



JANUARY FREEDOM DAYS MOMENTS IN CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY

By JANUS ADAMS

JANUARY 14

Even before the official U.S. entrance into the war, blacks could see the same old World War I monster raise its ugly head: the expectation that blacks should sacrifice their lives in a segregated Army for freedoms they could not call their own. On January 14, 1941, a federal suit stood poised to force a desegregated military.

JANUARY 18

"Plant a tree, a shrub, or a bush!" Lady Bird Johnson urged. As First Lady, she had launched a campaign to beautify America. But, thrust against a backdrop of cities enflamed by riot and Vietnamese rice paddies fertilized with napalm, her program had become fodder for bad jokes. In a new initiative, Mrs. Johnson hosted a White House luncheon on January 18, 1968, at which she sought to enlist women in the fight against urban crime. Johnson planted a seed for as she spoke, what took root in one of her guests — singer-actress Eartha Kitt — were seeds of rebellion.

War was igniting in the streets, charged Kitt. "You send the best of this country off to be shot and maimed. They rebel in the street...because they're going to be snatched off the their mothers to be shot in Vietnam." Stunned, the first lady countered, "Because there is a war on...that still doesn't give us a free ticket not to try to work for better things such as against crime in the streets, better education and better health for our people." But Kitt was on a different plane. "I have lived in the gutters," said poverty's child and high achiever. "The children of America are not rebelling for no reason."

Kitt's remarks were not received well. A poor player in a high-stakes political drama, she had misjudged her role. Blacklisted in a residential backlash, she self-exiled in Europe. The White House squandered another chance to work with its critics.

JANUARY 20

On January 20, 1970, Dr. Benjamin E. Mays was elected president of the Atlanta Board of Education. As congratulations arrived by the barrel load, one lone rotten apple could not spoil the bunch: "Dear nigger: How does it feel to get elected to a job strictly on your color?" This, to the president emeritus of Morehouse College, an elder statesman of theology and education, an adviser to President John F. Kennedy, a mentor-eulogizer to Dr. King, and the recipient of 28 honorary doctorates.

JANUARY 27

Bravo! On January 27, 1961, Leontyne Price made her long-awaited debut at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. With her performance as Leonora in *El Traviatore*, she joined a very short list of African Americans who had walked that stage, and became the first black woman to achieve international recognition as "prima donna assoluta."

Now this is what all of this means. That historic night, the curtains were slowly reined down, a woman of extraordinary ability and grace walked center stage to receive her well-deserved adulation, and an audience of thousands of sophisticated opera aficionados applauded and cheered her nonstop for forty-two minutes!

JANUARY 31

On Sunday, January 31, 1960, four North Carolina A&T College freshmen sat in a Greensboro dormitory stewing over an incident that had happened earlier that day. Returning to campus from a weekend in Wilmington, Joe McNeil couldn't get anything to eat at the segregated bus terminal. Angered by the racism confronting them each day and energized by the courage displayed by so many other Civil Rights demonstrators, the four friends wanted to do something. But what? Together, they cooked up the plan they would act on the very next



The Tennessean

January 31, 1960. Sit-ins, organized protests against racial discrimination, became a powerful tactic in the battle against segregated lunch counters.

day.

On Monday, February 1, 1960, Ezell Blair Jr., Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil, and David Richmond headed downtown. In Woolworth's they purchased school supplies and patiently waited for a receipt. Then, they sat down at the lunch counter and did a perfectly normal thing — they ordered coffee and doughnuts. When they were told to leave, they asked why they

could be served at one counter and not another. Their cool logic was too much to handle. Employee confusion turned from hostility to confusion again. There was simply no protocol for the situation. In taking seats at that lunch counter, the four young men made an enduring place for themselves in the history of the human rights struggle world-wide.

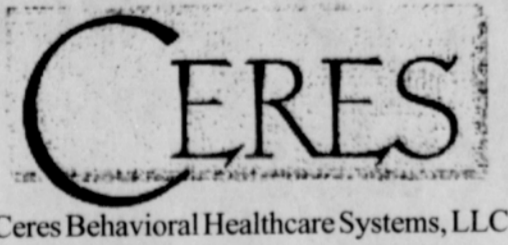
In fact, sit-ins did not begin in

Greensboro. In 1942, Civil Rights sit-ins had been waged by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) at Stoner's Restaurant in Chicago. But what seized the imagination and headlines in Greensboro was the initiative of the four A&T students acting completely on their own. Never before had segregationists been faced with this dilemma — their money or their way of life. If sit-in protesters weren't

served, they would block the counter. When they were dragged off and arrested, the commotion deterred other patrons. By mid-February 1960, the sit-in movement had spread to 15 cities in five states. And by mid-October, things had begun to change.

This timeline is from the book "Freedom Days". Permission for reprint was given by John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

"This growing self-respect has inspired the negro with a new determination to struggle and sacrifice until first class citizenship becomes a reality."
by Martin Luther King Jr.



Celebrating the vision and spirit of
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

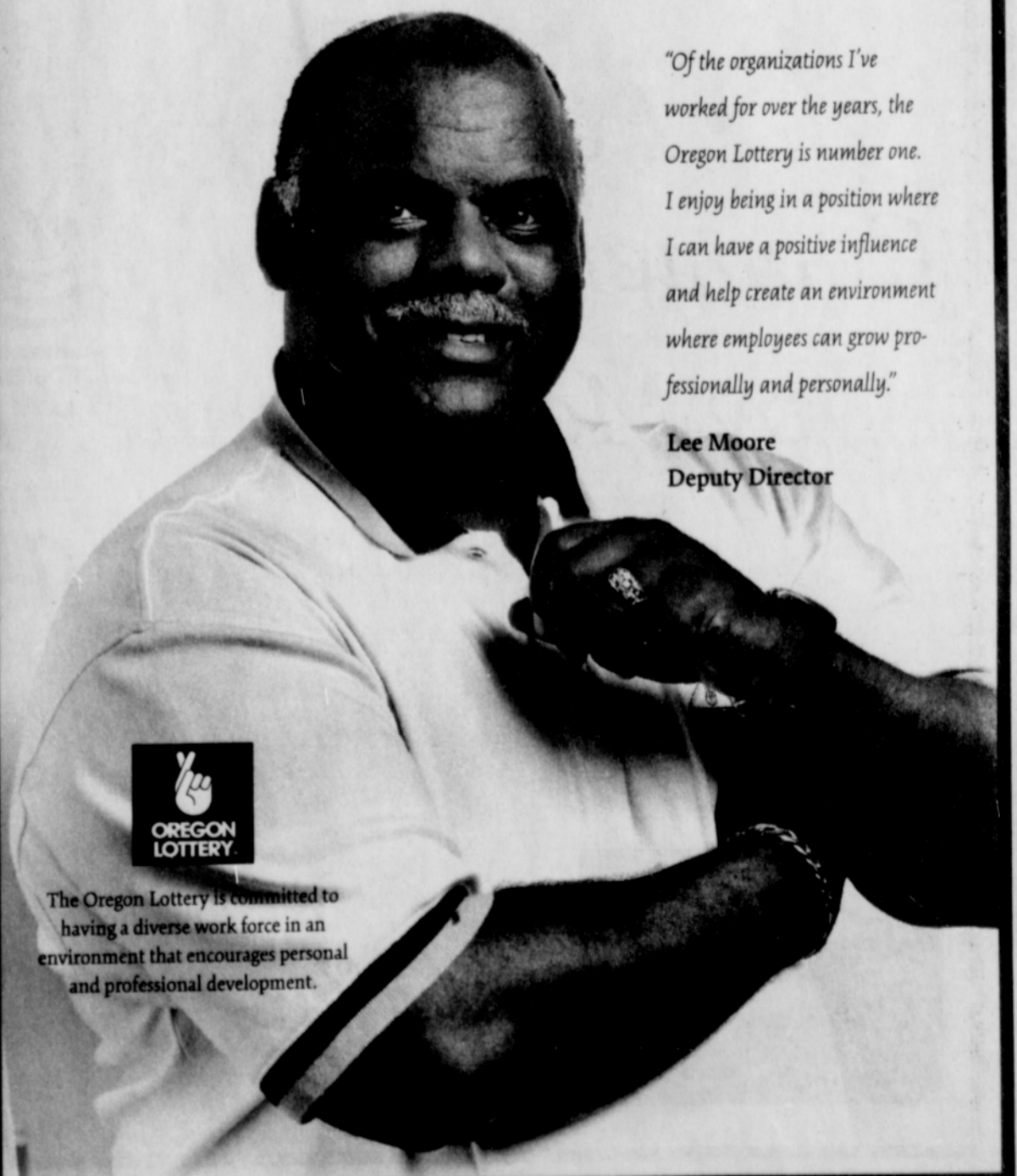
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