

*Tennessee State University and Metropolitan Historical Commission*

**28th Annual  
Conference on  
African-American  
History & Culture**

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2009  
TSU AVON N WILLIAMS, JR., CAMPUS  
8:30 AM-4:00 PM  
10TH AND CHARLOTTE AVENUES

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- 8:30 Registration begins
- 9:00 **Welcome and Opening Remarks**  
Dr. Gloria G. Johnson, Interim Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Tennessee State University  
Mrs. Linda T. Wynn, Conference Co-Chair  
Dr. Tara Mitchell Mielnik, Program Coordinator, Metropolitan Historical Commission
- 9:15 **Opening Remarks**  
The Honorable Karl Dean, Mayor, Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County  
Dr. Melvin Johnson, President, Tennessee State University
- 9:30 **Tennessee Black Migration/Immigration Separatist Movement during the Post Civil War Era**  
Ms. Selena R. Sanderfer, Ph.D. Candidate, Vanderbilt University
- 10:10 **The New American Racism: Clarksville, Tennessee, A Microcosm Study**  
Dr. Shirley Rainey, Asst. Professor, Fisk University
- 10:40 Break
- 11:00 **Musical Performance**  
Fisk Jubilee Singers, Dr. Paul Kwami, Director
- 11:30 **Collections of African-American History held by the Tennessee State Library and Archives**  
Mrs. Jeanne D. Sugg, State Librarian and Archivist
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:30 **Perpetuating the Diversity of African-American Sacred Music in the 21st Century**  
Professor James A. Scandrick, Jr., American Baptist College
- 2:00 **Nashville's North Edgefield: A Historically Diverse Community**  
Dr. William C. "Bill" McKee, Professor, Cumberland University
- 2:30 **Invitation to National Preservation Conference, Nashville, October 13-17, 2009**  
Ms. Anne-Leslie Owens, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation
- 2:45 **Closing Remarks**  
Dr. Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr., Conference, Co-Chair
- 3:00 **Reception Honoring the 100th Anniversary of the NAACP**  
Hosted by Tennessee State University and Dr. Melvin N. Johnson, President

# Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

## One-Hundredth Anniversary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) celebrates its one-hundredth anniversary in 2009. "Making democracy work," the nation's oldest civil rights organization was founded on February 12, 1909, the centennial year of Abraham Lincoln's birth. The NAACP has been instrumental in improving the civil rights, economical, educational, legal, and political and lives of African Americans for a century. Depending on the judicial system as a way to secure these objectives, NAACP officials focused on eliminating inequalities in public education up to the mid-twentieth century, including but not limited to its most famous *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case, which most historians agree denoted the first phase of the modern Civil Rights Movement. Throughout its one hundred years of existence, the NAACP has labored to fulfill its goals of civil and human rights, the right of enfranchisement, and the cessation of segregation and racial violence. From its inception, people and events with a Tennessee connection played an important role in the nation's premier civil rights organization.

Established by an interracial group of black and white activists, the association was organized in response to the August 1908 race riot in Springfield, the capital of Illinois and the birthplace of Lincoln. An outgrowth of the Niagara Movement founded by W. E. B. Du Bois, and others, the association's organizers were horror-struck by the violence perpetrated against African Americans. To address these concerns, social worker Mary Ovington White and Oswald Garrison Villard, both descendants of abolitionists, among others issued a call for a meeting to discuss racial injustice. Over sixty people signed "The Call," including seven African Americans that included Du Bois, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell, all of whom had Tennessee connections.

According to Nina Mjagkij, editor of *Organizing Black America, An Encyclopedia of African American Organizations*, conferees combined the esprit de corps of nineteenth century abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, with the Niagara Movement strategy of civil rights activists Du Bois and the newspaper editor and William Monroe Trotter to protest black disfranchisement, social segregation and educational inequities. They sought to advance race relations through agitation, court action, and federal legalization. The like-minded assemblage envisioned a comprehensive association with local chapters throughout the country, including the South, designed to rectify "national wrongs," especially those due to the intimidating effects of the U.S. Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) decision that ruled the "separate but equal" provisions for black and white Americans were constitutional and served as the foundation for nation's apartheid system of Jim Crow.

The NAACP established its national headquarters in New York City, named a board of directors and Moorfield Story, a white constitutional lawyer and former president of the American Bar Association as national president. Other officers included William English Walling, Chairman of the Executive Committee; John E. Milholland, Treasurer; Oswald Garrison Villard, Disbursing Treasurer; Frances Blascoer, Executive Secretary; and W. E. B. Du Bois, Director of Publicity and Research. The only African American among the NAACP's executives, in 1910 Du Bois established *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*, the organization's official organ, which was named after James Russell Lowell's popular poem, "The Present Crisis." In *The Crisis*, Du Bois promoted black literature, culture, history, gender equality, and aided in forming public opinion.

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The Association's early court battles included a victory against a discriminatory Oklahoma law that predicated voting upon a grandfather clause (*Guinn and Beal v. United States*, 1915) that enfranchised only those black males whose ancestors voted in 1866. Ruling in favor of the NAACP and its plaintiffs, the nation's highest tribunal decreed that Oklahoma violated the Fifteenth Amendment to the U. S. Constitution. This case helped to establish the NAACP as a legal advocate, a role it would play with enormous success. The same year, the civil rights organization boycotted the New York screening of D. W. Griffith's inflammatory film *Birth of a Nation* which was based on Thomas Dixon's 1905 bigoted melodramatic staged play, *The Clansman, An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, the second volume in a trilogy. The subject matter of the film caused immediate criticism for its racist and "vicious" portrayal of blacks, its proclamation of miscegenation, its pro-Klan stance, and its endorsement of slavery.

As the United States fought to make the world safe for democracy in World War I, the NAACP aided black victims and defended participants in the 1917 race riot in East St. Louis, Illinois. It also protested by organizing a mass demonstration against racial violence with a silent parade of thousands in New York City. Throughout the 1920s the civil rights organization fought against lynching. It passionately supported the Dyer Antilynching Bill in the United States Congress. Although the Dyer Bill never passed, the NAACP entered the legal arena and exposed the heinous crime of lynching. Many credit the public discourse, which was kindled by the organization's report *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1919* with significantly reducing the frequency of lynching. As membership grew, the NAACP under the directorship of James Weldon Johnson, the association's first black field secretary, branches were established in the South.

In June 1917, Robert R. Church Jr., the younger brother of Mary Church Terrell, established Tennessee's first NAACP chapter in Memphis. Two years later, James C. Napier organized a chapter in Nashville and later led 2,000 people to the governor's office to protest lynching. Before the decade ended chapters were organized in Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Jackson. The organization slowly moved into rural counties. In 1936, Ollie and Mattye Tollette Bond established a local NAACP chapter in Brownsville. According to the Tennessee

State Conference of the NAACP, chartered in 1946 after members of the Chattanooga, Knoxville, Memphis, and Nashville branches came together to aid black citizens of Columbia, Tennessee, following a race riot that killed several and injured many others, there are seven chapters in East Tennessee, eleven chapters in Middle Tennessee, and seventeen chapters in West Tennessee.

As celebratory events are held across the nation, it is impossible not to note the diversity of the NAACP's founders and those persons and events associated with Tennessee. Du Bois and Wells-Barnett, and Terrell joined forces in a national effort for increased racial equality. Wells helped in a petition drive to use the one-hundredth anniversary of Lincoln's birth to protest and improve the conditions of African Americans. The association's first black field secretary (1916), James Weldon Johnson, who served as a professor of creative literature at Fisk University from 1930 to 1938, established thirteen southern branches, including the five early branches in the Volunteer State. Tennessee also provided Thurgood Marshall, the head of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, his closest encounter with violence. In 1946 he traveled to Columbia to assist the defense of African Americans accused of participating in the race riot that summer. At the conclusion of the trial, Marshall was driving from Columbia to Nashville with attorney Z. Alexander Looby, when local police, who separated the two attorneys, stopped him. Looby refused to drive away. Instead, he followed the police car that had taken Marshall, probably averting violence against the future United States Supreme Court justice. From school desegregation, to the first voter registration drives in Haywood and Fayette Counties, to the Nashville sit-ins, and all civil rights issues in between, all drew upon NAACP support. From 1977 to 1993 Benjamin J. Hooks of Memphis was the NAACP's executive director.

The courageous leadership of NAACP officials and members provided a foundation for the Civil Rights movement in Tennessee. Through its one hundred years of existence, Tennesseans, both well known and unknown have fought among it legion of members for equality and justice for all of America's citizenry.

-- Linda T. Wynn

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# Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

## Cameron School, Nashville

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Nashville's Cameron School came into being on Monday night November 26, 1928 when the Nashville City School Board voted unanimously to rename Pearl Junior High School to Cameron in honor of Professor Henry Alvin Cameron, an African-American science teacher who was killed in World War I. Cameron was the fourth public school in Nashville named after an African American by the city school board.

The first Cameron School was located at 217 5th Avenue South, across the street from what is now the Country Music Hall of Fame in downtown Nashville. It was a two-story brick structure with no indoor plumbing but one that the community was proud to have. The heating source consisted of several stoves and grates located throughout the building. An annex building in the rear of the campus housed the Home Economics and Industrial Arts departments and a small cafeteria. The structure went through many designations during its 60 year existence. Built in 1883, the schoolhouse began as Pearl Grammar School serving grades 1-8. In 1897, when the Nashville Board of Education transferred the African-American high school department was transferred from Meigs to Pearl, the building became the first Pearl High. In 1917, Pearl High moved to a new facility on 16th Avenue in North Nashville. The 5th Avenue schoolhouse remained vacant until the fall of 1924, when it reopened as Pearl Junior High, serving grades 1-9. Four years later, on November 26, 1928, the Nashville City School Board voted to rename Pearl Junior High in honor of Professor Cameron.

President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs provided federal funding to Nashville throughout the 1930s, and through the Public Works Administration, Cameron moved into a new building on 1st Avenue South in the fall of 1940. This spacious Gothic Revival-

style facility was designed by one of the foremost architects in the country, Nashvillian Henry Hibbs, who planned the Nashville Electrical Service building in downtown Nashville and numerous college and university structures at Vanderbilt, Fisk, Peabody, Scarritt, Belmont, Meharry and other southern schools. The new Cameron consisted of four floors with a combined area of over 106,000 square feet. It had 23 classrooms, 2 office areas, a large library, three Home Economics rooms, a clinic, two laboratories (General Science and Physics/Chemistry), two shops, a cafeteria, kitchen, boiler room, teacher's Lounge, storage and janitor's rooms. The campus comprised over 7 acres and sits at the original site of the old Walden University and Meharry Medical College.

In the fall of 1955, finally fulfilling a long awaited community dream, Cameron became the third African-American high school in the city of Nashville. Physical additions to Cameron such as the McKissack & McKissack-designed East Wing (consisting of the boy's gymnasium, auditorium, band/vocal rooms and arcade) built in 1954, and the stadium which opened in the fall of 1956 provided the necessary resources for the school's new high school status. Cameron's first senior high graduating class received diplomas in June 1957.

The school's exceptional faculty, choral groups, marching band, athletic teams, science clubs, newspaper staff, player's guild and other departments won numerous city, state, and national honors. Cameron's 1958 and 1959 football teams went undefeated, and back-to-back TSSAA state basketball championships were captured in 1970 and 1971 by the men's varsity basketball team, coached by Pearl High standout Ronald R. Lawson Sr. and led by team members Freddie Lewis, Geary Jackman, Michael Edmondson, Harold Corlew, Cecil Beard, Kenneth Cooper, Carl Baker,

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Larry Knight, and David Vaughn. Other notable graduates of Cameron High School include engineer Jessie Russell, financial analyst Eric McKissack, musicians Bobby Hebb, Andrew White, Jr., and Freddie Carpenter, and professional athletes Leon Moore, Cecil Beaird, Gordon Banks, and David Vaughn.

As a direct result of a federal mandate to desegregate public schools in Nashville, Cameron High issued its last diplomas in June 1971, effectively ending its status as a high school for 16 years. The school returned to Junior High status as an integrated 9th grade school in the fall of 1971. In 1978, Cameron became the pilot institution for the Metro Nashville school system as a middle school for grades 5-8. Currently, it still operates as a middle school accommodating one of the most ethnically diverse student populations within the Metropolitan Nashville system. In 2003, a \$4.5 million dollar modernization project was completed at Cameron that renovated many areas of the building. The school

was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2005 and also that year the campus was designated by the Metropolitan Nashville Historical Commission as a Local Historic Landmark District. As a Middle School, Cameron continues its long-standing commitment to serving the educational needs of the students of Nashville, Tennessee. For more information on Cameron School, please visit the Cameron alumni website at [www.cameronalumni.org](http://www.cameronalumni.org).

-- Donald L. Johnson  
President, Cameron Alumni Group

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