces, from stoops on city streets to the backyards of washerwomen, where multiple generations labored from dawn to dusk, talking and laughing in a space free of white supervision and largely beyond white knowledge. As millions of Black people left the violence of the American South for the promise of a better life in the North and West, these networks of resistance and joy sustained early arrivals and newcomers alike and laid the groundwork for organizing for better jobs, better pay, and equal rights.

With the resurgence of labor activism in our own time, Black Folk presents a stirring history of our possible future.

"Brings a dazzling blend of compassion, storytelling, and deep research to a subject that is vital to anyone aiming to understand the future direction of American politics and the nation itself."

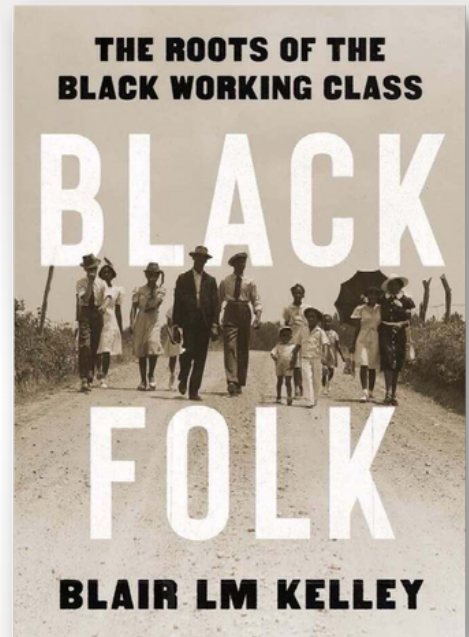
**-Martha S. Jones, author of Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All**

"Black Folk is a revelation, indeed one of the most important works of history to come across my desk in a long time. . . . Far from a small nameless and faceless group, the Black working class has been and continues to be the very heart of dignified working America and the animating force behind so much of our unique American culture."

**-Michael Eric Dyson**

"Black Folk is at once a love song, a blues, and an epic account of the Black working class in the United States. In lyrical prose, Blair LM Kelley draws on her own family history to tell the story of how Black laborers built, fed, repaired, served, cleaned, cared for, enriched, and worked to democratize this country. By tracing the roots of the Black working class, Kelley reveals the history of the whole nation. The toils of 'Black folk' made the soul of America."

**-Robin D. G. Kelley, author of Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination**



Blair LM Kelley, Ph.D. is an award-winning author, historian, and scholar of the African American experience. She is the Joel R. Williamson Distinguished Professor of Southern Studies at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and the incoming director of the Center for the Study of the American South, the first Black woman to serve in that role in the center's thirty-year history. Kelley is the author of two books: Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship (UNC Press) and Black Folk: The Roots the Black Working Class (Liveright).

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