

For Immediate Release

Contact:

Tara Mitchell Mielnik
Metropolitan Historical Commission
615/862-7970
Tara.mielnik@nashville.gov

Linda Wynn
Tennessee Historical Commission
615/532-1550
Linda.wynn@tn.gov

SAVE THE DATE! Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture to be held February 13, 2015

NASHVILLE -- November 2014

On February 13, 2015 join Tennessee State University's College of Liberal Arts and the Metropolitan Historical Commission for a celebration of the contributions of African Americans to Nashville and Tennessee history. For over thirty years, this award-winning conference has brought together historians, students, educators, community leaders, and others interested in African American history and culture. This year's conference will examine some of the unsung personalities of African-Americans in Tennessee, including John McCline, Samuel Yette, and King Daniel Ganaway.

The conference will continue to honor the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War, Steve Rogers, of the Tennessee Historical Commission, who will introduce John McCline, a former slave at Cloverbottom Plantation in Donelson, who left slavery with Union troops, and later wrote a memoir about life at Cloverbottom.

Award-winning journalist and author Pamela Foster concentrates on the life and legacy of Samuel Yette, whose life-long influential career in journalism began as the founding editor of *The Meter*, the student publication of Tennessee State University. Yette will be the focus of a new addition to the Conference's *Profiles* series.

Brenda Fredericks will introduce King Daniel Ganaway, an African-American from a Rutherford County family who later worked in Chattanooga and Chicago as an award-winning photographer. Ganaway's portraits were exhibited in the 1920s and 1930s in Los Angeles, Chicago, and as part of the Harmon Foundation's traveling exhibit of African-American artists. Ganaway's life and legacy were all but unknown until the Fredericks' family began a genealogical search for their unknown ancestors.

Dr. Sybril Bennett, Journalism professor at Belmont University, will focus on the lessons of the Underground Railroad, and how its innovative network can be adapted for networking in the 21st Century. Her book *Innovate: Lessons from the Underground Railroad* has been called "outstanding," "masterful," "creative," and "inspiring" by reviewers.

Tennessee's State Historian, Dr. Carroll Van West, will discuss the movement to desegregate Clinton School in East Tennessee, and the development of the Green McAdoo Cultural Center in Oak Ridge as a place to learn about and honor the legacy of those students and their families that stood against violence and racism to be the first to integrate a public high school in the South.

Continuing the Conference's long-standing commitment to honoring the contributions of African-Americans to Nashville's cultural scene, the Nashville Public Library's Wishing Chair Productions will stage "Anasasi the Spider" in honor of the rich story-telling traditions of the African-American community.

New for this year will be the airing of the winning student documentaries from 2014's Tennessee History Day competition. High school students from Memphis and middle school students from Knoxville received honors for the best projects in African-American history, sponsored by the Nashville Conference Committee, at the 2014 competition. Those students and their teachers will be honored and the winning documentaries screened at the upcoming conference.

Please make plans to join us for this exceptional program on Friday, February 13, 2015, at the Avon Williams Campus of Tennessee State University. Registration is \$20, and includes admission to all speakers and performances, additions to the *Profiles of African-Americans in Tennessee* series, and other publications. Lunch and parking are also included. The full program registration brochure will be available after December 1 at www.nashville.gov/mhc, or by calling 615-862-7970.

###

Please Join Us!

On February 13, 2015, Tennessee State University's College of Liberal Arts and the Metropolitan Historical Commission will celebrate the contributions of African Americans to Nashville and Tennessee history. For over thirty years, this award-winning conference has brought together historians, students, educators, community leaders, and others interested in African American history and culture. This year's conference will examine some of the unsung personalities of African-Americans in Tennessee, including John McCline, King Daniel Ganaway, and Samuel F. Yette.

New for this year will be the airing of the winning student documentaries from 2014's Tennessee History Day competition. Honored for the best projects in African-American history, sponsored by the Nashville Conference Committee at the 2014 competition, these middle- and high-school students and their teachers will show their winning documentaries.

Dr. Sybril Bennett, Journalism professor at Belmont University, will focus on the lessons of the Underground Railroad, and how its innovative network can be adapted for networking in the 21st Century. Her book *Innovate: Lessons from the Underground Railroad* has been called "masterful," "creative," and "inspiring" by reviewers. State Historian Dr. C. Van West will conclude the conference with an analysis of the students from American Baptist College and their role in the Voting Rights Movement in Selma, Alabama.

TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY AND THE METROPOLITAN NASHVILLE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

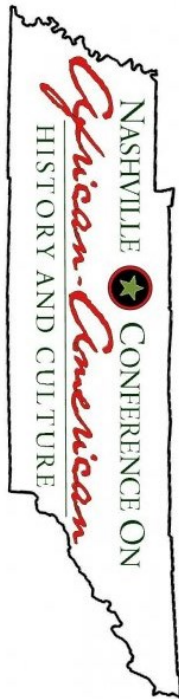
Present the
34th Annual



Friday, February 13, 2015

8:30 am—4:00 pm

Tennessee State University
Avon Williams Campus
10th & Charlotte Ave.
Nashville, Tennessee



Metropolitan Historical Commission
Sunnyside in Sevier Park
3000 Granny White Pike
Nashville, Tennessee 37204

Planning Committee

Conference Co-Chairs

Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr.
Fisk University

Linda T. Wynn
Tennessee Historical Commission/Fisk University

Committee Members

Gloria C. Johnson, Dean, College of Liberal Arts
Tennessee State University

Pamela Bobo, *Tennessee State University*
Murle Kenerson, *Tennessee State University*
Gloria McKissack, *Tennessee State University*
Tara M. Mielnik, *Metropolitan Historical Commission*
Jamaal Sheats, *Fisk University*
Sharon Hull Smith, *Tennessee State University*
Learotha Williams, Jr., *Tennessee State University*

Financial Supporters

Alkebu-Lan Images
Aramark
Frierson Foundation
Holy Trinity Episcopal Church
Tennessee Historical Society
Spruce Street Baptist Church
TSU Friends of the Library

Special Thanks



Preliminary Program

9:00 am	Welcome Mr. Tim Walker, Executive Director Metropolitan Historical Commission Mrs. Linda T. Wynn, Conference Co-Chair
9:20 am	<i>Lessons from the Underground Railroad</i> Dr. Sybril Bennett, Belmont University
9:40 am	<i>John McCline and Cloverbottom Plantation</i> Mr. Steve Rogers, TN Historical Commission
10:10 am	Break
10:30 am	<i>Ananzi the Spider</i> Wishing Chair Productions
11:00 am	Remarks The Honorable Brenda Wynn, Davidson County Clerk Dr. Glenda Baskin Glover, President Tennessee State University
11:30 am	<i>Tennessee History Day Student Presentations</i>
Noon	Lunch (provided)
1:20 pm	<i>Interpreting Plantation Slavery: Tennessee State Museum's Exhibit on Wessington Plantation</i> Mr. Rob DeHart, TN State Museum
1:50 pm	<i>King Daniel Ganaway: African-American Photographer</i> Mrs. Brenda Fredericks, independent scholar
2:15 pm	TSU Jazz Collegians
2:50 pm	<i>Samuel F. Yette and the Founding of The Meter, TSU's Student Newspaper</i> Ms. Pamela Foster, independent scholar
3:15 pm	<i>Where Giants Walked: American Baptist College and Selma's Voting Rights Movement</i> Dr. Carroll Van West, TN State Historian
3:45 pm	Closing Remarks Dr. Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr., Conference Co-Chair

Conference Registration



February 13, 2015

Registration fee is \$20.00.

Make checks payable to:
TSU Foundation: TSU/MHC Conference

Mail to:
**Metro Historical Commission
3000 Granny White Pike
Nashville, Tennessee 37204**

Registration form and fee **MUST** be received by
January 23, 2015.

Name
Address
City, State, Zip
Email Address
Phone

Questions? Call us at 615-862-7970
Preregistration is strongly encouraged.
Registration cannot be taken over the phone.

Tennessee State University College of Liberal Arts and Metropolitan Historical Commission



Friday, February 13, 2015

Tennessee State University, Avon Williams Campus

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 8:30 am | Registration begins |
| 9:00 am | Welcome and Opening Remarks |
| 9:20 am | Lessons from the Underground Railroad
Dr. Sybril Bennett |
| 9:45 am | John McCline and Cloverbottom Plantation
Steve Rogers |
| 10:00 am | Landscape of Liberation: GIS and the African-American Geography
of the Civil War in Tennessee
Dr. Wayne Moore |
| 10:15 am | Break |
| 10:30 am | Ananzi the Spider
WishingChair Productions |
| 11:10 am | Remarks
Honorable Brenda Wynn, Davidson County Clerk
Dr. Glenda Baskin Glover, Tennessee State University |
| 11:30 am | Tennessee History Day Student Presentations |
| 12:00 | LUNCH |
| 1:30 pm | Interpreting Plantation Slavery: Tennessee State Museum's exhibit on
Wessyngton Plantation
Rob DeHart |
| 1:50 pm | King Daniel Ganaway: African-American Photographer
Brenda Fredericks |
| 2:15 pm | TSU Jazz Collegians |
| 2:50 pm | Samuel F. Yett and the Founding of <i>The Meter</i> , TSU's Student Newspaper
Pamela Foster |
| 3:15 pm | Where Giants Walked: American Baptist College Students and Selma's
Voting Rights Movement
Dr. Carroll Van West |
| 3:45 pm | Closing Remarks |

FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS

ALKEBU-LAN IMAGES

ARAMARK

FRIERSON FOUNDATION

HOLY TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

TENNESSEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRUCE STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

TSU FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Co-Chair Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr., *Fisk University*

Co-Chair Linda T. Wynn, *Tennessee Historical Commission/Fisk University*

Gloria C. Johnson, ex-officio, *Tennessee State University*

Pamela Bobo, *Tennessee State University*

Murle Kenerson, *Tennessee State University*

Gloria McKissack, *Tennessee State University*

Tara Mitchell Mielnik, *Metro Historical Commission*

Jamaal Sheats, *Fisk University*

Sharon Hull Smith, *Tennessee State University*

Learotha Williams, Jr., *Tennessee State University*

FEATURED ARTISTS

Ted Jones

Michael McBride

Vando Rogers

Jamaal Sheats

Special thanks to Jamaal Sheats for curating this exhibition!



Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

SAMUEL F. YETTE



Prestigious journalist, author, educator, publisher, and social critic Samuel Frederick Yette was born in Harriman, Tennessee on July 2, 1929. The grandson of a slave, Yette was the twelfth child of Frank Mack Yette and Cora Lee Rector Yette. He attended segregated schools in both Harriman and Rockwood, and began taking college classes at Morristown College before following some of his siblings to Tennessee State University in Nashville in 1948.

While a student at TSU in 1950, Yette discovered that students were paying fees for a student newspaper, while no such paper existed. Yette, a junior, brought that oversight to the attention of TSU President Walter S. Davis, who asked him to propose a plan for one. Yette submitted a Program of Work to President Davis, who asked Business Department Chair Dr. William L. Crump to provide an office and furnishings and to work with Yette, who established the TSU Student Newspaper, *The Meter*. Yette served as first editor-in-chief prior to his graduation from TSU in 1951.

After graduation, Yette served in the United States Air Force during the Korean War. Following the war, he returned to Tennessee to teach high school, first in Rockwood, then in Chattanooga. He also served as a sports writer and radio announcer in Chattanooga. Yette enrolled in the graduate program in journalism at Indiana University in Bloomington, where he was one of two black students. A strong student and writer for the student newspaper, Yette was inducted into the national journalism fraternity, Sigma Delta Chi in 1956. Yette persuaded another African-American journalist from Tennessee, Carl Rowan, to speak at the induction ceremony. Yette received his degree

from Indiana University in 1959, the same year he married his wife, Sadie Walton.

Pursuing a career in journalism, Yette had accompanied renowned photographer Gordon Parks throughout Alabama in the mid-1950s to document the emerging Civil Rights Movement for *LIFE* magazine. This high-profile series led to other journalism assignments for Yette throughout the 1950s and 1960s, including reporting for the *Afro-American* in Baltimore and *Ebony* magazine. He also served as director of information at Tuskegee University before holding positions as press liaison and executive secretary of the Peace Corps and special assistant for civil rights at the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity.

Yette made history in 1968, becoming the first African-American correspondent for *Newsweek* magazine, where he served as Washington correspondent and covered urban issues, including civil rights protests and urban violence. Yette also made appearances on NBC's *Meet the Press*. In 1971, Yette published his first book, *The Choice: The Issue of Black Survival in America*, based on materials gathered from his journalistic experiences. Yette's book was deemed controversial for his arguments involving the American wars on poverty, on drugs, and on sexual confines, and the effect of these national policies on African-Americans, particularly African-American youth. In part, *The Choice* "asserted that the federal government showed a pattern of repression against African Americans that, left unaddressed, could lead to genocide" (Washington Post, 24 January 2011). *The Choice* became an award-winning and popular book, used as a textbook on over fifty college campuses nation-wide, but its

publication led to Yette's dismissal from *Newsweek* magazine, and a protracted legal battle in which Yette alleged his firing was primarily racially motivated. Although the courts initially ruled in Yette's favor, that decision was overturned on appeal.

Yette became a professor at the new School of Communications at Howard University in Washington, DC, in 1972, where his charismatic teaching style and devotion to his students earned him widespread popularity. His son, Michael, remembered that his father "was a natural teacher, and wanted to spread knowledge and wisdom, to particularly his people, to help them advance the lives of his people, and journalism was his tool of preference" (Richard Prince's "Journal-isms," 21 January 2011). Yette remained at Howard University until 1986. While teaching at Howard, Yette founded Cottage Books, a publishing company, where he reprinted *The Choice* and published another book, *Washington and Two Marches, 1963 & 1983*, a photographic remembrance of the civil rights movement, written and published with his son Frederick. Yette's personal life took a tragic

turn in December 1983, when he and his wife were involved in a car accident in which he was thrown from the car and his wife was fatally injured.

Yette served as an adviser and official photographer for Jesse Jackson during Jackson's 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns and in later years was a syndicated newspaper columnist. He eventually returned to Tennessee, serving as Writer-in-Residence at Knoxville College in 2005. Yette was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, and moved back to the Washington, DC area to be near family in 2008. Samuel F. Yette died January 21, 2011 in Laurel, Maryland.

- Pamela Foster

Bibliography:

"Some Notable Writers, Editors, and Publishers Affiliated with TSU over its First 100 Years," *Engaged: The Journal of Tennessee State University* (2013).

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

JOHN MCCLINE



John McCline was born on James Hoggatt's Clover Bottom farm in August of 1852, one of sixty enslaved African-Americans who labored on this 1,500 acre farm eight miles east of downtown Nashville. The antebellum history of the Clover Bottom farm is very wanting due to the lack of surviving account books, farm journals, and personal correspondence from the Hoggatt family. Few documents related to the operation of the Clover Bottom's antebellum past exist, and what little is known comes from the words of John McCline who described his life at Clover Bottom and the ensuing years during the Civil War in a vividly detailed book, *Slavery in the Clover Bottoms*. McCline wrote his narrative about 60 years after the events occurred documenting unrecorded chapters in the farm's history, and shedding new insights into interaction between roles of owner and slave. The story of McCline's journey from slavery to freedom, his witness to key events during the Civil War, his transition to freedman, and his nearly 50 year employment with Herbert Hagerman, the Territorial Governor of New Mexico, is a remarkable story.

McCline's mother, whose name is unknown, died shortly after he was born and he was raised by his maternal grandmother, Hannah. McCline was the youngest of four boys. His father, Jack McCline, did not live at Clover Bottom, but was owned by a man named James Smith who lived at Silver Springs in neighboring Wilson County. McCline wrote at length about the work and jobs he and others performed at Clover Bottom, and how the management of the household was sternly

overseen by Mrs. Hoggatt. Perhaps the most important information McCline mentioned in his narrative are the names, kinship relations, and occupations of over half of the 60 slaves living on the farm. Without written farm journals, McCline's information is the only documentation that gives specific identity to this enslaved community.

The onset of the Civil War changed life for everyone at Clover Bottom. Troops from both the Union and Confederate forces encamped on the farm for brief periods of time. Nathan Bedford Forrest and his cavalry of 1,000 men were fed and camped one night at Clover Bottom on July 21, 1862. Union foraging patrols confiscated supplies, food, animals, and wood. On December 18, 1862, troops from the 13th Michigan Infantry returning from a foraging trip marched down Stewart's Ferry towards Lebanon Road. John McCline was sitting on his mule named Nell when a soldier on the supply wagon shouted, "Come on Johnny, go with us up North, and we will set you free." McCline, a ten year old boy, jumped off his mule, climbed into the back of a large covered ambulance, claiming his freedom yet leaving behind his family and the only life he ever knew. Within two weeks of leaving Clover Bottom, McCline witnessed the aftermath of a great battle of the Civil War, Stones River outside of Murfreesboro. He moved with the Michigan troops throughout Middle Tennessee and northern Alabama over the next three years. He became part of Sherman's March to the Sea, and finally mustered out in Cincinnati in 1865.

McCline was taught to read and write and after the war spent nine years living in

Michigan with the families of these soldiers. In 1874, McCline moved to Chicago and worked as a porter at the Sherman and Palmer House hotels. McCline returned briefly to Nashville to attend Roger Williams University in 1877, eventually teaching school in Trousdale County. Concerned over the low pay and poor working conditions, McCline left Tennessee. He moved to St. Louis and worked at the Lindell Hotel for twelve years, first as a waiter, then as the hat check man. In 1890, McCline contracted malaria and because of his health, doctors advised him to seek a drier climate. He moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado, and established a stable. After two years running an economically unsuccessful business, McCline began working for a wealthy industrialist named James Hagerman in 1892. McCline was in charge of Hagerman's horses and stable.

McCline continued in the employment of the Hagerman family, and in 1906 he moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico with Herbert Hagerman who had been appointed Territorial Governor of New Mexico for President Teddy Roosevelt. McCline lived in Santa Fe the remainder of his life, and worked for the Hagerman family for nearly fifty years. McCline, a respected leader of the small

African American community in Santa Fe, died in 1948 at age 96, and is buried in Santa Fe's Fairview Cemetery.

—Steve Rogers

For further reading:

Jan Furman, ed. *Slavery in the Clover Bottoms: John McCline's Narrative of His Life during Slavery and the Civil War*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998.

Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

ELBERT WILLIAMS

The year 2015 marks the 50th anniversary of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law on August 6, 1965. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 abolished literacy tests and poll taxes designed to disenfranchise African American voters and gave the federal government the authority to take over voter registration in counties with a pattern of persistent discrimination. Before the Voting Rights Act came to fruition, numerous people gave their lives in the quest for social justice and the right of the franchise as granted by the 1870 ratification of 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution. This amendment granted African American men the right to vote by declaring that the "right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude". Using poll taxes, literacy tests and outright intimidation to stop people from casting free and unfettered ballots, Southern states effectively disenfranchised African Americans. Four years prior to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) Legal Defense Fund's litigation of the 1944 *Smith v. Allwright* case that outlawed "white primaries", Elbert Williams, a resident of Haywood County, Tennessee, and one of the earliest known members of the NAACP, was lynched because of his membership in Brownsville's newly inaugurated chapter of the NAACP. Williams' demise came eleven years before the Christmas night bombing of Harry T. and Harriett Vyda Simms Moore's bedroom; fifteen years before the lynching of 14 year-old Emmett Till; and twenty-three years prior to Medgar Evers' assassination.

When consideration is given to those whose lives were taken in the struggle to gain voting rights, Florida's Harry T. Moore or Mississippi's Medgar Evers are among the first persons to come to mind. Evers, a native of Decatur, Mississippi, and an alumnus of Alcorn University, was a civil rights activist, organizer of voter registration efforts, demonstrations and boycotts of companies that practiced discrimination was the first field secretary for the NAACP in Mississippi. Because of his civil

rights and voter registration efforts, at 12:40 a.m. on June 12, 1963, Byron De La Beckwith, a white segregationist and founding member of Mississippi's White Citizens Council, shot Evers in the back in the driveway of his Jackson home. He died less than an hour later at a nearby hospital. Evers' life ended twelve years after Harry T. Moore. Moore organized the first Brevard County branch of the NAACP in 1934 and became its president. He later traveled throughout the state of Florida organizing branches. In 1941, he organized and became President of the Florida State Conference of NAACP branches. In 1945, he formed the Florida Progressive Voter's League and became its Executive Director. This organization was instrumental in helping register over 100,000 black voters in the State of Florida. Because of his civil and voter rights activities, as well as his activism in the Groveland Rape Case, on Christmas Day 1951 the Ku Klux Klan placed a bomb beneath the floor joists directly beneath the Moore's bed. Moore died on the way to the hospital; his wife, Harriett, died nine days later. Tennessee's Elbert Williams met an earlier, similar fate for wanting to participate in the political process.

Williams was born on October 15, 1908, in rural Haywood County, Tennessee, to Albert and Mary Green Williams. In 1929 he married Annie Mitchell, and they eventually moved to Brownsville, where they worked for the Sunshine Laundry. The Williamses became charter members of Brownsville's NAACP chapter, organized in May 1939. One of the first actions taken by members of the Brownsville's NAACP chapter was to work to register African Americans to vote in the upcoming presidential election the following year. Although no members of Haywood County's African American community had been allowed to register to vote during the 20th century, on May 6, 1940, five members of Brownsville's NAACP Branch unsuccessfully attempted to register to vote. Within 24 hours, the threats and reign of terror began. White extremists destroyed Brownsville's NAACP branch and over 20 African American families fled the area. Despite the mayhem that catapulted Brownsville into a state of chaos, the Williamses did not leave.

This publication is a project of the 2015 Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture. The author compiled the information. The Metropolitan Historical Commission edited and designed the materials.

On June 20, 1940, many in Brownsville, including Elbert and Anna Williams, listened to the radio broadcast of the second fight between Joe Louis and Arturo Godoy. Louis successfully defended his title by winning the match over his opponent in the eighth round. After the fight, as Elbert Williams prepared for bed, Tip Hunter and Charles Read, city police officers, and Ed Lee, manager of the local Coca-Cola bottling company knocked on their door and forced Williams, who was barefoot and clad in pajamas bottoms and an undershirt, into the awaiting vehicle. They questioned him about his activities with the Brownsville NAACP. That was the last time anyone saw him alive. When he did not return home by the next morning, Annie Williams attempted to find the whereabouts of her husband. After three days of anxiously awaiting some word about her husband, Annie Williams received that ill-fated call on Sunday June 23, 1940 at 7:30 a.m. from undertaker Al Rawls. He wanted her to come to the Hatchie River because two anglers found the mutilated "body of a colored [sic] man". Williams, still clothed in what he was wearing the night of his abduction, was found with a rope around his neck, which was fastened to a log. He was beaten and bruised with bullet holes penetrating his chest. His head was twice its normal size. The Coroner ordered no medical examination, and held his inquest on the riverbank that same morning. His verdict was "Cause of death: unknown". Similar to what the Coroner wanted to do with Emmett Till's body some 15 years later, the Brownsville's Coroner did not want Annie Williams to see her husband's body. However, she insisted. Upon identifying her husband's body, she started to cry. One of the white men in attendance told her, "We ain't gonna have no hollering here". After she identified the body, they told Mrs. Williams that the body was to be buried immediately. According to his death certificate, Elbert Williams' death was ruled a homicide by "parties unknown". After retrieving the body from the Hatchie River and wrapping it in sheets, Al Rawls placed the body in a pine box and subsequently buried the remains of Elbert Williams in Taylor's Chapel Cemetery. Neither Annie Williams nor members of the family attended the burial. She immediately left Brownsville and ultimately settled in New York.

Because of the atrocities committed in Brownsville, the county seat of Haywood, Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP's Special Council investigated the murder and interviewed numerous witnesses. Like so many others, these interviewees challenged violent assaults discursively and engaged in what Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in their work *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature*,

Psychoanalysis and History described as calculated "speech acts," which should be viewed as a form of direct action protest against racial violence.

Pressured by the National Office of the NAACP, the United States Department of Justice (DOJ) ordered the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to investigate the death of Elbert Williams. The DOJ promised a broad inquiry. It ordered the United States Attorney in Memphis to present the case to a Federal Grand Jury; NAACP Special Council Thurgood Marshall monitored the investigation. Marshall discovered that FBI agents took Tip Hunter, the leader of the lynch mob, on their rounds to question witnesses. Subsequently, the DOJ reversed its decision and closed the case citing insufficient evidence. Marshall criticized the DOJ for its investigation and failure to prosecute. As in many cases involving the death of those who fought to obtain civil and social justice, no one has ever been prosecuted for the death of Elbert Williams. According to some, Elbert Williams of Brownsville, Tennessee was the first known person affiliated with NAACP killed for his civil rights activities and seeking the right to vote. Twenty years later, at the height of the Modern Civil Rights Movement, Brownsville's NAACP re-organized in 1961. Those responsible for Williams's death have never been prosecuted.

- Linda T. Wynn

For More Information:

Heather Catherwood, "In the Absence of Governmental Protection: The Struggle of the Brownsville NAACP to Secure the Right to Vote." Northeastern University School of Law, May 2012. On-line at <http://nuweb9.neu.edu/civilrights/wp-content/uploads/Williams-final-essay.pdf>