Leading the NAACP into the Future

Morris Reed, President, NAACP New Orleans Chapter

Cornell William Brooks, President, National NAACP

Black History
Terrylyn Dorsey and Terrinika Smith

Commentary
Remembering Malcolm
Morris Reed and Cornell William Brooks
Lead Local and National NAACP
into the Future

By Edwin Buggage

NAACP History of Leading the Civil Rights Struggle

For over a century the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) is the oldest continuous Civil Rights Organization in the United States. Many great leaders have been part of this organization from its founding with W.E.B. DuBois, through the Civil Rights Era with, Thurgood Marshall, Roy Wilkins nationally and people such as A.P. Tureaud and Ernest “Dutch” Morial locally were fighting to tear down the walls of separate but equal. In an America that was far from being a country where all were created equal.

The national NAACP last year named Attorney Cornell Brooks its National Chair after Ben Jealous stepped down. Under his leadership with renewed vigor that this organization as well other historical Civil Rights Organizations have come back to address the issues of today. As we discussed in the previous editions of Data News Weekly this month, that focused on NNPA (National Newspaper Publishers Association) and the National Urban League that the fight for Civil Rights/Human Rights is an ongoing struggle that is relevant today as it was in the turn of the 20th Century when the NAACP began.

Morris Reed and his Vision for local NAACP

The local NAACP has recently changed its reigns of leadership with the stepping down of Danatus King. The organization is now being led by longtime Attorney and Judge Morris Reed. Speaking of his agenda he says, “The

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded by W.E.B. DuBois on February 19, 1909. The NAACP is the nation’s oldest, largest and most widely recognized grassroots-based civil rights organization.
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block organizing to provide voter education, registration and partici-
pation. Once it is put in place, this model could serve as a catalyst for
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the center of the conversation of fairness and justice in this country.
Reed believes the NAACP and oth-
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these issues of inequality and injust-
tice must take a lead role in finding
workable solutions to the problems
regarding race today.

“No, I do not believe we can say
there is no longer a need for the
NAACP. We still need the NAACP;
which is the oldest (since 1906)
and largest (over 2 million mem-
bers) to remain engaged on the
following issues impacting the
community: economic sustain-
ability and ending poverty; educa-
tional equality; healthcare for all
our people; fairness in the criminal
justice system; and of course voting
rights," says Reed.

NAACP Connects
Young and Old around
Issues of Justice

In some regards there is a dis-
connect between the younger and
older generations when it comes to
issues of Civil Rights. This is some-
thing that Reed finds disheartening,
according to Reed. “There exist in
the community a great deal of apa-
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Zulu Parade Highlights

Photos by Kichea S. Burt

The temperatures were chilly, but the Zulu Parade was HOT! Thousands gathered to cheer as the Zulu Parade rolled down the streets, tossing beads and the coveted 2015 Zulu coconuts. It was a day not to be missed, and Data was there to capture all the moments.
Black Broadway
African Americans on the Great White Way

By Stewart F. Lane

"Black Broadway: African Americans on the Great White Way"
c.2015, Square One Publishers
$39.95 / $49.95 Canada
288 pages

A remote control and five hundred channels.
That's what you've got for entertainment, and there's still nothing on TV. That doesn't keep you from looking, though, and wishing for something different.

Finding entertainment shouldn't be such a big production – but in decades past, that's exactly what it took for African Americans, in more ways than one. In the new book "Black Broadway" by Stewart F. Lane, you'll find out why.

When William Alexander Brown decided to retire, he knew where he'd do it: in the two-story home he'd purchased in lower Manhattan. It was 1821 and Brown, a free black man, knew that there were few places for black actors to perform for black audiences, and he planned to allow performances there.

The popularity of those performances spurred Brown and a friend to "go a step further" with a 300-seat establishment they named the African Grove Theatre. It, too, was successful, until Brown was forced out of business by a local white theatre owner who feared competition.

Not long after the African Grove Theatre was closed, minstrel shows began attracting crowds of both races. Many shows featured white and black entertainers in burnt-cork blackface, as well as comedy sketches and dancing – including many skits satirizing black life and culture.

"It's not clear," says Lane, "why the African Americans of the era turned out to see" those shows – but they did, perhaps to laugh "at the absurdity of the caricatures..."

By the late 1800s, vaudeville and burlesque had become popular, and that added increasing diversity to shows. Black entertainers were often included on-stage, and entire productions were created with black troupes, for black audiences.

White people, of course, were welcome and did attend; one theatre owner even gave them their own section... in the back of the house.

Throughout the years, African Americans – both performers and audience members – made strides, but slowly and with help from the NAACP and the Harlem Renaissance. By the 1930s, Broadway shows included racial issues; by the 1940s, interracial marriage was a common theme. In the 1950s, audiences enjoyed performances dealing with poverty and racism – but it wasn't until well past the Civil Rights years that black faces became a non-issue on the Great White Way.

Loaded with pictures, playbill reproductions, advertisements, and drawings, "Black Broadway" is a theatre-goer's delight.

But I was equally happy to see that there's plenty for the historian, too: in addition to a rich narrative on equality for African Americans on Broadway (and off), author Stewart F. Lane includes a running timeline of national and world history to put the main body of this book into perspective. We're also treated to dozens of short-but-comprehensive profiles of influential performers and people who, though many haven't graced a stage in decades, are still familiar to followers of theatre, jazz, dance, and music.

With all that's inside this book, give yourself time to browse, read awhile, then browse again and enjoy. "Black Broadway" is perfect for fans of stage and screen and, of course, when there's nothing on TV.

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From Malcolm X to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz

There is perhaps no American civil rights leader who generated as many divergent opinions as Malcolm X. As we near the 50th anniversary of his assassination on February 21, 1965, our nation will inevitably scrutinize his life, his work and his lasting impact on our country and our continuous struggle to address racial inequality and its heinous consequences.

Born Malcolm Little on May 19, 1925, Malcolm became accustomed to the cruelties of racism at an early age, losing his father in a suspect attack by white supremacists. His early life was a blur of broken homes, petty crime and incarceration. Introduced to the teachings of the Nation of Islam during his time in jail, Malcolm X traded prison for a pursuit of racial justice and equality for Blacks in America.

While his initial approach may not have always been championed by or aligned with other civil rights leaders of the time, Malcolm X’s life transition and his embrace of multiculturalism is an important story to be acknowledged and retold. But often, supporters and critics alike attempt to isolate the “by any means necessary” civil rights leader to one part of his journey.

Ten days after his famous “The Ballot or the Bullet” speech, Malcolm X left the United States on April 13, 1964 for a life-altering trip through the Middle East and Africa, including a pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, the holiest city in Islam. It was during his experience of the pilgrimage that his next transformation would occur. In letters from his trip, he described scenes of unimagined interracial harmony among “tens of thousands of pilgrims, from all over the world. They were of all colors, from blue-eyed blondes to black-skinned Africans.” As he began to see that unity and brotherhood were not impossible realities between “the white and the non-white,” his fight for equality never changed. It only became more inclusive.

In a letter to then Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) President James Farmer, Malcolm, now El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, wrote, “I am still traveling, trying to broaden my mind, for I’ve seen too much of the damage narrow-mindedness can make of things, and when I return home to America, I will devote what energies I have to repairing the damage.”

Unfortunately, Malcolm X’s newfound approach to the pursuit of racial equality was cut short less than a year later under a fatal hail of bullets in Harlem’s Audubon Ballroom. But rather than end his journey to mend our wounded nation, we can each walk a few steps in his remaining miles to ensure equality and justice for all.

Marc H. Morial, former mayor of New Orleans, is president and CEO of the National Urban League.

Black History Salute to Prince Hall Masons

During Black History Month 2015 I believe it is important to highlight some of those long lasting institutions and entities that have continued to serve the empowerment interests of Black America for over the past 200 years. Too often some of us forget too quickly about the historical groups and social bridges that have helped to bring Black America across troubled and perilous waters during the last two centuries.

One group that I know we should resolutely salute during every Black History Month is the organization known today as the Grand Lodge of Prince Hall Masons. They have grown exponentially from their first lodge in Boston, Massachusetts in 1787 to numerous other masonic lodges today strategically established and recognized throughout the United States.

Without a lot of external fanfare and public boasting about the accomplishments of Prince Hall Masons, the facts are that this organization of skilled and talented “Brothers” has been consistent in contributing to the long protracted progress of Black America. The living legacy of Prince Hall is still today focused on the mission of providing leadership of high moral character, charitable assistance to those in need, and steadfast support of freedom, justice, equality and empowerment for Black Americans and all people.

Who was Prince Hall? He was one of the earliest Black abolitionists against the slavery of African people in America in the mid-1700s. He was a Free Black leader in Boston who was proud of his African ancestry and committed to improve the quality of life of African people during the early founding years of the United States. Prince Hall was a Black American freedom fighter who, like Cyrus Attucks, fought bravely in the Revolutionary War.

Prince Hall was one of the first Black Americans to be made a ma- son in America on March 6, 1775 in Boston. Interestingly, he and 14 other Black men initially established and named their first lodge: African Lodge #1 on July 3, 1776, one day before the United States Declaration of Independence was adopted and issued on July 4, 1776.

Once again this was a bold historic move by Hall and his masonic brothers with the clear unambiguous intention to stand up and work for African liberation and empowerment as a sacred fraternity. Hall was named master of African Lodge #1. Years later in honor of Prince Hall after his passing, the name of the lodge was changed to the Prince Hall Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons.

Why is this important and relevant 239 years later today in 2015? It is important because Black history did not start on a slave plantation in the south of the U.S. Prior to the birth of the United States, African people in America were engaged and involved in promoting unity to advance the cause of freedom and liberty. The evidence and truth about the historic and contemporary contributions of Prince Hall Masons to advance our interests needs to be better known and understood today by 44.3 million Black Americans.

The history of African people is as old as the history of humanity. Given the fact that racism and racial discrimination are still prevalent throughout the U.S. today means that we have to remain vigilant and committed to keep pushing forward to improve the quality of life for our families and communities. Similar to the fundamental necessity of maintaining the Black church, press, businesses and HBCUs, the issue concerning our awareness of the good work of historic groups like the Prince Hall Masons is equally important.

Black History Month, yes, is a time for reflection and memory of the past. But we must learn from the past and build upon what previous generations have built as a foundation. Let’s celebrate Black history by renewing our determination and spirit to uplift all of our families and communities. Let’s strengthen our institutions and businesses, in particular our HBCUs are in critical need of financial support. Let’s learn from the sustainable tradition of the Honorable Prince Hall: unity, build, outreach to care for others, demand justice and freedom, and enjoy the blessings of life to ensure a better future for those who will come after we have transitioned.

Marc Morial
President and CEO
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Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr.
NNPA Columnist

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Second-liner Profile Series for Data News Weekly

Terrylyn Dorsey and Terrinika Smith

Dance Like a Girl

Rachel Carrico

Terrylyn Dorsey is usually second-lining near her cousin, Terrinika Smith. "When it's me and Terrinika, we tear the floor up." On Sundays, they tear the street up as well. Dorsey is "trying to walk on my knees, flip, spin, walk on top of my head if I want to, jump up and down, crawl." Her cousin is usually nearby, coaching, encouraging, and dancing alongside her. "Terrinika always be telling me, 'Uh uh! Don't be doing that! You can't be doing the same thing over! You got to do some new moves!'" Smith agrees: "Exactly. Shock them every time."

Smith, now in her mid-twenties, was raised in the second-line culture. When she was a child, her father, Wellington Ratcliff, Jr., paraded with Young Men Olympian (see last week's profile), and her mother paraded with the Lady Sequins.

"Exactly. Shock them every time."

"Second-lining is who I am. I am where I can be free, be who I am, where I can be free, be who I am. Second-lining is who I am. I am second-lining."
There is never an excuse for domestic violence or sexual assault. It’s time we all speak out to stop the violence.

No more excuses.
No more silence.
No more violence.