

Women and the NAACP

During Women's History Month, it is important for our local branch of the NAACP to recognize the role women have played since the organization's founding. Among the founders were Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell and Mary White Ovington. Myrlie Evers-Williams became the third woman to chair the NAACP board in 1995.

I have been privileged to serve as president of NAACP branches since I was twenty-six years old. I began first with the Central Jersey/Princeton Chapter. It was in this chapter that I first became aware of the power and presence of Black women in their roles with the NAACP. The former president was the late Mrs. Grace Wilson. I learned so much from Mrs. Wilson. She took precious time to introduce me to branch by-laws, customs and traditions. She also introduced me to the New Jersey State NAACP officers.

A few years later I found myself in capital city of New Jersey where I became president of the Trenton chapter. I followed the later Robert Lawrence. But when I came on board, it became clear that the incredible work of the chapter was also being done by members like the late Catherine "Stony" Graham, Betty Coles, Alice Crews and others. Not only did I deepen my awareness of the NAACP's power, but I also learned that Black women were the power brokers. While in Detroit I served on the Executive Committee of the largest chapter in the nation with over 10,000 members. The work of Rev. Wendell Anthony could not reach its zenith of success without the incredibly powerful presence of Black women serving on the Executive Committee and as members of the chapter.

The Evanston/North Shore NAACP owes more gratitude than one can possibly imagine, to the courageous and powerful women who have been leaders in our branch since its inception. During Women's History Month, we would do well to recognize and pay homage to the women whose work, sacrifice, courage and visionary leadership have helped us all move closer to obtaining are full civil rights in Evanston and the North Shore.

The first record of women working in the chapter is of Mrs. Elizabeth Croford (sp) Williams who was listed as secretary in the Chicago Defender on June 28, 1919. The Defender also listed Mrs. G. DeBaptist Ashburn as a speaker at the "Y" in discussing the business of the NAACP on April 30, 1921. The earliest members of the Evanston/North Shore NAACP included Hellen W. Garnett, Dr. Isabella Garnett, Elizabeth Croford(sp) Williams and Daisy Sandridge. Past presidents of the branch have included Lula Harper-Jackson and Edna Summers.

While these names are important and critical for lifting up and sharing the power and presence of Black women in leadership roles, there are also a myriad of silent and unnamed women who made the branch relevant and filled with purpose. During my tenure as president of the branch, I can truthfully say that women have been at the forefront in working with diligence and dedication to keep our branch focused and filled with purpose. We thrive on the belief that the NAACP continues to be "the oldest and boldest, the

strongest and longest” civil rights organization in history. Our current officers and board members includes; 2nd VP Geri Sizemore, 3rd VP Minister Sharon Weeks, Executive Committee members Willie Shaw, Terri Shepherd, Debra Evans, Rev. Valerie Riley and Ndona Muboyayi.

When the history books are written about the NAACP at every level- national, regional, state and local, let the record state that there were women who were the principal workers, planners and strategists who made our organization the powerful advocate for civil and human rights, that it is today.

And I for one, say thank you and God Bless for the sacrifice of time, commitment and resources that Black women have poured into our branch. The work is not nearly finished. In fact, with the rise of racist animus, vitriol and hatred occurring in our area, nation and world, the work is just beginning.

Rev. Dr. Michael Nabors
President