

NOVEMBER FREEDOM DAYS MOMENTS IN CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY

By JANUS ADAMS

NOVEMBER 1

"In 1942," John H. Johnson recalled, "my mother and I were recent graduates of the relief (welfare) rolls. And I decided I was never going down that road again." He had a dream of an idea - he wanted to publish a magazine. For his dream, his mother risked hers - the furniture she'd saved for and paid for with a lifetime of work. In 1942, she pledged her furniture as collateral to empower her son with a \$500 secured bank loan. That year, on November 1, he published his first issue of Negro Digest. With its success, he dubbed the date his "good luck" day. On November 1, 1945, he launched *Ebony*. And on November 1, 1951, came *Jet*.



John H. Johnson launched his publication, *Ebony* on November 1, 1945. In 1942, Johnson's mother pledged her furniture as collateral to empower her son with a \$500 secured bank loan to start up his business. Jackie Robinson, Mrs. John H. Johnson, Jim Brown, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Publisher and CEO John H. Johnson (far right) with *Ebony*'s 20th anniversary birthday cake.

NOVEMBER 5

On November 5, 1968, in one record-breaking day's testament to the power of the black vote unleashed by the 1965 Voting Rights Act, seven black men and women were elected mayor, nine went to Congress (eight to the House and one to the Senate), ninety-seven were elected to state legislatures, and four hundred were elected to local governments in the former Confederate States.

Although no one had dared predict such sweeping success, the 1968 results had been foreshadowed by the 1967 election and Carl Stokes of Cleveland, Ohio. And few could deny the repercussions - pro and con - from the slaughter of the

trated every union issue from seniority and wage differentials to apprenticeship opportunities. The AFL-CIO even segregated its conventions in southern cities.

Once the dependence of black groups on the contributions of wealthy white industrialists had kept African Americans out of the union movement. No longer. That bond had been strained as the Civil Rights movement attacked racist institutions nationwide. Twenty-five years after founding the Negro National Congress and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, A. Philip Randolph was president of the Negro American Labor Council. As delegates gathered in Chicago for the Council's convention on November 10, 1961 where Randolph was the keynote speaker.

NOVEMBER 11

Ed Davis was a trailblazer. In 1939, he opened a Studebaker dealership, the first African American franchisee of any U.S. manufacturer. Born into a comfortable family in Louisiana, where his father owned a 500-acre farm and a Model-T Ford, Ed grew up in love with the magic and newborn potential of cars. Those were the days when seeing a car was as rare as owning one. Following his love, at sixteen he left Louisiana to attend Detroit's Cass Technical High School and study auto mechanics. But graduating during the Depression era made it impossible to find a job. After he was refused a job washing cars on the ground that the gas station owner was losing too much money in equipment and supplies, the business skills he had learned from his father kicked in. He struck a deal to "rent" space for \$1 per day. The owner soon complained, "you are making more money than I am." The owner didn't see his own potential to increase sales to people who came in for a wash. Instead, his racism got in his way. His concern was who made more money. Davis was offered \$15 a week plus ten cents for every car washed, and he took it. With initiative, he had created a job for himself when there was none to be had. It was that start that launched him on his way.

NOVEMBER 15

In 1969, young Bay Area Californians seething over society's inequities adopted a two-pronged strategy to combat injustice. As Black Panthers took to the streets of Oakland, Black Studies seized imaginations on nearby campuses. With the first student generation to come from a land beyond the "Talented Tenth" of W.E.B. Du Bois's 1920s and the "Black Bourgeoisie" of E. Franklin Frazier's 1950s, a new era had begun. A Purdue student assessed the plight of his generation. These black students, he said, were "sharecroppers of the American dream." The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King forged a turning point. Nonviolence was out; self-

defense was in. "Integration into what?" they asked, questioning society's basic premises. No longer grateful for college acceptances, "Relevance!" was their demand; "Black Studies!" was their cry.

For perspective, KRON-TV's Like It Is asked three scholars - Drs. Clair Drake, Nathan Hare, and Andrew Billingsley - to answer the question "What is Black Studies?" The program aired on November 15, 1969.

In 1970, in the midst of the push to add Black Studies and achieve reform, Mills College, a private Bay Area women's school in Oakland, awarded the nation's first graduate degree in Black Studies to Janus Adams.

NOVEMBER 22

One of America's great agonies is this: although truth may not be black and white, our history often is. Some may remember the early 1960s. Some may remember the early 1960s as Camelot, but the Kennedy era was notable for the second Civil War - the war for Civil Rights.

On November 22, 1963, as a traumatized nation absorbed the assassination of its bright young president, reporters sought to put the legacy of John F. Kennedy in context by interviewing key figures. Responding, Malcolm X characterized JFK's murder as "A case of chickens coming home to roost." Tactless as it seemed to grieving ears, it was hardly inaccurate. Kennedy had launched the siege on Vietnam, which Buddhist monks protested with public self-immolations. His CIA had helped capture South Africa's Nelson Mandela. On the homefront, his infamous FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover, had approved the wiretapping and sabotage of Civil Rights leaders.

Yet even with this racism-as-usual, blacks knew that Kennedy's intervention during the 1960 election had freed Dr. King from jail. Northern blacks who could vote, cast ballots of faith for Kennedy in the name of their southern cousins who couldn't, and that block vote gave Kennedy a narrow winning margin over Richard Nixon. As president, Kennedy lifted his sights from the nation's blood-soaked racial landscape to denounce segregation and decry the Birmingham church bombing that killed four girls. When southern senators filibustered for racism and "states rights," JFK cast his political lot with segregation's victims. In so doing, he might have cast his personal lot with its many casualties.

In the end, Kennedy did not deliver on the promise for which blacks had helped elect him. For all he offered in glamour and hope, Kennedy too often sacrificed black justice for southern votes. It took his successor, a Southerner, Lyndon B. Johnson, to break the mold and enact the Civil Rights Act (1964), Executive Order No. 11246 on affirmative action (1965), and the Voting Rights (1965).

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



The nation was traumatized by the assassination of its bright young president, John F. The Kennedy era was notable in the war for Civil Rights. Photo credit: Moneta Sleet, Jr.

Orangeburg students by the National Guard, assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, and the appearance of Fannie Lou Hamer at the Democratic National Convention. The energy ushering Richard Nixon into the presidency on a "law and order" campaign also brought a generation of blacks into party politics. A network of community organizers had succeeded in forging the national Civil Rights agenda into an election platform.

Among the highlights, New York's Shirley Chisholm became the first black woman elected to Congress. Louis Stokes of Ohio (brother of Carl Stokes, Cleveland's mayor and William Clay of Missouri were also new. And, in defiance of those who would hold back the tide of black electoral power, Harlem returned its beleaguered congressman of twenty-three years, Rev. Adam Clayton Powell Jr., minus his seniority, as a virtual freshman. Determined to dethrone the powerful black congressman, ranking majority leader, and third in line of succession to the presidency, the House leadership had forced Powell's expulsion in a move that was suspicious on its face - a fact the Supreme Court would later confirm. In rallying behind Powell, Harlem voters - like their southern cousins - were fighting for the fundamental right of a people to elect the qualified candidate of their own choosing.

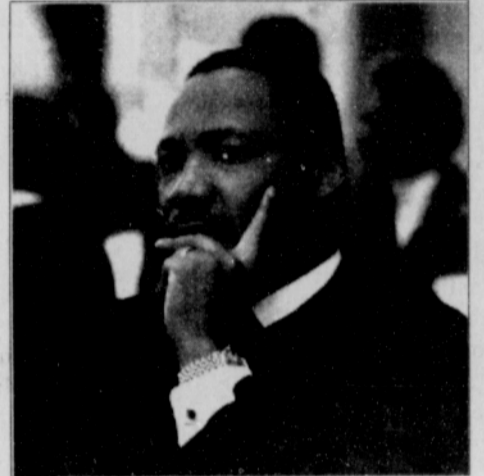
NOVEMBER 10

In 1961, divide-and-conquer tactics had separated workers by caste who should have been aligned by class. Unions once positively influenced by the communist stand on workers' rights and racial equity were now strictly Jim Crow and hostile to blacks. White supremacy had infil-

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