



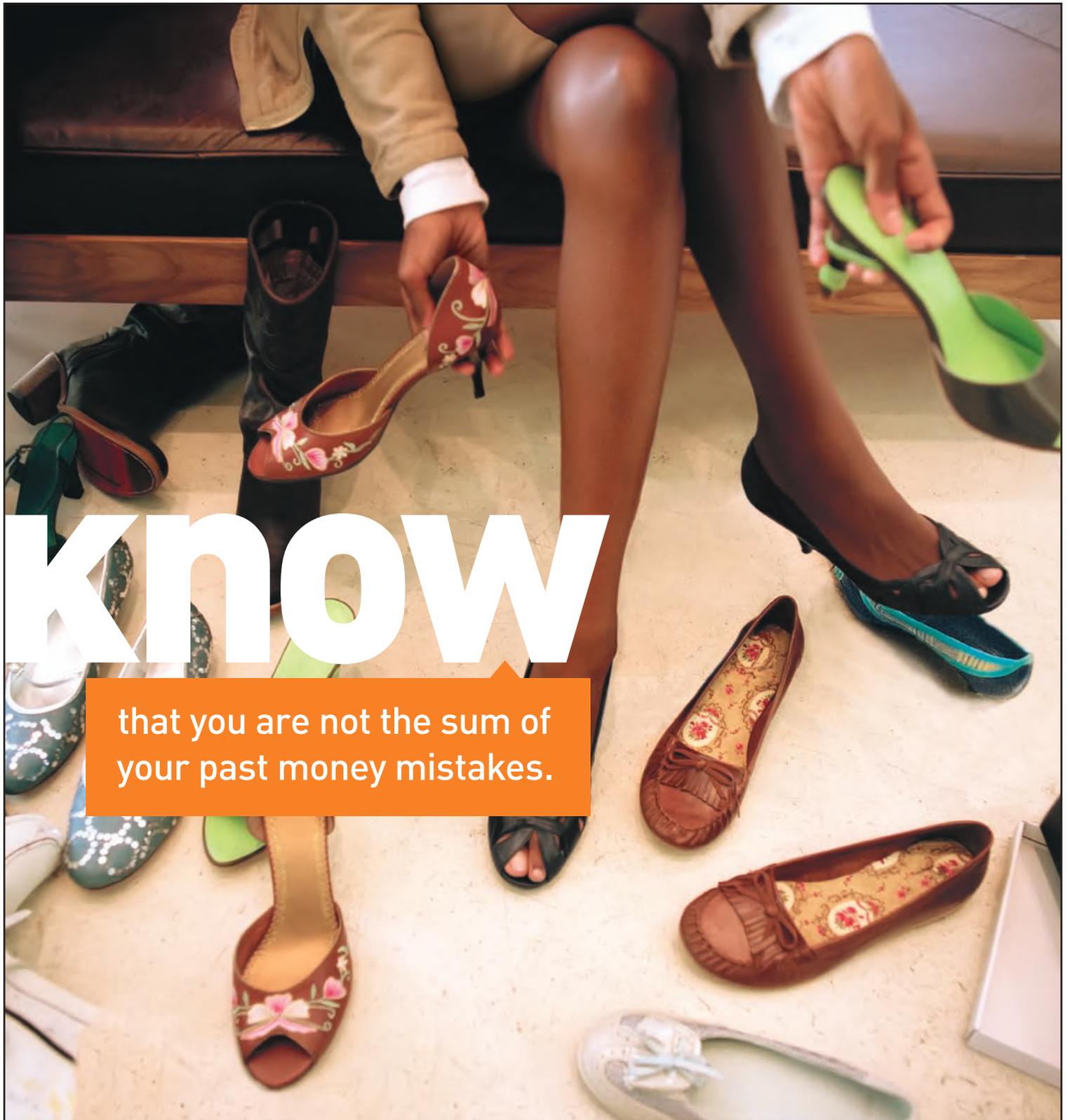
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NATIONAL MAGAZINE

57th ANNUAL
CONVENTION
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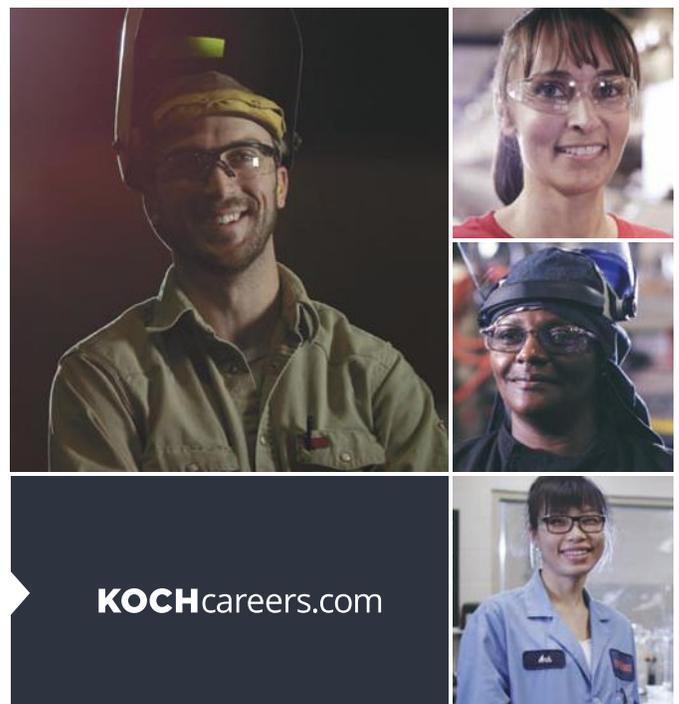


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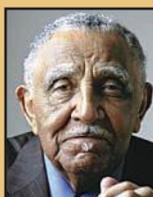
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1957-1968



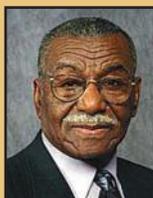
Ralph D. Abernathy
PRESIDENT EMERITUS
1968-1977



Joseph E. Lowery
PRESIDENT EMERITUS
1977-1997



Martin Luther King, III
PAST PRESIDENT
1998-2003



Fred L. Shuttlesworth
PAST PRESIDENT
2004
R.I.P. 1922-2011



Charles Steele, Jr.
PAST PRESIDENT
2005-2008



Howard Creecy, Jr.
PAST PRESIDENT
2011
R.I.P. 1954-2011



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Citi applauds the work of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and all those who work together to build a more inclusive America.





E.P.A.

BY CHARLES STEELE, JR., SCLC President and CEO

Rules Will Harm Most



You've probably heard the familiar oath: "First, do no harm." It's the pledge doctors are obliged to follow when treating an illness or injury.

Our government in Washington should heed the same advice: Don't treat one problem by creating another, more serious one.

That caution comes to mind as I've considered new regulations on power plants that the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will propose this summer. As a step toward addressing climate change, the EPA wants to curb carbon emissions from coal-burning power plants and wants governors across the country to shut down coal-fired plants in their states.

The problem is that these are the same plants that provide the biggest portion of our electricity and usually at the most affordable rates. Climate change may well be a serious issue, and one that deserves an informed response from our government. But the EPA's plan isn't the right one. According to a growing number of experts who are responsible for overseeing our nation's electricity supply, the EPA's plan will do next to nothing for global warming, but will raise the cost of electricity for both homes and businesses. It could even make the supply of electricity for all of us less reliable.

As a person who has spent a lifetime fighting on behalf of poor people, this concerns me greatly, and it troubles the Southern Christian Leadership Conference that I represent.

The reason is simple: Higher electricity bills hurt poor and low-income families the most. These communities, frequently consisting of disadvantaged minorities, already spend a larger share of their limited income on monthly utility bills—far more than affluent communities spend as

a share of their income. In fact, a Stanford University study suggests that the new regulations would mean households in the lowest income group shouldering increased energy costs at more than twice the rate of households in the highest 10 percent of income.

Paying for electricity is not a discretionary expense. The poor and the elderly on fixed incomes need heat in the winter and air conditioning in the summer as much as higher-income households, only they have fewer dollars to pay for these necessities.

Rising utility bills can often result in painful sacrifices—a poorer diet, poorer health, fewer of life's little pleasures and certainly none of the costlier ones. And utility bills are bound to climb as the most affordable electricity eliminated, forcing us to rely on costlier sources. People's health conditions are impacted if they are forced to live without air conditioning or heat, or if meals are skipped just to foot higher utility bills.

This is a case of government trying to make things better while creating spin-off problems. Surprisingly, even the environmental benefit will be negligible. That's because American power plants are now far cleaner and are no longer the largest source of carbon emissions. Instead, power plants and factories in Asia produce far greater carbon output.



Overall, the EPA is asking up to pay the price for a problem we can't fix, and it expects low-income households to pay the largest share.

Before the EPA adopts these measures, it should think twice about pursuing extreme rules that will have a negligible environmental impact, but could bring great pain to hardworking, everyday Americans. SCLC

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DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.



Getting to the Root Cause

*{ Laws are necessary –
but laws are not enough. }*

BY BERNARD LAFAYETTE, JR., SCLC Chairman



Dr. Bernard LaFayette, Jr. receives the coveted 2015 Hank Aaron Champion of Justice Award from the Atlanta Braves at the Center for Civil and Human Rights. Photo: Dirk Thomas

The civil rights work of the 1950's and the 1960's was a beginning. In the twentieth century, we took on passing legislation to ensure the civil rights of all Americans.

But laws are not enough.

In the twenty-first century, civil rights work will go beyond passing legislation: it will take on getting to the root cause of the persistent, insidious racial hatred existing in America.

We know the incidents that have been occurring across America in recent weeks and months are not the result of isolated, individual “crazy” behavior. It is a reflection of a much larger attitude and point of view that is in disharmony, in conflict, with American principles of freedom for all.

The racial violence we've been experiencing is absolutely appalling. However, we must strive to forgive those who are perpetrating the violence. We must also face the challenge of putting forth every effort to prevent the violence from re-occurring.

The only way we can defeat violence—is through non-violence.

As Dr. King once told us, “Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that.”

How we bridge the racial hate and conflict, how we bring our country and fellow Americans to a place of the “Beloved Community”—and our effectiveness in doing so—will determine the collective fate of not only America, but our world.

We don't have time to waste. The brightest minds and solutions are needed now. The best educational and social programs are needed now. The best facilitators and best engagement structures are needed now.

America's civil rights leadership will have to create and sustain a level of unprecedented public engagement. It will take collaboration and coalition-building at an unprecedented level of duration and performance. No one knows what that will look like.

But we know what our past has looked like.

We made it through the end of the First Reconstruction Era of America, as destructive as it was for the progress of racial equality. We could consider we are entering the end of a second “Reconstruction Era” in America.

Will we make it through the destructiveness of this Era, this seemingly repeating pattern of racial hatred and divisiveness?

It's too late to turn back. We've come too far to turn back now.

We must—and shall overcome. Dr. King shared with us that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land.

Join us in Baton Rouge. SCLC

A young boy with dark skin and short hair is saluting with his right hand. He is holding a wooden stick that supports a large American flag. He is wearing a blue and purple plaid shirt. The background is a white wall with vertical lines. The bottom of the image features a green grassy field.

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WELCOME to the SCLC 57th Annual Convention

We've Come Too Far To Turn Back Now – The Voting Rights Act, Then & Now



CONVENTION DETAILS:
Thurs., July 23 – Sun., July 26, 2015
Hilton Hotel, Capitol Center, Baton Rouge, La.

BY CATHELEAN C. STEELE, Director, SCLC "Justice for Girls"



Photo: John Glenn

As a History teacher, I knew of the monumental struggles Baton Rouge, Louisiana underwent historically. From being the largest slave trading center in America at one time—to being a hotbed of controversy during America's Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's—to serving as a staging command central during Hurricane Katrina—Baton Rouge has stood the sometimes brutally stark test of time.

It is thus befitting that Baton Rouge will serve as the convening site for the 57th Annual Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

For, once again in our history as a nation, we are faced with a monumental struggle for civil rights. We are clear of the intentions to reverse voting rights progress through *Shelby vs. Holder*. We are clear voting rights hang on a thread in the United States.

Only one question remains:

Will we take on together—and succeed together—in maintaining these rights so precious to Americans and others around the world—rights that were earned through a sea of enormous sacrifice?

Baton Rouge—which is French for “red stick”, once a line of demarcation—represents our “stake” in the

matter—our sacred ground—as we throw our hats, and our hearts, all the way in.

We start now. Baton Rouge is the place to build. Baton Rouge is the place to collaborate. Baton Rouge is our place to stand.

Come join this defining moment in our country's history. Come join committed others in an environment of unprecedented urgency with civil rights legends alongside civil rights fledglings.

View our convention itinerary on our website, as we bring numerous famous and new leaders in the area of civil rights to speak. Choose from a selection of breakout sessions and workshops intended to invoke thoughtful, collaborative dialogue and powerful next actions—together.

Witness and participate in a special acknowledgment of women across the nation who have been shining stars of service, empowered, self-expressed, and in action making a difference.

Come! Meet with and find others committed to coalition-building, resource-sharing, creating teamwork-in-action across the nation.

As the acclaimed Sheryl Sandberg (COO of Facebook) inspires us to do, let's “lean into” our dreams for civil rights—and not turn back.

We've come too far to turn back now. Welcome to Baton Rouge—with you, it will be huge! **sclc**



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Is honored to support the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for 58 years of dedication and service to the community. We stand tall with you in carrying on the never-ending fight for economic and social justice. We have made significant strides, but there is still work to do before we can all make it to the mountain top and live the American dream.



Norwood Jewell
Vice President and director
Chrysler Department, UAW

/tw:opeiu512

The past has made us stronger.
The future will make us proud.

For more than fifty years, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) has forged a legacy of strength that has ensured the promise of a better future. At AK Steel we know a little bit about forging a stronger future, which is why we continue to support the SCLC and their efforts in promoting economic opportunity for everyone.



Charles Steele, Jr.'s conversation with summit organizer results in President Obama's talk on poverty at Georgetown University.



May 2015, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.; Pres. Barack Obama and Charles Steele, Jr. Photo provided by The White House.

BY MAYNARD EATON, Managing Editor

WASHINGTON, DC—May 22, 2015, In his keynote address at the National Summit on Overcoming the Issue of Poverty at Georgetown University (which SCLC co-sponsored) Dr. Charles Steele, Jr. spoke to the critical need for bridge building between religious boundaries in order to push the issue poverty to the fore-front of the national policy agenda.

The idea of the three-day conference blossomed from conversations with a key official of the host organization (Initiative on Catholic Social thought and Public Life, Georgetown University) and Dr. Steele.

Dr. Steele spoke directly and forcefully on Dr. King's "economic dream" of eradicating poverty in America. Steele outlined the SCLC's current efforts through the organization's Poor People Campaign. He stressed the need to create allies in the fight against poverty.

"I believe that this country must make ending poverty a priority on the national agenda. We can end poverty in the United States for all Americans, but only through the action of government, not inaction as we have seen it. Government will only act, if we form a collective, to force it to," said Steele.

The SCLC president's comments were a preamble to remarks made by President Barack Obama, who participated in a "first" of its kind event with a sitting United States president. This unprecedented panel discussion on the issue of poverty in this country was with public policy professor Robert Putnum, and president of the American Enterprise Institute Arthur Brooks..

According to President Obama, "the best anti-poverty program is a job that conferred income, as well as structure,

dignity and connections to community. Without access to outside resources or a sense of connectivity, those who grow to middle-class status, leave."

Concentration of wealth, according to Obama, can lead to some being left behind by allowing those who are advantaged through education opportunity, family background or community background, simple luck, to withdraw from "other" people in their towns, cities, drawing the nation apart rather than together.

This prestigious gathering brought together invited leaders from the Catholic, evangelical and broader religious community as well as key policymakers, researchers and community leaders.

By working with other like-minded individuals and organizations, Steele pledged that the SCLC stands committed to champion this cause and will continue the organization's mission to encourage presidential and congressional action in this regard. Steele shared the views of U.S. Black congressional leadership who believe that the "demonstrations and civil unrest are based mostly on poverty, unemployment, a lack of opportunity, hopelessness and despair."

Steele's sentiment resonated with the audience, many who said that his speech echoed the words of SCLC co-founder Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. who said, "The time has come for us to civilize ourselves by the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty."

Steele concluded his Washington, DC visit by meeting with members of the Congressional Black Caucus to seek support of SCLC National Agenda and Initiatives. **sclc**

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“A Couple in the Struggle”



Joseph Lowery escorts Evelyn to a waiting car as marchers on the way to Washington, D.C., complete a short walk at the start of their journey on April 20, 1982, in Tuskegee, Ala.

Joseph and Evelyn Lowery

BY MAYNARD EATON, Managing Editor



Photo: John Amis

October 4, 2006, Joseph and Evelyn Lowery

“Our partnership was something special that God planned.”

—Dr. Joseph E. Lowery

There have been notable marriages within the civil rights movement—Martin and Coretta King, Ralph and Juanita Abernathy, C.T. and Octavia Vivian, Charles and Cathlean Steele to name a few—but topping the list, perhaps, are Joseph and Evelyn Lowery. They were partners in marriage and movement; united to build organizations and progressive actions designed to right wrongs and change the nation.

“When our children’s children ask how we got over we can tell them about Joe and Evelyn. They served well,” said Alabama State Senator Hank Sanders during a Monument Unveiling Ceremony honoring the Lowery’s combined civil rights credentials on May 23, 2015 at the Civil Rights Memorial Park in Selma, Alabama. “There were a lot of married people in The Movement but not a lot of couples. Joe and Evelyn had different roles and different impacts. This monument will be a symbol to let future generations know that they were great people; they were a great couple in the struggle

Civil rights leader, social activist, orator and minister Joseph Lowery has fought against prejudice and discrimination against African-Americans for more than 50 years. In 1968, the same year that Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, Lowery took over as pastor at the Central United Methodist Church in Atlanta. He also became the chairman of the SCLC around this time, serving as one of the organization’s more moderate voices. In 1977, Lowery won the presidency of the SCLC over more radical factions. He helped revitalize the organization, bringing in new members and focusing on such pressing issues in the African-American community as police brutality and human rights.



At the Monument Unveiling Ceremony honoring the Lowerys' combined civil rights credentials on May 23, 2015 at the Civil Rights Memorial Park in Selma, Alabama. Photo: Stephonia Taylor McLinn

In recent years, Lowery received a lot of media attention for his role in the inauguration of Barack Obama, the nation's first African-American president, in 2009. Obama selected Lowery to deliver the benediction at the event. In his speech, Lowery called for the president and the rest of the nation "to work for that day ... when justice will roll down like waters and righteousness as a mighty stream."

Since then the 93-year-old civil rights legend has received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and become widely recognized as the most prominent and powerful SCLC president since Martin Luther King, Jr.

"This is a well deserved tribute to them both," opined Fred Taylor, a former SCLC staff member who worked with Dr. Lowery for 21 years. "Lowery's motivation was not around him; his motivation was his ministry and his commitment to the struggle. He was totally absorbed in the Civil Rights Movement. He knew how to advocate and articulate the issues of our time."

As for Evelyn Lowery, who was her husband's constant companion for nearly 70 years before her death in 2013, Taylor says: "Mrs. Lowery stood on her own ground. Her legacy stood alone and she just happened to have been the wife of Joseph Echols Lowery."

Two years after her husband was elected president of SCLC, Evelyn Lowery launched SCLC/Women, Inc., which has grown into a powerful and prestigious organization that focuses on issues aimed at empowering women. She also founded and led the Evelyn G. Lowery Civil Rights Heritage Educational Tour. She was thought of as a change

agent and a transformational female figure.

"The Lowerys helped move our country forward on this path of progress and the permanence of this statue reflects the enduring mark of Evelyn and Joseph left on our nation," wrote President Barack Obama. "They have helped open hearts and minds, and their example will continue to inspire our journey toward becoming a more perfect union."

"What a wonderful couple were my Mom and Dad," said their oldest daughter Yvonne Lowery Kennedy, chair of the Birmingham chapter of the National Congress of Black Women, "a strong couple who loved hard and fussed hard, You can't think of Evelyn without thinking about Joe and you cannot think about Joe without thinking about Evelyn."

The Lowerys' life and legacy has launched a tradition at SCLC and elsewhere. "Joe and Evelyn Lowery set an example for me and others. That's why I constantly have my wife Cathelean by my side," said SCLC president Charles Steele.

Following the ceremony, the wheel chair bound and frail Dr. Lowery talked briefly with this reporter who has written about the Lowerys for 35 years.

"Our life together was unspeakably incredible," Lowery told me exclusively. "We hung out together. We had great teamwork. My work was strengthened by her. Our partnership was something special that God planned."

As for his opinion of the state of civil rights in America today, Lowery opines, "The Civil Rights Movement is in a holding pattern. It's like an airplane looking for a place to land." sclC

Honoring and Learning From Our Veteran Civil Rights Foot Soldiers

BY CARRIE L. WILLIAMS, CEO, S.E. Region News

Alabama State Rep. Terri Sewell has attempted to do it. The University of Georgia has a department of study devoted to it. The cities of St. Augustine, FL and Annapolis, MD have erected monuments to point to it. Xernona Clayton's International Civil Rights Walk of Fame commemorated it.

Even the movie "Selma" has alluded to it. Yet, to this day, there remains a huge missing in our country's lack of commensurate tribute to Civil Rights foot soldiers for the life sacrifice and service they rendered voluntarily to America, as a collective.

Knowing that they were going in harm's way, that their lives were at stake, they went forward nonetheless in the face of extreme danger, to protect and defend the constitutionally granted civil rights of all Americans, even unto death.

We ask no less of our military personnel. Those who are wounded, or who die in the line of action are awarded the Purple Heart, in the name of the President of the United States.

What lies at the source of the seeming reluctance in our country to fully acknowledge the Civil Rights foot soldiers' enormous patriotic contribution? And how will we capture their veteran wisdom before the last living vestige of their contribution leaves the planet?

With over half a century of civil rights service to his name, Ralph Worrell, an always present (retired yet not retired) SCLC staff member, shares this thought on the subject:

"Those that were against the Movement, they have kept awareness from the American people, by not recognizing those who were in the field. They have wanted to isolate us from each other, such that we forget about the Movement, and what has been done so far."

"It should have been done a long time ago," summarizes Worrell, in response to questioning about the lack of national recognition for Civil Rights foot soldiers.

The medallion that never leaves Worrell's neck is a symbol that the 86-year old—like a select few others—wears with an unspoken, visceral dedication to the cause he gave his life over to. Received from SCLC's Rev. Hosea Williams—a World War II army veteran who served under General Patton—as an acknowledgment of foot soldier service beyond the call of duty, the limited edition medallion speaks to the

"I didn't know anything about civil rights, but I was deeply inspired by Dr. King."



Civil Rights foot soldier Ralph Worrell at the SCLC headquarters. Photo: Phil Skinner, AJC

effort, against the odds, to deliver an honor worthy enough for the price paid by Civil Rights foot soldiers.

"It's not a question of black or white," explains Worrell. "It's something that goes on within any particular group. There are those who try to seize power—and keep it from others. It's black and white."

Worrell's wisdom comes from years of experience that began professionally in New York City's famed Harlem community of the 1950's. With a gentle island accent, the tall, lithe young man had already experienced the power of

helping people through Grant Lee Adams, who was the first to organize labor in his home of birth Barbados. Worrell greatly respected Adams for this, and after finishing a two-year business degree in Brooklyn, NY, one of his first accomplishments in the U.S., Ralph Worrell joined the RWDSU (Retail Wholesale Department Store Union) District 65 in New York City, which was a part of the UAW.

Before long, Ralph was promoted to "organizer", and had the privilege of being taken under the wings of "Cleve" (Cleveland Robinson), the then-Secretary Treasurer of the union. Little known to Ralph, "Cleve" was the right-hand

labor man of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whom Ralph would soon hear speak at the union convention in 1962.

“I didn’t know anything about civil rights,” recalls Worrell with a smile, “but I was deeply inspired by Dr. King.”

A year later, in 1963, Worrell would be highly involved, through the RWDSU, in organizing a contingency of New Yorkers to attend the March on Washington, D.C. It was after hearing Dr. King’s “I Have A Dream” speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, that Worrell committed to himself, that he, somehow, would become a part of Dr. King’s organization.

In 1964, upon the announcement of King’s selection for the Nobel Peace Prize, as King visited/spoke in New York before going to Norway, Worrell had the opportunity to be addressed one-on-one in a conversation with Dr. King.

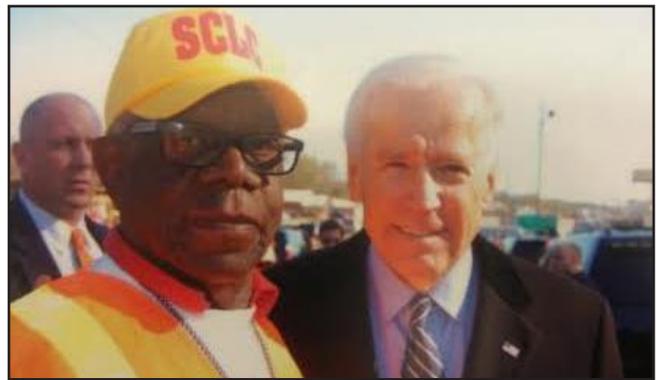
King’s message to him was, simply, “Ralph, you gotta be nonviolent.”

That clinched Ralph Worrell’s commitment to the Movement in a deep way. Ralph worked for the union – but worked for the Movement at the same time, from that point forward. He participated in the Selma to Montgomery March, and other related activities, including an interaction with then-Governor Wallace. During this period of time, he was put in charge of raising money for the Movement, through his union accountability, asking for \$1 dollar donations from labor union members and from the public.

In 1968, “Cleve” sent Ralph to Washington, D.C. as a labor union rep “on loan” to the SCLC, to become an extended SCLC staff asset in organizing the Poor People’s Campaign. During that period of time, Worrell recounts, whenever Mrs. King or the family needed security, he would be called upon to escort her/ them, including during their travels in and out of airports.



During the 2010 Selma to Montgomery March, Worrell spear-headed and directed twenty-seven individual marches, all of which arrived safely on the steps of the Alabama State Capitol seven days later.



Ralph Worrell and U.S. Vice President Joe Biden.

By 1970, with having been involved in the organizing/ participating in numerous strikes and rallies, Ralph Worrell officially joined the SCLC staff under the direction of Hosea Williams in Atlanta, on what would be termed a permanent “loan” from District 65. Ralph Worrell has remained with the SCLC ever since.

Starting in 1985, Ralph Worrell has led—or played a major role in leading—the Selma to Montgomery March, which has occurred every five years: 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, and 2015.

The 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday this past March became an opportunity for Worrell to highlight the status of civil rights in a particularly powerful way, during the Selma to Montgomery March, especially as a

veteran of the Movement.

“There’s no question that this year’s march is more important now that the Voting Rights Act is endangered,” he affirmed to Newsweek’s Stuart Miller.

“We’re putting a lot of emphasis on this campaign—it is as significant as it was in 1965.”

When questioned a little further about those remarks in the interview for this story, the seasoned foot soldier pondered for a moment, with the look of a professor trying to explain a complicated algorithm, then imparted: “Everything is changing—and nothing has changed.”

“We have to go back, and re-coup those things that worked during the Movement. We can use those things as a guide for the future, as goals—because we are still behind.

“We have to come together and form coalitions. That looks like sitting down, talking, eliminating the ‘I’ and start dealing with the ‘We’.

“There’s no one group. We need the young people, for their energy. We need those who were in the Movement in the past, for their experience. We need those who are really willing to work on these goals for the future.”

When asked about what those goals might look like, specifically, Worrell’s sage wisdom quipped, “Same as before.”

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AMERICA'S UNFINISHED TRIBUTE

In the discussion that ensued, the veteran Civil Rights foot soldier laid it out, plain and simple. Although, he assessed, it gets addressed singly in issue after issue, the real goal behind the Movement—and the real goal for the future—is “Equality”.

“It takes care of everything,” Worrell sums up. He used the analogy of playing ball as a child. Even if there are those that are better at playing ball than others, that, for a child, the “give me the opportunity to swing the bat” mindset allows each child to have the chance of becoming the best they, as an individual, can become. Ralph Worrell sees “Equality” as a democratic principle in the same way.

This is what gives individuals a sense of their own power, their own freedom, so to speak, in embracing their individual future. That is a proper use of power, Worrell asserts, versus power that takes away from others.

“People can begin to turn to each other, not on each other,” Ralph Worrell punctuates. “That’s what brings about that four-letter word: Love! Love is a conqueror of most evils!”

Picking up steam, Worrell’s voice lifts just a decibel louder, and swiftly adds:

“People think the Movement was about marching – but that’s not what the Movement was about. The Movement is the community moving together. It’s about people willing to give of their finances, doctors willing to see you, families being willing to open their homes to you for a night’s stay.

“It’s a community moving together.”

A sense of community moving together is something that remains for us to re-capture in the Civil rights community of the 21st century.

One place of alignment we could start is in an over-arching, national acknowledgment of the Civil Rights foot soldiers.

The efforts thus far have been piece-meal. Rep. Sewell’s efforts have focused on those that walked across the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The University of Georgia’s Foot Soldier Project For Civil Rights Studies only focuses on individuals and events in the state of Georgia. The Foot Soldiers

PASSION CHANGES THE WORLD

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Atlanta, Ralph Worrell (left, in white) and others pay their respects at Dr. King’s and Corretta Scott King’s gravesites.



Nelson Mandela (center), Photo: Wendell Rodgers

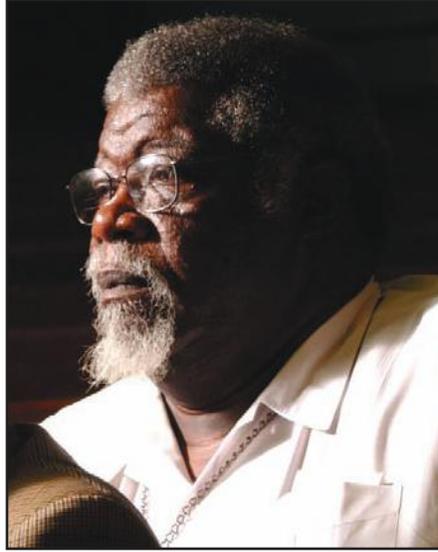
Monument in St. Augustine, Florida honors those who impacted the city of St. Augustine. The Foot Soldiers Memorial in Annapolis, MD commemorates those foot soldiers who marched in the March on Washington, D.C. Xernona Clayton's International Civil Rights Walk of Fame awarded a spot for J.T. Johnson and Rev. Willie Bolden on behalf of all foot soldiers in 2012. Yet, both men overflowed with the names of numerous other foot soldiers at their acceptance speeches at Ebenezer Baptist Church, so compelled were they that others' names be mentioned, and known.

Not all—but much of these efforts have focused around the Civil Rights foot soldiers who were men—in part, due to the “background” role women foot soldiers often played. The brutality they endured and the risk upon their lives and their family's lives was not lessened by that fact, however. Their contribution is even farther away than the dot given in U.S. history books to the contribution of foot soldiers in the Civil Rights Movement.

What we can learn from these incredible heroes and sheroes remains an untapped national treasure. They will not be with us for much longer. **sclc**

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JAMES ORANGE, 1942-2008

A Civil Rights Legend and Ferocious Advocate for Justice

BY HEATHER GRAY

The incomparable James Orange was the “quintessential SCLC foot soldier” and the de facto “captain of Dr. King’s street crew”

Known as one of the best organizers that evolved out of the 1960’s civil rights movement, James Orange lived a remarkable 65 years. We lost him on February 16, 2008.

He was a big man physically at 6’3”, weighing 300 pounds and referred by some as the “gentle giant.” It’s true he was gentle. He also had a laugh and singing voice that projected everywhere including at his church and protest chants. But James was also a passionate, relentless and ferocious advocate for justice. In no way did his gentleness and kindness belie his for passion for justice, against injustice and work toward establishing the “beloved community” as described by Martin Luther King. His was a legacy of perhaps being one of the best organizers that evolved out of the 1960’s civil rights movement.

James began his civil rights career as a young man just one year out of high school in 1962 in Birmingham, Alabama.

“I was a year out of high school,” said Orange, who grew up in Birmingham, Alabama. I had met a beautiful young woman who sang in the choir at the Monday night mass meetings in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. We were to meet afterwards and go have a soda and talk.’

The church was jam-packed with a standing-room-only crowd except for two benches in the front. Never one to hesitate, Orange walked up and sat down on one of them.

‘I listened to Ralph Abernathy’s sermon,’ Orange remembered,

‘and the longer I listened the more intently I listened as I became absorbed in his message. It was 1962 and the movement was determined to break segregation in Birmingham, the city of Sheriff ‘Bull’ Connor and his police dogs.’ After the services, Rev. Edward Gardner, a leader of the Alabama Improvement Association that was leading the campaign, asked people to come forward. As they moved to the front of the church, the audience stood and started to applaud.

It was then that Orange realized that he was in the wrong pew. But there was no turning back. ‘I was already up front and, a few minutes later, found myself, together with those who had come forward, in the church basement.’ He said, ‘Although I didn’t know it yet, the trip down those stairs changed my life forever.’ After people took seats and quieted down, the Rev. James Bevel, director of direct action for the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC), began telling the group, many of who were high school or college students, how they were to behave if they were confronted by the police or arrested.

Never a shrinking violet, Orange asked who was going to get arrested. ‘We are,’ Bevel replied. ‘You are.’

‘That’s when I learned that those empty benches had been reserved for people who had volunteered to go to jail, if necessary, in the fight against Jim Crow,’ Orange said, a broad smile crossing his face.

‘But there was no turning back.’ And, as far as Orange is concerned, not then and not since” (Gaboury).

It’s said James was arrested more than 100 times. Perhaps the most critical arrest of James’ life and what set the tone for his subsequent work was in 1965 in Marion, Alabama.



A Paramount Pictures photo from the movie "Selma," from left to right: Tessa Thompson plays Diane Nash, Omar Dorsey plays James Orange, Colman Domingo plays Ralph Abernathy, David Oyelowo plays Martin Luther King, Jr., Andre Holland plays Andrew Young, Corey Reynolds plays Rev. C.T. Vivian, and Lorraine Toussaint plays Amelia Boynton.

At that time James was organizing on voting issues in Marion and was arrested for doing this work. Rumors began to spread that James was about to be lynched and peaceful protests began outside the jail. One of those protesting was 26-year-old Jimmie Lee Jackson. As state troopers were beating Jackson's grandfather and mother, Jackson tried to protect them. In the struggle he was shot in the stomach by trooper James B. Fowler and died two days later.

Some wanted to take Jackson's body to the doorstep of Alabama Governor George Wallace in protest. Instead James and others decided to hold a march from Selma-to-Montgomery and the rest is history.

James was at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis when Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968. He was devastated. *"There were two experiences that James described as most sorrowful for him and they were "The dynamite charge, set by (neo-fascist J.B.) Stoner, that partially destroyed the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (in Birmingham) and killed four young girls on Sept. 15, 1963. The other was the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968" (Gaboury).*

By 1970 James was living in Atlanta. He continued to work with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) until 1977 when he began his career with the AFL-CIO in Atlanta. He started this work in a campaign for the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union that was ultimately successful in providing benefits for workers of the J.P. Stevens plant.

When the King holiday was initiated in 1986 Mrs. King knew that she could rely on James to help organize the events for that first official King week which he did, of course. When the King Center chose not to be responsible for the King March during the holiday, James took on the responsibility and created the organization known as the March Committee.

Years ago I complained to James about the military plane "fly-overs" during the King March. His response was classic

James Orange. "That's exactly why we are taking over the organizing of the March," he said. "All of us need to make sure that the March is relevant to the militarism, poverty, racism and anti-war issues that concerned Dr. King. We're not going to let exploitive corporations and the military take over King's message—no way!"

Ultimately, James traveled frequently to South Africa to play a central role in South African voter registration and education efforts prior to and after the 1994 first democratic elections. He supported development efforts in South Africa by making connections with those he knew in the United States who could help in, for example, agriculture or transportation needs.

James always had a bevy of folks around him. They were usually young people he was mentoring but older folks surrounded him as well. I don't think I can recall seeing James Orange without at least 4 or 5 people around him most of whom he called "leader".

There are some who call James Orange an "unsung" hero. For those of us who live in the South, nothing could be further from the truth. James was central to virtually every critical movement for justice in the South and the country since the 1960's and we all knew it.

He seemed to have a capacity to draw people out and make them feel good about themselves and about the work they were doing. This is likely the hallmark of "real" leadership.

We lost James on February 16, 2008 but his legacy is powerful. What James did in his organizing work transcended himself. His was always about the broader mission.

When asked why James would call people "leader," there were various responses. Invariably, James recognized that we are all responsible for doing what we can to make the world more just. By calling all of us "leader" he was anointing thousands around the country and the world with that very mission. SCLC



HEATHER GRAY is a writer and radio producer in Atlanta, Georgia and has also lived in Canada, Australia, Singapore, briefly in the Philippines and has traveled in southern Africa. She served as the director of the Non-Violent Program for Coretta Scott King

in the mid-1980's in Atlanta; and for 24 years worked with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund focusing on Black farmer issues and cooperative economic development. She holds degrees in anthropology and sociology. She can be reached at hmcgray@earthlink.net.



KINGIAN: Peace and Nonviolence, the Only Way to Fight

BY LSHERIE DEAN

Many can tell you about the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. They can recite the illustrious 1963 “I Have A Dream” speech he bellowed over millions in D.C. Not many know that his birth name was actually Michael, but was changed to Martin Luther King, Jr. after his father visited Berlin and decided to change his name from Michael in 1934. Not many know or understand the struggle of his endurance...his fight for peace and equality...his ambition. Especially if you weren’t elbow to elbow in the trenches with him, it’s hard to imagine.

His ambition was a spark to set the world aflame. His passion for people and burning desire to push through adversity was short-lived, but hard and dangerous—ultimately ending his life. We’ve all watched the movies, heard the recordings, listened to freedom riders and other civil rights activists speak on his greatness. He wasn’t perfect, but even after death he has...influence...power. We all have a magnitude of power within us. Tapping into that power only fuels our purpose and ignite passion in others.

Debatable to say the least, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. will forever be one of the most powerful Civil Rights leaders our world will ever see. Building on his dream...standing on the power of hope, Dr. King planted seeds that would grow into what is now the most reputable national and international non-profit organizations in the world...

“Despite a bombing of the home and church of Ralph David Abernathy during the Atlanta meeting, 60 persons from 10 states assembled and announced the founding of the Southern Leadership Conference on Transportation and Nonviolent Integration. They issued a document declaring that civil rights are essential to democracy, that segregation must end, and that all Black people should reject segregation absolutely and nonviolently.

Further organizing was done at a meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana on February 14, 1957. The organization shortened its name to Southern Leadership Conference, established an executive board of directors, and elected officers, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as President, Dr. Ralph David Abernathy as Financial Secretary-Treasurer, Rev. C. K. Steele of Tallahassee, Florida as Vice President, Rev. T. J. Jemison of Baton Rouge, Louisiana as Secretary, and Attorney I.M. Augustine of New Orleans, Louisiana as General Counsel.

At its first convention in Montgomery in August 1957, the Southern Leadership Conference adopted the current name, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Basic decisions made by the founders at these early meeting included the adoption of nonviolent mass action as the cornerstone of strategy, the affiliation of local community organizations with SCLC across the South, and a determination

to make the SCLC movement open to all, regardless of race, religion, or background.”

These were the beginnings. These were the makings of monumental widespread of desegregation, voting rights, racial equality, and nonviolence.

Dr. King’s dream...his vision for harmonizing races became infectious. Look at where we are today. Without his perseverance and the fight of so many known and unknown faces, would we have equal voting rights? Would I be able to type this without fear for my life? So many questions come to mind.

But this...the Southern Christian Leadership Conference has remained ever present continuing the fight for all people, not just Blacks. This is a battle of peace versus hate... violence and nonviolence.

And even decades after his death Dr. King’s flame of hope lives.

PASSING THE TORCH

The torch, as we like to say, was delicately passed to businessman, politician and civil rights leader, Dr. Charles Steele, Jr. continuing the footsteps of Dr. King as the National/International President and CEO of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

No stranger to leadership, Dr. Steele, Jr. pressed his career by becoming the first African American elected into the Tuscaloosa, Alabama city council and among the first African Americans to be elected Alabama State Senator. Numerous awards decorate his extensive portfolio including being inducted into the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Board of Preachers of Morehouse College and Tuscaloosa Civic Hall of Fame in 2006.

As the National/International SCLC President and CEO, Dr. Steele is heavily involved with the forward progression of civil rights built on the foundations laid by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

You can imagine even today how rigorous the call to action is and how it can be somewhat of a burden especially since many are naïve believing that the civil rights movement has ended—that there’s no more fight. But as in recent news more and more police brutality and countless injustices flare up, we see there is indeed still a need and a continued effort for organizations as great as SCLC.

I have to be a fundraiser. See many people don’t realize Dr. King was a great fundraiser. SCLC and the civil rights movement is a business and you have to treat it like a business.

My job is very difficult because people think they are free now and that SCLC is a dinosaur or obsolete—they don’t think they need it anymore until they get in trouble. So my job is difficult because they don’t give to SCLC because they think they have made it...they have arrived. I tell people all the time, you may have arrived but you got off at the wrong station—you have arrived, but at the wrong destination.



The torch was passed to Charles Steele, Jr.

God gave us SCLC. It belongs to those who have been oppressed. It’s a vehicle to freedom. It’s the history... they want to dismount it. I’ve been out here working 40 years in this thing. We have to be creative and nontraditional in getting to where we need to be.

Getting to where we need to be may seem like a long road left to travel, yet hopeful for many. Social media, or shall I say, technology itself has completely changed the way we “see” today’s society. News travels in an instant and because of that we are all able to live in the moment of injustices like that of Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Eric Garner and many others.

While the sixties have long melted away, the civil rights movement never left. Fighting legislation, fighting still for equality...SCLC has always been a voice. A peaceful voice of reason and an advocate for positive and productive change not just for the United States, but for the world.

You can’t be concerned about the glory, you got to be concerned about the work. You got to be on the front line and be willing to die. I’m willing to make that kind of sacrifice...

It’s about impact—the power of influence and the power of affect. In football they always talk about the impact player. People don’t hear you when they don’t see you. They got to see you in action first. Anybody can get up and give a speech. They’re just speakers. Just talkers. Dr. King was a person of action.

The impact of Dr. King was all about peace and non-violence, the Kinging Philosophy—principals and philosophy on peace and nonviolence. He was against the Vietnam War. He even said, “The bombs that drop in Vietnam will soon be the bombs that drop in America.”

I believe this to be true. Metaphorically speaking, we’re dropping bombs in our own land against each other... black and whites...

PRESSURE OF THE MOVEMENT

There are major problems all over the country... all over the world. In my opinion the pressures of being politically correct has watered down the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement. Many do not want to offend. Many do not want to go against the grain...stand for what is right because maybe they don't want to lose their job for positing their frustrations or opinions on Facebook, or being captured in a photo or video by national news as they march against injustices in Ferguson, New York and elsewhere. I see that changing now.

I see people who speak other languages and thrive in other cultures look at what's happening in America and wonder what happened to the land of the free...the home of the brave... I see those same people standing for what is right, marching in ally chanting "Black Lives Matter" as they watch in horror as injustices rampage our streets.

But there's a problem. There's a problem on the front line where young activists believe it to be just "their time" in the fight as if there was nothing to learn from those who fought, lived and survived the Civil Rights Movement. There's a sense of pressure of the moment in making it known that this generation...my generation must make a change, however, we have to work together. Division only keeps up confusion and dishonors our past.

This is the problem—we lack infrastructure of the Civil Rights Movement. It was the Civil Rights Movement that got us this far. Problems all over the country all over the world. Ferguson, never had the Civil Rights Movement so there was no infrastructure. Rioting is totally against the teachings of Dr. King. It's total self-destruction.

I was in Washington D.C. when youth stated that this is our time not old folks. Everybody want to be famous and glamorous and get in front of cameras. Put in some work! The real pressure comes when the youth leaves the house. Training at home doesn't mean anything if other people aren't teaching their children.

FRONTLINE RESPONSE

In our discussion on Ferguson, the mission of SCLC, and steps to reforming our judicial system, Dr. Steele made it very clear that relationships and education are keys to making all of this work together. In dealing with the issues in Ferguson and many other places where police brutality is exposed, we both agreed that the movement itself is a process. The steps to getting to where we need to be is a process and we all have to be willing to succumb to it, first building those relationships.

It starts at the top—whoever is in control, police chief, local government. You have to go through a process. Bring law enforcement and people together. Collaborate with law enforcement and community—sit down and discuss a two-sided vision from both sides. We need to hear a community vision and a law enforcement vision—they shouldn't differ after sitting down civilly and talking about where we go from here in terms of embarking on a controllable community.

See what we're missing is that we live in a global village. What goes on in America affects the world and what goes on in the world affects America. America can no longer isolate itself in terms of just being the great America and not be concerned about the whole world.

The best example of that is Ebola. Ebola was all over the world and has affected people everywhere because we are a global village. So if we work domestically with law enforcement and the community as a global community here in America, then it will better the world. There's no boundaries in this thing. We have no boundaries and that's why we as a people, particularly African Americans—we miss the boat, because we don't believe in being exposed internationally. That's what Dr. King was embarking on—to bring the world together. The ultimate goal is uniting the world.

We understand the monumental effects of sound education. Dr. Steele stressed the importance of youth being taught before stepping foot on the front lines. Makes sense to me. I applaud all modern day Civil Rights activists. I'm proud to be in the midst of a generation who is about change and is working to push those same efforts Dr. King was embarking on, but like so many who don't really understand the importance of order...process and what it means to peacefully protest... those aren't the people you want on the front lines.

Education most certainly plays a significant role. Know your rights. Know and understand the law. Be smart. As Dr. Steele stated earlier, rioting is self-destruction. Why riot your own communities eliminating economic growth for your community, families and businesses?

Got to be committed in sustaining ourselves...not yourself, but ourselves. We [SCLC] believe education is the new Civil Rights. If we don't get involved in changing the traditional way of our people being educated, we're going to lose a whole segment of our population- self-destruct or even be destructed.

Education has out priced itself. People can't afford to go to college anymore in particular poor folks and people of color. So what we have done at SCLC started a program for those to continue their education like those why didn't go passed high school can enroll in our "Infrastructure of Tail-End Communication" with a credit of a university, where we can set up what is known as distant learning. SCLC facilitates the education with instructors on each site and bring instructors to accredited institutions.

SCLC's education programs also include their STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Program with a focus on careers, other academic programs as well as the Justice for Girls Program educating girls (and young boys too) in communities about sex trafficking which has become a seriously large problem in America and in particularly Atlanta, Ga.

BEING THE MOVEMENT

Recently the movie, Selma was released bringing to life just one very important battle for Dr. King involving the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a huge step in getting to where

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we need to be by outlawing discrimination. This move gave Dr. King the tenacity to push for equal voting rights with emphasis on African Americans being treated fairly when registering to vote.

Selma showed Dr. King facing the battle head on with much opposition. His organization, SCLC played a huge role in setting the stage in Selma, Alabama leading to the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Personally I believe the movie bridged then and now—the protests that continue for injustices across the country and even the world. To me it was definitely an eye-opener...

"I was rattled after the first ten minutes. I had to do everything in my power to fight the tears throughout the entire movie. It was a wonderful movie and I am grateful to the director and producer. She shed a lot of knowledge on Selma's part in the Civil Rights Era that wasn't taught in details. Selma should be showed at all churches, classrooms, community centers..."

—@soulstar612

"I'm speechless. It's powerful and I recommend it African Americans who don't know much about him [Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.] and what he's done. All teachers do is give us a written speech and make us do assignments off of it. I know I'm young, but I didn't even know all of this and things he went through for US and it just really touched me."

—@yoitstee_

Selma revisited the efforts of Dr. King and the SCLC. It gave another place to visit in the moment. Good promotion, good base for what was going on now...

We lost the 1965 Voting Rights Act. The law has gone back to state law...state rights, which we were fighting under the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Now we don't have that protection anymore. Mississippi has the power when they were lynching. The 1965 Voting Right Act has been gutted. Before it was gutted you had to get an extension of the voter rights bill—had to get it ratified by 3/5 of the state. Section 4 and Section 5 were the most important in the bill which was gutted a year and a half ago... took out Section 4 which eliminated Section 5—states now have control... Gone back to state rights which is state wrong.

When I told people in Berlin that we no longer have voter rights, they said, if they can that to you, they can do it to us because we follow America...

This reason alone is why it's so important to know the issues, to stay on top of what's happening in our world. Dr. Charles Steele, Jr. is leading Southern Christian Leadership Conference into the next level. His focus has strengthened with the foundations laid before him while pressing the issues of today.

We are experts on direct action. We still have our direct action programs, but this is the key, we are reinventing ourselves. We know we can march well, we know we can do direct action...we know we can picket and got to jail, but we can do others things. Just like we perfected direct action we also can perfect other avenues where we're lacking

in education, entrepreneurship and training in the Kinging Philosophy on peace and nonviolence.

Expect to see more of SCLC in the future. Your support of the massive efforts of unity, relationships, education, entrepreneurship and the movement itself is need. It's valued. We can all work together. We can push forward collectively living out the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. sclc



LSHERIE DEAN, founder and editor, The LSherie Alert, LLC, is a native of Tupelo, MS and reared in Peoria, IL, she received her Bachelors of Science degree from Jackson State University in 2007.

Dean has built a reputation of being the "go to girl" in Marketing and Social Media. She promotes various events, such as; activities,

independent artists, poets, photographers, businesses, brands and individuals who are pressing their purpose on the world. If it's designed to have a positive impact on the community, she promotes it. She is committed to helping others reach their goals. Because of her support of others, she has developed prominent relationships by positioning herself as a vital piece of any puzzle.

In the summer of 2012, The LSherie Alert, LLC was launched to support individuals, companies/businesses, projects, and events that produce positive stimulation for their communities. The alert also highlights creative thinkers, spoken word geniuses and independent artists.

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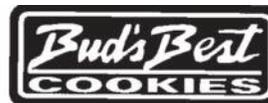
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Loretta Lynch and the Rising Power of the Black Sorority

Loretta Lynch's confirmation as U.S. attorney general was a crucial victory for a group of women whose influence is seldom appreciated.

BY THEODORE R. JOHNSON, theatlantic.com

APRIL 26, 2015—After a five-month delay, Loretta Lynch made history when the U.S. Senate finally confirmed her. On Thursday, the Senate confirmed Lynch as the next U.S. attorney general, the first African American woman ever to hold this Cabinet position. Her long-stalled nomination sometimes seemed in doubt, held hostage to partisan jockeying between Democrats and Republicans. But one political bloc never gave up, relentlessly rallying its support behind Lynch: the black sorority.

During her initial hearing, the seats behind Lynch were filled with more than two dozen of her Delta Sigma Theta Sorority sisters arrayed in crimson-and-cream blazers and blouses, ensuring their visibility on the national stage. These Delta women—U.S. Representatives Marcia Fudge and Joyce Beatty among them—were there to lend moral support and show the committee that they meant business. The Deltas were not alone. The Lynch nomination also drew support from congressional representatives from other black sororities: Alpha Kappa Alpha members Terri Sewell and Sheila Jackson Lee took to the House floor to advocate for a vote while Sigma Gamma Rho members Corinne Brown and Robin Kelly and Zeta Phi Beta member Donna Edwards used social media and press conferences to campaign on Lynch's behalf.

For Lynch, who co-founded the Delta chapter at Harvard University, the political support of the sorority sisters was not necessarily a surprise. But for those less familiar with the political activism of black sororities, their appearance at the Lynch hearing offered an unexpected crash course in the political influence of the black sisterhood.

Black sororities are not social auxiliaries of polite society, but are focused organizations with very specific civic and political goals. As elected officials from both parties are quickly finding out, these sorority-member activists are part of a growing power bloc of black women in the modern political landscape. As Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell in particular has learned twice in the last few weeks, the black sisterhood will show up at your office and respectfully request that you take action on their requests without delay.

Outside of black communities, the sorority's political influence, social action initiatives, and economic development often go unnoticed. Likewise on college campuses—particularly those that lie outside of the network of Historically Black Colleges and Universities—the general student body



U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch

is largely unaware of the extent of black sororities' work in communities and their contributions to expansive national programs in areas like education, health, and promotion of strong families.

Yet the reality is that black sororities are—and have been—hard at work on a political agenda that seeks to improve the American experience of blacks and women across the country. And unlike most other sororities, membership in a black sorority is not simply a college phase, but a lifelong commitment. Alumnae comprise 75 percent of the active membership of these groups. Black sororities do not confine their concerns to college campuses. And their fight for Lynch's confirmation only represents the surface of over a century's worth of work.

In order to understand the broader context of sorority politics, it's worth taking time to look back at how these organizations developed, and to look forward to the new forms of political sisterhood that are emerging today.

The four major black sororities—Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, and Sigma Gamma Rho—were founded over a 14-year period a century ago to provide sisterhood to the relatively few black women attending college. The first of them was Alpha Kappa Alpha, which sprang up on the campus of historically black Howard University in 1908. Its nine founders were consumed by the idea that their education was a privilege accompanied by “an everlasting debt to raise [black communities] up and to make them better.” In the years that followed, the remaining three historic black sororities were founded with similar aims, but with slightly different focuses that gave them each unique character. They, along with five historic black fraternities, constitute the National Pan-Hellenic Council.

In those early years of their existence, these sororities, like nearly all of black America, were shut out from many economic opportunities and barred from participating in the political process. But as the late political scientist and Alpha Kappa Alpha member Jewel Prestage argued, black women have been political activists since slavery and proficient innovators of new approaches to political activities. Leveraging their college education and experiences, the sororities focused on the things they could control, like their appearance, behavior, community organization and education. In this way, the black sororities took many of their cues from the personal politics of the turn-of-the-century black church-women. These women, as historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham notes, were deeply influenced by the “politics of respectability” and the pressure to consistently be twice as good as their peers. This culturally conservative political stance—for both church-women and sorority sisters—emerged as part of a strategy to combat injustice by being above reproach in their work ethic, conduct, and achievement.

This ideology, at this particular time, helped to develop the sororities as relatively grassroots, democratic organizations that stressed personal development and community responsibility. These characteristics, sociologist Bernice McNair Barnett notes, were hallmarks of black women’s collectivist movement organizations during this period. Further, Barnett believes black women developed this organizational model as a result of their unique vantage point from “within interlocking systems of gender, race, and class stratification.” This made them well-suited for fundraising, dispersing information, mobilizing community members, and pooling resources for collective action.

Once the Great Society legislation of the 1960s empowered African Americans with theretofore unrealized civil rights, the sororities began to rely more on traditional political activities like voter registration and lobbying, and established more representative forms of governance in their organizations. As Barnett points out, the hierarchal model that emerged in black women’s collectivist organizations stressed a more directly proactive and visible approach to political and civic leadership and engagement. It became the default for those organizations, like today’s black sororities, that had access to more resources by virtue of their education, professional connections, and middle-class status.

As large, diverse groups, these sororities experience tension between their pursuit of respectability and their progressivism, and between their grassroots origins and



Members of the Florida chapters of AKA in the state capitol in Tallahassee in 2011. Photo: Dwayne Taylor

present-day hierarchy. Additionally, because of the economic class markers of these differing approaches, they are sometimes charged with elitism. These tensions can play out in unpredictable ways. In the Black Lives Matter movement, some directed their members not to wear sorority letters while protesting, whereas others encouraged it.

Such tensions over style are to be expected, but they do not detract from the broad agreement these groups share about the goals they pursue. Perhaps the most important legacy of sorority activism has been its ability to get black women involved in national politics—from civil disobedience to encouraging candidates for office and organizing a powerful voting bloc.

Sorority members were among the first black women to enter into state and national politics: Delta Sigma Theta member Shirley Chisholm became the first African American woman elected to Congress in 1968 and first African American to run for president on a major-party ticket in 1972. Sigma Gamma Rho member Gwen Cherry broke the gendered color barrier in the Florida House in 1970. And in 1993, Carol Moseley Braun, another Delta, became the first—and so far the only—black female Senator in history.

Following on these accomplishments, 13 of the 18 black women in Congress today belong to one of the four national black sororities. The two black women running for Senate seats are also sorority members: California Attorney General Kamala Harris of Alpha Kappa Alpha and Representative Donna Edwards of Zeta Phi Beta.

The importance of the black sorority is not entirely lost on the American political class. They know the special role they play in influencing the black vote through the larger black sisterhood, as evinced by President Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Attorney General Eric Holder all finding time to meet with Delta Sigma Theta’s sorority leaders and address the entire convention during its centennial celebration two years ago. And it is no coincidence that Hillary Clinton just hired Maya Harris, a civil rights lawyer and think-tank

Cont’d on pg. 33.



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Picture of Rachel Dolezal

Race and Rachel Dolezal

BY DR. JOSEPH L. WILLIAMS

The story of Rachel Dolezal's perpetration as a black female while holding a position of authority at the NAACP has fueled vicious debates in virtually every media platform. How could this happen? What made her do this? What should be done? These are a few of the questions that have been asked.

I will reserve my judgment on what should be done to her, because it appears the stones have already been thrown; however, I do think this story brings up an even larger issue that no one seems to notice or be discussing.

How is it that gender, within the American context, can be more fluid than race? One of the most famous American Olympians, Bruce Jenner, made the decision to become a woman (Caitlyn Jenner). He was received in the media, breaking a twitter record that exceeded that of President Barak Obama. Caitlyn has landed the cover of Vanity Fare and there are talks of a major makeup brand endorsement that is on the way.

Within this society, "gender" can be one's choice; however, "Race" appears to be fixed. This is wrong on so many levels and it goes to show we still allow skin color to decide our social power and positioning in society. Being an African American male, I wonder what America would think if I woke up saying, "from this day forward, I want to be a white man with all the privilege that comes along with that self-identification." I wonder how I would be received.

Rachel Dolezal is classified as "white" but she identifies herself as "black." That's one thing—but what about a "black" woman who wants to be "white?" Will that be ok?

"Race" continues to plague and separate our society. It is our primary medium of personal identification and until we understand how the concept of "Race" convolutes all things we will never advance as a culture. Although there are cultural differences, there is only one race and that is the Human Race!



DR. JOSEPH L. WILLIAMS is an accomplished author, public speaker, life coach and pastor committed to improving the world through promoting greater self-awareness, social consciousness and spiritual growth.

Sororities, cont'd from pg. 31.

senior fellow who's published on the power of the women of color voting bloc, as co-lead for her policy team. If the 2016 Republican presidential contenders have any inclination to attract black voters, they need look no further for their initial efforts. Their pathway in begins with a survey of the survey of the nation's leading conservative sorority members: Sheryl Underwood, co-host of the CBS show *The Talk*, is a noted Republican and past national president of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, and Jennifer Carroll, the recent Republican Lieutenant Governor of Florida is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha.

The political clout of black women today has become more tangible and visible to those outside of the black community. This transformation is the result of their increased access to traditional political activities in an attempt to obtain a more equal American experience for African Americans.



Sigma Gamma Rho members strike a group pose during a probate ceremony. Photo: Lambda Lambda chapter, Texas A&M

The confirmation of Loretta Lynch may be a signal achievement for black women, whose electoral power and political influence undeniably has been on the rise in the last decade. But it is especially sweet for the black sororities, which have now spent more than a century pursuing traditional and nontraditional political activities, watching one of their own make history yet again. As Dr. Paulette Walker, national president of Delta Sigma Theta, told fellow Delta Melissa Harris-Perry last week, "We are more than a sorority ... oftentimes, when you hear the word sorority—we are stereotyped as to what that means. But we are advocates for social [action]; that's what we do, that who we are."

Though Lynch's confirmation will not suddenly bring the invisible middle—those black women who do not conform to the stereotypical caricatures prevalent in media portrayals—into the spotlight, it is nonetheless an important victory for a group of women who have been ignored for too long. SCLC

THEODORE R. JOHNSON is a writer and former naval officer. He has served as a military professor at the Naval War College and a 2011-12 White House Fellow.

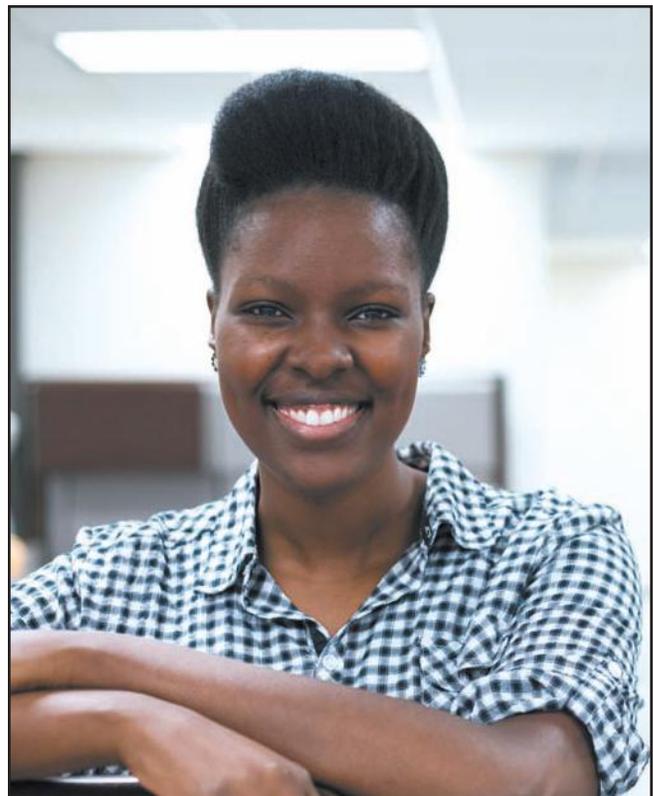


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Top photo, TWU at Selma with Dr. King.

Middle photos, TWU wins promotional opportunities to Bus Operator for black workers in 1941.

Equal pay for women transit workers was another early TWU victory.

Bottom photo, TWU fighting for integrated schools.



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