



JULY FREEDOM DAYS MOMENTS IN CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY

By JANUS ADAMS

JULY 6

It was July 6, 1944, wartime on the homefront, and Jackie Robinson was up at bat. In three years he would make a pact with the devil of racism; he would resist striking back at his tormenters as a strategy in desegregating the Brooklyn Dodgers and major league baseball. But on this day in 1944, as he would for the rest of his life, Jack Roosevelt Robinson made history as a freedom fighter.

JULY 13

Of the 435 members of the House of Representatives in 1971, only twelve were women, one of whom was black - New York's Shirley Chisholm. In the Senate, there was only one white woman. With women a population majority, something had to change. On July 13, 1971, three hundred women gathered in Washington, D.C., to found the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC). Among those representing African American women were Congresswoman Chisholm, activist (and widow of Medgar Evers) Myrlie Evers, Mississippi crusader Fannie Lou Hamer, National Council of Negro Women president Dorothy Height, and National Welfare Rights Organization vice president Beulah Sanders.

Taking the conference at its word on women candidates, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm announced her candidacy for president the following January. The first Black woman elected to Congress, now she was the first black woman to run for president. Campaigning on a foreign policy platform that demanded an end to the Vietnam War and an end to the European-American pact thwarting the liberation of peoples of color, she earned surprising grassroots support. Significantly, on July 13, 1972 - one year to the date from the founding of the NWPC - when the roll of delegates was called at the Democratic National Convention in Miami Beach, Florida, Chisholm actually won 151 delegate votes!

JULY 16

On July 16, 1970, the Folklore Institute of Indiana University hosted the Conference on African

Folklore. It was important sign of the times. Beyond "relating" to Africa, people now wanted to "know" Africa.

With knowledge of historical African folklore would come revelations from African American culture. To people who had been indoctrinated to believe that they (alone among all the people of the world) 'had no culture'; to people who had not only lost touch with home but lost sight of it as well; to people who no longer even knew where home was - East Africa or West, mid-northern Igbo or southern Zulu - what a transformation this discovery was about to unleash. In *nommo*, the word, was proof of vast cultural retentions traceable in the imprint of the distinctively African (and African diasporan) talking animal tales. Decoding the connective tissue of content and metaphor, Brer Rabbit and Ananci traced their roots of ancestry to the moralistic animal fables of Aesop, one of the world's greatest and most enduring philosopher/teachers. The knowledge became ours that *Aesop* - alternately spelled *Esop*, *Ethiop* (as in *Ethiopia*), and *Aethiop* - means "African." And there was more. Black South Carolinian rice baskets were found in West Africa. Shotgun house architecture had a new pedigree.

JULY 26

On July 26, 1968, Americans met four new families: the Lords, Philadelphia Main Line and terribly rich; the Siegals, Jewish; and the Grays, the first African American ever on a daytime drama. In short, these were the families with *One Life to Live*.

Very early into the cliffhangers, it was disclosed that the Grays had a difficult past. Sadie Gray had lost her daughter. It was a terribly tragedy. Stay tuned. Then Carla Benari, an "exotic" and "glamorous" actress "in the throes of a nervous breakdown," turned up at Llanview Hospital, where poor dear Sadie worked. As related by Carla's alter ego and real-life actress/embodiment, Ellen Holly, in her autobiography, *One Life*, it was rumored that Carla's "mental fragility was caused by the burden of carried secrets." Her finances were shaky, she lived in a run-



Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm was the first woman to run for president. Significantly, on July 13, 1972 - one year to date from the founding of the NWPC - when the roll of delegates was called at the Democratic National Convention in Miami Beach, Florida, Chisholm actually won 151. Photo credit: Moneta Sleet, Jr.

down apartment "customarily rented out to chorus gypsies from touring road companies," and exactly what was bothering her and why she came to Llanview remained a mystery. But Carla's glamour and "emotional neediness" soon made her irresistible to two doctors. Stay tuned for weeks on end. Marrying one doctor wasn't good enough for Carla Benari. (Noooo) She had to fall in love with the other doctor, too, a black man - (Yesssss) - and kiss him on national television (the hussy). And as she confessed her love for him...switchboards at ABC affiliates across the country lit up. Cut to commercial. The main New York switchboard was jammed, as Holly would learn, "flooded with calls from irate white men defending Carla's...Caucasian virtue." And then, before sponsors had time to cancel, Sadie came on camera. "Clara!" she said. "Mama!" Carla gasped. No wonder the girl was a

mess. Carla Benari was Sadie Gray's lost daughter, back from the "dead" of passing for white. This is what it took to get blacks on daytime TV.

Two more years would go by before Flip Wilson premiered his prime time variety show on September 17, 1970 - a first since Nat King Cole's show in the 1950s.

JULY 27

On July 27, 1972, news of the now-infamous "Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in Negro Males" began to spread worldwide. For forty years, 1932 to 1972, the U.S. Public

Health Service and local agencies denied over four hundred unsuspecting black men treatment readily available when the study began that would have cured the disease and stemmed its spread. Condemnation had raged over Nazi experiments on human subjects during World War II; the 1964 Helsinki Declaration noted that the U.S. was

behind other nations in protections against human experimentation; provisions on informed consent were even endorsed by American agencies. Still nothing rescued the Tuskegee men.

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Salutes Martin Luther King Jr.

"There is such a thing as freedom of exhaustion. Some people are so worn down by the yoke of oppression that they give up...The oppressed must never allow the conscience of the oppressor to slumber...To accept injustice or segregation passively is to say to the oppressor that his actions are morally right."

By Martin Luther King



Unintentionally, through a lack of understanding, we don't value the gifts that give us life... the trees, the air, the water.

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