

Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 2

FEBRUARY, 2009

The African American Historical Museum and Cultural Center of Iowa

Mission: To preserve, promote, publicize and educate the public on the heritage of African Americans in Iowa.

Organizational

History: In 1994, a small group from Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Cedar Rapids began the project in celebration of Black History Month.

Timeline

1994 - African American Heritage Foundation, Inc. is chartered in Iowa as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

1998 - First full time employee, Joseph McGill, hired as Executive Director.

2000 - Temporary museum is opened at Westdale Mall, Cedar Rapids.

2002 - Construction begins in April on the new 17,000 square foot state-of-the-art museum and cultural center.

2003 - Grand opening September 19th for permanent exhibit "doorways".

2004 - Endowment fund opened.

2005 - The 12th Ave. bridge is renamed the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Bridge and the memorial art piece "Trumpet" is unveiled.

2006 - Museum chapters are established in 8 communities across Iowa.

2008 - The flood of 2008 damages the Museum building.

2009 - Museum re-opens to the public on January 17.

Black History Month

February marks the beginning of Black History Month, a federally recognized, nationwide celebration that provides the opportunity for all Americans to reflect on the significant roles that African-Americans have played in the shaping of U.S. history.



"We should emphasize not Negro History, but the Negro in history. What we need is not a history of selected races or nations, but the history of the world void of national bias, race hate, and religious prejudice." Dr. Carter G. Woodson
founder Negro History Week, 1926

Dr. Carter G. Woodson is given much of the credit for Black History Month. The son of former slaves, Woodson spent his childhood working in coalmines and quarries.

He received his education during the four-month term that was usual for black schools at the time. At 19, having taught himself English fundamentals and arithmetic, Woodson entered high school, where he completed a four-year curriculum in two years. He went on to earn his

Master's degree in history from the University of Chicago, and he eventually earned a Ph. D from Harvard.

Disturbed that history textbooks largely ignored America's black population, Woodson took on the challenge of writing black Americans into the nation's history. To do this, Woodson established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History.

In 1926, he developed Negro History Week. Woodson chose the second week of February for the celebration because it marks the birthdays of two men who greatly influenced the black American population: Frederick Douglass (February 14), an escaped slave who became one of the foremost black abolitionists and civil rights leaders in the nation, and President Abraham Lincoln (February 12), who signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which abolished slavery in America's confederate states. In 1976, Negro History Week expanded into Black History Month.

Source: <http://blackhistorypages.net/pages/cgwoodson.php>,
<http://www.chipublib.org/002branches/woodson/woodsonbib.html>

NAACP 100th ANNIVERSARY

On February 12, 2009, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People will mark its 100th anniversary. The NAACP Headquarters, based in Baltimore, MD, along with its 1,700 units nationwide, will host celebrations and observances throughout the year that highlight the significant role the organization has played in leading social change in America.

The NAACP was founded by W.E.B. Dubois, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Henry Moscowitz, Mary White Ovington, Oswald Garrison Villard, and William English Walling as an interracial organization "to promote equality of rights and to eradicate caste or race prejudice among the citizens of the United States; to advance the interest of colored citizens; to secure for them impartial suffrage; and to increase their opportunities for securing justice in the courts, education for the children, employment according to their ability and complete equality before law."

The Niagara Movement, a group of 32 prominent African-Americans led by W.E.B. Dubois, was the predecessor to the NAACP. The group met on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls (due to U.S. segregation laws in hotels) to discuss the challenges facing "people of color". In 1909 the conference took place in New York, and a new group emerged calling themselves the National Negro Committee. This new group adopted the name of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and was incorporated in 1911.

Source www.naacp.org

Reconnecting the Historical Civil Rights Movement in a Current Sociological Context

With the marking of the Presidential Inauguration of our 44th President Barack Obama, we are afforded the opportunity to observe the historical workings of past civil rights accomplishments in a current sociological context. Many emerging scholars often theorize about the implications of the Civil Rights Movement while neo-civil rights activist combat more institutionalized acts of discrimination. However, many struggles and hardships faced by early civil rights activists, scholars, and workers are of continuing disconnect. This disconnect does not stem from any inten-

tional motive. Rather, this growing lack of connection derives from the fading of past social issues with passing of time. Even in the event where past civil rights issues transcend through time, these new issues require a different type of analysis that will continue to be rooted in the past.

Today, we find that civil rights frameworks focus on the successful navigation through systemic oppression, legislative changes in civil rights laws, and best practices used for processing complaints. Although these are all important indicators of the progression and have proven beneficial in addressing problems in the current civil rights climate, it is important to continuously seek education about past civil

rights milestones. Drawing attention to strides that civil rights workers and activities made at the local, state, national, and global level are key steps to understanding the face of civil rights in the future.

As we celebrate the multifaceted accomplishments in the areas of civil rights activism, enforcement, education, and scholarship. It is important to acknowledge the workings of past civil rights trailblazers.

Remember, the civil rights movement is a part of our past, present, and we are actively working to shape the rights of our future.

*Submitted by LaSheila Yates,
Civil Rights Investigator*

African American Women in Iowa



Lulu Johnson (left) with members of her Sunday School class, Gravity, Iowa, 1924

Lulu Merle Johnson was born in 1907 in Gravity, Iowa, and graduated from Clinton High School in 1925. She earned both a BA and an MA in 1930 from the State University of Iowa (now the University of Iowa). In 1941, Johnson received a PhD in American History from the State University of Iowa, becoming the first African American woman in the state to earn a doctorate. The title of Johnson's dissertation is "The Problem of Slavery in the Old Northwest, 1787-1858."

Lulu Johnson taught history at Talladega College (Alabama), Tougaloo College (Mississippi), Florida A&M University, and West Virginia State College before joining Cheyney State University (Pennsylvania) in 1952 as a history professor and dean of women. Johnson was a lifelong member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. She retired in 1971 and died in 1995.

For 36 years, **Ruth Ann Gaines** has been the Des Moines East High School drama teacher, Des Moines Area Community College speech and drama instructor, and a facilitator of diversity courses through the Heartland Area Education Agency. Valued and honored with many awards over the years, Gaines was the first fine arts teacher to receive the Department of Education's Iowa Teacher of the Year award.

In 2001 Gaines created Sisters For Success, a Des Moines Public School mentorship program for African American middle and high school girls. In 2003, she was one of five educators chosen from around the country to be inducted into the National Teachers Hall of Fame. And in 2004, she was one of three Iowans to be inducted into the Iowa African American Hall of Fame. She was inducted into the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame in 2007.





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Editor, Stefanie Robinson

**Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission
Areas of Civil Rights Coverage**

Simply being treated unfairly may not be discriminatory. While it may be unfair, morally unjust or simply wrong, it may not necessarily be an illegal practice.

Unlawful Discrimination does not cover all things or all circumstances. Cedar Rapids City Ordinance 2-99 covers unlawful discriminatory practices only in the areas of Employment, Education, Public Accommodations, Credit, and Fair Housing.

Generally speaking, complaints of unlawful discriminatory treatment must be based on a person's Age, Race, Color, Creed, Religion, Mental or Physical Disability, Sex (gender), National Origin or Sexual Orientation. These categories are called protected class status.

Additionally, the Commission enforces local civil rights laws in the area of housing on the basis of familial status (families with children under 18 years), and in the area of credit on the basis of marital status.

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PRESIDENT OBAMA SIGNS LEDBETTER BILL
Restored Law Marks Key Moment for Civil Rights

President Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act into law on January 29, 2009 reversing the Supreme Court's 5-4 ruling in 2007 and restoring the ability of victims of wage discrimination to hold their employers accountable for injustice and challenge the practice in court.

The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act restores the law that existed for decades in virtually every region of the country prior to the Supreme Court decision in Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. and makes it clear that *each* discriminatory paycheck is a new act of discrimination that resets the 180-day limit to file a claim. Plaintiffs still can recover back pay only for a period of no more than two years before they challenge the discrimination.

"The five Supreme Court justices who ruled against me showed they didn't understand the realities of the workplace," said Lilly Ledbetter. "But Congress and the President told them today that they were wrong. The effects of wage discrimination are all too real. And when it comes down to it, this really is a family affair. If women are paid better, families and the rest of the country are better off."

***"If women are paid better,
families and the rest of the
country are better off."***

~ Lilly Ledbetter

When Are WE Going to Get Over It?



Dr. Manis

For much of the last forty years, ever since America "fixed" its race problem in the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, we white people have been impatient with African Americans who continued to blame race for their difficulties. Often we have heard whites ask, "When are African Americans finally going to get over it?"

Now I want to ask: "When are we White Americans going to get over our ridiculous obsession with skin color?"

Recent reports that "Election Spurs Hundreds" of Race Threats, Crimes" should frighten and infuriate every one of us. Having grown up in "Bombingham," Alabama in the 1960s, I remember overhearing an avalanche of comments about what many white classmates and their parents wanted to do to John and Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Eventually, as you may recall, in all three cases, someone decided to do more than "talk the talk."

Since our recent presidential election, to our eternal shame we are once again hearing the same reprehensible talk I remember from my boyhood.

We white people have controlled political life in the disunited colonies and United States for some 400 years on this continent. Conservative whites have been in power 28 of the last 40 years. Even during the eight Clinton years, conservatives in Congress blocked most of his agenda and pulled him to the right. Yet never in that period did I read any headlines suggesting that anyone was calling for the assassinations of presidents Nixon, Ford, Reagan, or either of the Bushes. Criticize them, yes. Call for their impeachment, perhaps.

But there were no bounties on their heads. And even when someone did try to kill Ronald Reagan, the perpetrator was a non-political mental case who wanted merely to impress Jody Foster.

But elect a liberal who happens to be Black and we're back in the sixties again. At this point in our history, we should be proud that we've proven what conservatives are always saying -that in America anything is possible, EVEN electing a black man as president. But instead we now hear that schoolchildren from Maine to California are talking about wanting to "assassinate Obama."

Fighting the urge to throw up, I can only ask, "How long?" How long before we white people realize we can't make our nation, much less the whole world, look like us? How long until we white people can -once and for all- get over this hell-conceived preoccupation with skin color? How long until we

white people get over the demonic conviction that white skin makes us superior? How long before we white people get over our bitter resentments about being demoted to the status of equality with non-whites?

How long before we get over our expectations that we should be at the head of the line merely because of our white skin? How long until we white people end our silence and call out our peers when they share the latest racist jokes in the privacy of our white-only conversations?

I believe in free speech, but how long until we white people start making racist loudmouths as socially uncomfortable as we do flag burners? How long until we white people will stop insisting that blacks exercise personal responsibility, build strong families, educate themselves enough to edit the Harvard Law Review, and work hard enough to become President of the United States, only to threaten to assassinate them when they do?

How long before we start "living out the true meaning" of our creeds, both civil and religious, that all men and women are created equal and that "red and yellow, black and white" all are precious in God's sight?

Until this past November 4, I didn't believe this country would ever elect an African American to the presidency. I still don't believe I'll live long enough to see us white people get over our racism problem. But here's my three-point plan:

First, every day that Barack Obama lives in the White House that Black Slaves Built, I'm going to pray that God (and the Secret Service) will protect him and his family from us white people.

Second, I'm going to report to the FBI any white person I overhear saying, in seriousness or in jest, anything of a threatening nature about President Obama.

Third, I'm going to pray to live long enough to see America surprise the world once again, when white people can "in spirit and in truth" sing of our damnable color prejudice, "We HAVE overcome."

Andrew Manis is author of *Macon Black and White* and serves on the steering committee of *Macon's Center for Racial Understanding*.

What is your reaction to this article?

What are your thoughts on Dr. Marris' words?

Please send your comments to Stefanie Robinson at s.robinson@cedar-rapids.org.

We want to hear from you!