

# Black History Month -- The Black Worker

## American Federation of Teachers: Stellar integration record

By LIBBY CLARK  
Special To The Chronicle

If a report card was demanded today, The American Federation of Teachers would get an "E" for Excellence. It's far and away the most integrated union in organized labor from top to bottom. The union has seven vice presidents.



A member of the American Federation of Teachers in Washington assists pupils with classroom assignments.

They are Sandra Irons, Jacquelyn Vaughn, Lorretta Johnson, Nathaniel LeCour, John Elliott,

Carol Graves and George Springer.

In the first half of the 20th century, when segregation and discrimination was widespread and many trade unions excluded Blacks from membership, the AFT was among the first union to breakdown racial barriers and open its membership to Blacks and other minorities.

In southern states, Black teachers in segregated school districts organized their own unions locals and readily affiliated with the AFT. Local 9, an all Black Washington, D. C., union was chartered in 1916.

Black teachers elsewhere joined on equal footing with their white counterparts to organize integrated AFT locals in their respective school districts in other parts of the country.

In 1918, the AFT demanded equal pay for Black teachers and years later backed up its plea with a generous contribution to the NAACP fund earmarked for equal pay activities.

Also in 1918, AFT called for the election of Blacks to local school boards, and it lobbied for compulsory school attendance by Black children, and equal educational opportunity for said students.

In 1928 AFT demanded that the historical contributions of Black Americans be taught in the public schools.

The union has not been without racial strife within its own ranks. As late as 1950, it was necessary for AFT to expel a number of locals who steadfastly refused to admit Blacks to their membership. This action resulted in a loss of nearly

10,000 members. The results -- a fully integrated union.

The 60's found the AFT in the vanguard of the civil rights movement alongside such venerable fighters as A. Phillip Randolph, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Whitney Young, Roy Wilkins, James Farmer and other civil rights stalwarts. Indeed, AFT members helped to organize the 1963 "March on Washington" for Justice and Jobs, and over the next five years AFT staffers and members travelled south to register new Black voters and to teach in the "freedom" schools.

Along with other unions and civil rights organizations, AFT also lobbied for passage of key civil rights legislation, re: the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, the Fair Housing Act and the Voting Rights Act.

Further involvement of AFT, along with civil rights groups and the AFL-CIO includes lobbying efforts on behalf of a decent minimum wage, for which legislation was favorably passed last year; school integration, adequate integrated housing, Medicare, full employment and aid to education. The battles to keep these programs and to expand them continue, and AFT remains in the thick of the battle.

Today, the fight against tuition tax credits is one of the most pressing issues AFT faces in its struggle to build and maintain quality public education for students of all racial extractions.

AFT was recently victorious by

a 9 to 1 margin, in Washington, D. C., where the local chapter, with national AFT assistance defeated a local tuition tax credit measure.

Headquartered in Washington, D. C., the 680,000 member American Federation of Teachers is an international AFL-CIO union, whose membership is made up of primarily elementary and secondary school teachers, college and university professors and other non-supervisory personnel in the field of education. While the union represents teachers in urban, suburban and rural school districts throughout the United States, its strongest concentration is in the large cities across the country.

In recent years, AFT has opened doors to other public sector and professional employees with concerns similar to those of teachers. The Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals (FNHP) organized in 1978, the nation's massive and largely non-unionized health care industry. Through the Federation of State Employees (FSE), AFT also serves a broad spectrum of blue and white collar civil service employees working for state and local governments.

Since the late seventies, AFT has affiliated nearly 200,000 new members. It is recognized as one of the most integrated and fastest growing unions under the AFL-CIO umbrella.

In 1967, AFT moved its headquarters from Chicago to Washington, D. C. The national office provides technical assistance to its state

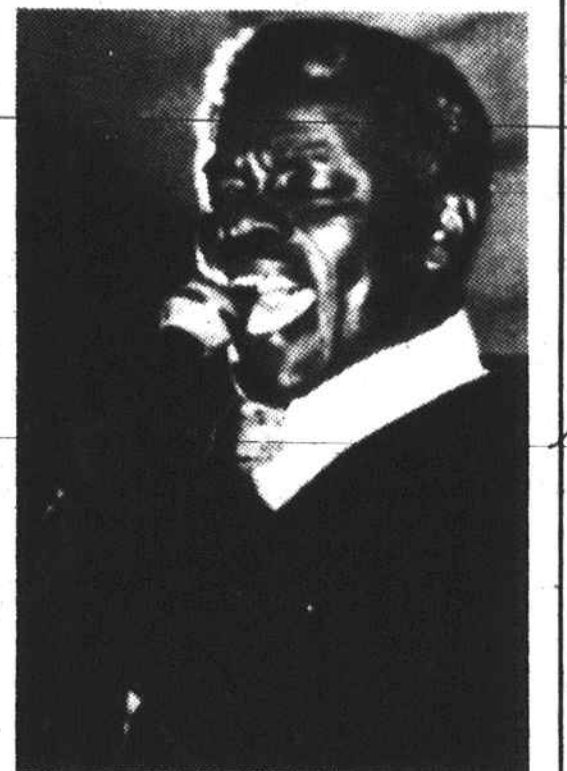
and local affiliates in the organizing and collective bargaining activities. Since AFT is largely a union of professionals, it also gives major attention to the professional concerns of its members and provides support to its locals through legislative and political action, public relations, human rights, research, educational issues and communications departments.

Albert Shanker, a former New York school teacher and union official, has been international president of AFT since 1974. Robert Porter has been international secretary-treasurer since his first appointment by the organization's executive council at the 47th AFT convention in 1963.



Lorretta Johnson, vice president of the American Federation of Teachers.

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## The Coalition of Black Trade Unionists

By LIBBY CLARK  
Special To The Chronicle

In September of 1972, more than 1200 Black-union officials and rank and file members representing thirty-seven different international and national trade unions, met in Chicago for two days of discussion of the role of Black trade unionists in the labor movement. The meeting proved to be very productive and constituted the largest single gathering of Black unionists in the history of the American labor movement.

The most significant development of the conference was the establishment of a permanent umbrella organization -- the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. There are over three million Black workers in the ranks of organized labor -- the single largest organization of Blacks in the nation. This block of workers represents a very significant economic force within the Black community as well as organized labor.

Since that 1972 initial conference, the Coalition with William Lucy as its president, has established twenty-six local chapters across country, including three state-wide chapters. Presently there are seventy-two international and national trade unions in its membership ranks.

Lucy, the International Secretary-Treasurer of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO (AFSCME); says "Tapping this reservoir (the Black Trade Unionists) of hope, tenacity and creativity is the challenge before those of those who are committed to disarming the forces of poverty, racism and exploitation. Organization is the key to harnessing the talent and strength in minority communities. Therein lies the necessity of an organization like the Coalition of Black and poorer workers is a custom-tailored role for the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists."

Continuing to expound on the goals and objectives of CBTU, Lucy said, "The imprint of CBTU's leadership and influence is beyond dispute, from funneling donations and volunteers to political candidates fighting for more jobs and better living conditions to minority workers to providing all-out support for the Free South Africa Movement. While the media is bent on

belittling organized labor as anemic and out of step with today's worker, it is just as common for the press to ignore the successful and energetic contributions of Black Trade Unionists."

"The basic objectives of the CBTU are reflected in its activities and projects, which include: To improve the "image" of labor throughout the community; working within the framework of the trade union movement to provide a voice and vehicle for greater Black and minority participation; extensive and increased involvement in voter registration and voter education; campaigns and programs to improve economic development and employment opportunities for minority and poor workers; organizing the unorganized; providing support for civil rights, civil and related groups to improve living and working conditions in the Black communities throughout America. Foremost on the agenda of the CBTU is "organizing the unorganized." The current dismal socioeconomic climate in America that is devastating the Black community is issue enough to organize," Lucy points out. "If we allow ourselves to become impotent, disorganized and powerless in the face of increased unemployment; inadequate social service programs; decadent and indifferent educational systems and ever increasing antagonistic attitudes and actions towards urban communities where most Blacks live and work -- then we are welcoming extinction," Lucy explained.

According to Lucy, labor operates currently in an unparalleled period of hostility and antagonism; which means that extra efforts and emphasis must be centered on attaining more positive and visible working relationships between labor and institutions in the Black community; consequently, the CBTU's role is to provide the most effective bridge between the labor movement and the Black community, realistically interpreting the needs, goals and aspirations of one to the other.

"As ultra-conservative right-wing groups and the right-to-work advocates persist in their attacks on organized labor; such actions should and must be a warning for increased and accelerated political coalescing between labor, liberal groups, churches and the general

public to muster support on issues and projects of a common interest," Lucy believes.

One of the key focal points of

CBTU objectives is support projects and programs aimed at reducing

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### Thalhimers Salutes

# Black History Month

*Celebrate the unique contributions black Americans have made to the history of our country and the world. This month-long recognition follows the commemoration of Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday and continues his dream that all Americans share in an attempt to relate to, contribute to and promote what he called "the beloved community."*

## Thalhimers