

# Black Heritage Important For Future Perspectives

**Editor's Note:** On February 11, Hoke County Teacher of the Year Ethelyn H. Baker delivered the speech "Black America: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" to members of the Hoke Civic League as part of their observance of Black History Week. Excerpts from the speech follow.

I would like to commend the Hoke County Civic League for its continued effort to keep the history of Black Americans alive.

It is important and crucial to our very existence that we expose our children to the history of our people -- that we continue to strive toward the creation and development of cultural movements such as outlined in your objectives.

It is vitally important that each generation is aware of the effect that the American Black has had and continues to have upon this country.

As Carter G. Woodson, the father of Black History said, "If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated."

The theme, "Black America: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow", is one which donates two separate societies -- Black and White.

Although it is true that for centuries we lived in a society consisting of slavery, Jim Crowism and segregation, I would like to think of us as being Americans, for we have, we are and we will continue to contribute to the development of these United States.

Our contributions, our endeavors, our knowledge, and, yes, our blood, sweat and tears were not for Black America or for White America.

It was for America. Our forefathers lived and died for this country, our children were born here, our parents raised and reared us here. We have an investment in this country. We are Americans yesterday; we are Americans today and we will be; not shall, but will be Americans tomorrow.

Now that we have established the fact that we are Americans who were born Black, let us look closely at Blacks in America.

Now the Civic League is a political organization, so its concern should be politics. Not only should this particular organization be concerned with politics, but every Black person within the sound of my voice -- whether adult or child should be concerned with politics because if you don't believe that governmental decisions made on the local, state and federal levels affect the fiber of our existence, look at the decisions made regarding education and employment -- two of our greatest concerns.

For further insight as to how politics have influenced our status in America, let your imagination take control of your mind and mentally go back to the 17th century.

Now I realize that no one wants to go back -- but vicariously come with me to the first permanent colony in the New World.

The 20 Negroes who were put ashore at Jamestown in 1619 were not slaves in the true sense of the word. They were indentured servants who happened to have been Black.

They were listed as servants in the census count of 1623-1624. By this time there were 23 Blacks in Virginia -- 11 men, 10 women and two children.

In fact, in 1624 two indentured servants, Isabella and Antonio, who arrived on the same ship in 1619, were married.

In 1625 they became the parents of William, the first Black child born in English America who was christened in the Church of England in Jamestown.

As late as 1651, some Negroes whose period of service had expired were being assigned land in the same way as it was being done for whites who had completed their indenture.

During the first 50 years of Virginia's existence, it had many Negro indentured servants, and increasing number of free ones.

Because Virginia failed to satisfy her labor needs with the Indians and indentured servants, she began to give serious thought to continued servitude by Negroes.

Black labor was what Virginia needed in order to speed up the clearing of forests and the cultivation of larger and better tobacco crops.

All that was needed was legislature approval which came in 1661. The Negroes who had completed their servitude were not affected.

In the following year, Virginia took another step toward slavery by indicating in her laws that children born in the colony would be held bound or free according to the status of their mother.

As time passed and as the Black population increased (in 1724 there were three times as many Negroes in the Carolinas as whites) legislature to control the Blacks was enacted.

Eventually, slave codes were adopted by the middle as well as the New England colonies.

Slaves reacted to their status in various ways which included running away.

If they were apprehended, they would do it again.

It is reported that one woman in North Carolina ran away no less than 16 times.

Running away was the most effective way of resisting slavery. The Fugitive Acts of 1795 and 1850 could not be an end to it.

In addition to running away, Negroes were becoming articulate. They wrote books and held conventions.

In 1854 the Negro Convention adopted a resolution that represented views of an increasing number of Negroes.

In short, it advised all oppressed to adopt the motto, "Liberty Or Death."

It was now obvious that Negroes were ready for action. They continued to hold conventions and protests throughout the 1850's. There was so much pressure that in April Congress passed an act that abolished slavery in the District of Columbia.

In the second year of his administration, Lincoln decided that he should emancipate the slaves -- not only because it was just and right, but because it would hasten the end of the war.

On January 1, 1863 Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation declaring that slaves in states still in rebellion would be set free.

As he put his signature to the proclamation, Lincoln said "I never in my life felt more certain that I was doing right then in signing this paper."

Negroes now had the opportunity to fill important offices.

By the time Reconstruction began, they held elected and appointed positions. Two Negroes served for sometime in the United States Senate.

Twenty-one served in the United States House of Representatives from the Forty-Third to the Fifty Sixth Congress.

However, these new political opportunities ended in 1902.

By this time there was not a single Negro in a state legislature nor national Congress.

In addition, southern states adopted various devices to prevent Negroes from voting.

I could name many landmark decisions which have effected blacks in America, but the question is, and should be, "Where are we today? Now?"

It is important to note that many of the historical developments have led us where we are today.

Despite the fact that there are more and more black elected officials in positions from the county school board to Congress, the black population remains greatly under represented.

Only 23 of the 535 members of the United States Congress are black, there are no black senators and only one in our North Carolina Legislature -- there has only been one United States Senator since Reconstruction -- Edward Brook from Massachusetts compared to two during Reconstruction -- Hiram Revels who was born in North Carolina and Blanche K. Bruce -- both elected from Mississippi.

There are no black governors; yet a defiant segregationist who now professes compassion was elected governor for a record fourth term.

Two decades ago George Wallace, who was sworn in wearing a top hat and formal attire while bands played Dixie, proclaimed segregation forever.

Today, Wallace admits his mistake of the past and wants to renew faith in the future. Can a leopard change its spots? Time will tell.

Black Americans possess a great potential for political influence. It is of vital importance that Black officials be elected to key positions which so deeply affect our lives.

The proposition before us now is to fulfill the dream of Martin Luther King as we move toward the future.

According to the November 1980 edition of *Ebony* magazine, Blacks stand to advance in business and politics, a Black vice president and governor of several states may be part of the future.

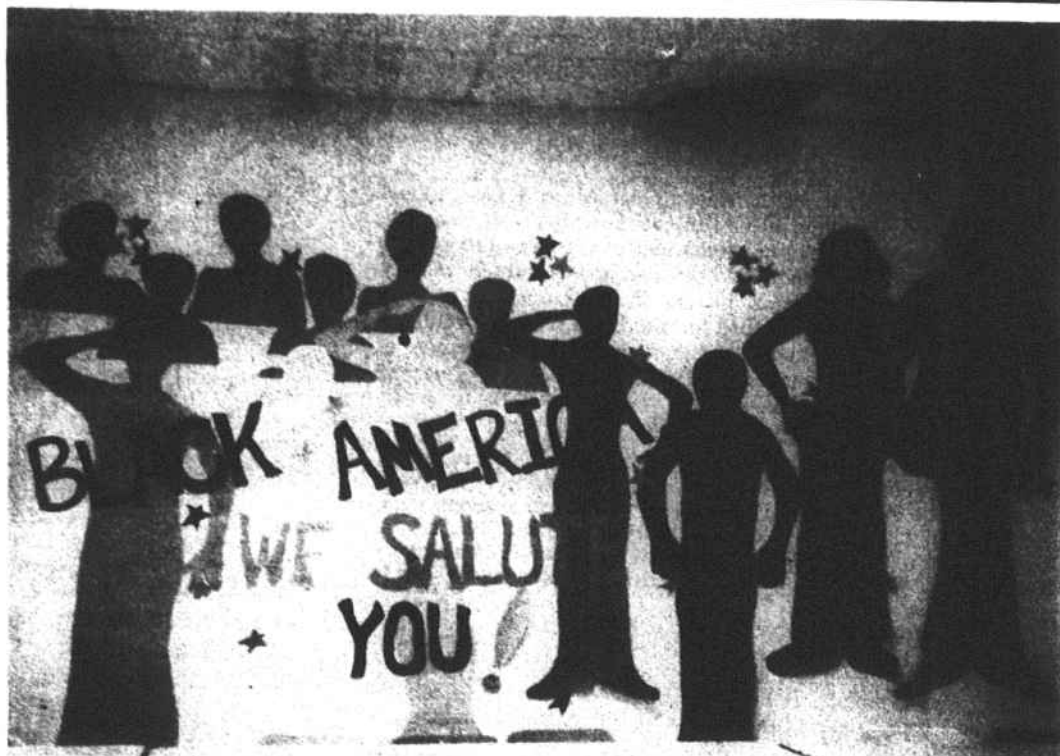
It is believed by Blacks who have struggled for a change over the last 35 years that racism will continue to exist in education, on the job and in our cities.

There will be development and growth of businesses and jobs. In addition, there will be opportunities for Blacks in manufacturing and hospital management.

The crucially important areas will be in the area of technology such as electronics and computer science where blacks will fill positions of programs and manufacturing.

The key to success of all jobs will lie in education. Civil rights organizations will be more important in tomorrow's world. Over all Black participation will continue to increase.

According to Cardiss Collins,



"Black America We Salute You" -- This wall display was in the Turlington School's Cafeteria. It was done by Ms. H. William and the art club.

black United States Representative from Illinois, blacks need to use their political participation, they need to learn to vote intelligently.

Mrs. Collins feels and I quote, "I think Black leaders can change the status of black Americans and ease the amount of suffering that we as a nation of black people are going to have to encounter. Then I think that you will see black power."

Black can be power. Black can be power when the "B" means ballot instead of bullet.

It is high time that we as black people realize that the white man will give us nothing.

That 40 acres and a mule that was promised 200 years ago was a farce.

In actuality, we deserved and still deserve more.

We must stop retaliating by rioting and walking away from the situation.

We must come to grips with the fact that the only place we are truly equal is at the ballot box.

In this country there is a total of 86,495,678 persons who are registered to vote.

Out of that number 16.4 million are eligible blacks, only 9.8 million actually voted in the presidential election of 1980.

This represents 50.5% of the eligible voters.

Many people do not vote because they say one vote won't matter.

They're going to do what they want to do anyway.

Let me tell you, one vote does matter.

In 1960, John F. Kennedy was elected president by 120,000 votes out of 68,840,000 votes cast.

There were 165,000 precincts in the United States in 1960.

The margin was less than one vote per precinct.

Black can be power when the "L" stands for Learning-Labor, not laziness.

Throughout history we have had the reputation of being lazy.

By gaining knowledge, we are able to work and accomplish a goal.

During the economic situation many of us are complaining rather than actively seeking employment. We are waiting for the Man to give us. As parents, we should teach our children to acquire all the knowledge possible and apply that knowledge.

Black can be power if the "A" stands for Academics rather than

athletics. For years Black athletes have been exploited on the high school teams as well as the college teams.

Our youngsters and young adult athletes have used their brawn and neglected their brain.

A recent ruling by the NCAA on the academic performance of athletes and requirements and expectation on the SAT test has angered some blacks and have referred to the ruling as being racism.

The ruling is just another example of Blacks shaping up or expected to be shipped out.

Black can be power if the C stands for one's content of character rather than the color of one's skin. (When I was growing up during the time of segregation the jingle was "if you're white you're right, If you're yellow, you're mellow, If you're brown, stick around, If you're black, get back. Get back.")

Well, believe me, ladies and

gentlemen, those feelings are still with us, only a little subtle.

We have been brainwashed since slavery into thinking the lighter the skin, the better the person, that white is right.

Two leading psychologists, a husband-wife team, Kenneth Clark and Mamie Phipps Clark documented the disturbing fact that the majority of Black children, by the age of five, believe that to be black in America is a mark of inferior status.

What was more disturbing was the fact that black children accepted the white society's definition of themselves as being inferior.

The majority of the children studied preferred white dolls and rejected the brown dolls.

In 1954 the United States Supreme Court referred to these findings and other social research when it ruled in *Brown vs. The Board of Education* that separate was not equal.

## Newcomers' Gift

Let Us Help You  
Get To Know Hoke County  
through  
The News-Journal

If You Are A Newcomer  
And Have Lived Here Less Than Three Months,  
You Can Receive A Three-Month Subscription To

The News-Journal  
ABSOLUTELY FREE!

All You Must Do Is Call  
And Give Us Your Name And Address

The News-Journal

875-2121

HERITAGE FEDERAL Savings & Loan Association

118 Commerce Ave.  
Raleigh, N.C.  
Member FDIC



MEMBER  
ESLIC  
Equal Housing Lender  
A U.S. Government Agency

FREE

5 1/2%