

THE Skanner

Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now

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- Local News
- Pacific NW News
- World News
- Opinions
- Jobs, Bids
- Entertainment
- Community Calendar

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Opinion

We Need Educational Equality in Our Schools

Frederick Douglass. Con-doleezza Rice. Martin Luther King, Jr. Clarence Thomas. Ida B. Wells. Shirley Chisholm.

All of these leaders will receive renewed national attention during this Black History Month. And all have something else in common: their emphasis on education.

None of these leaders would have been able to achieve the remarkable victories or overcome the incredible obstacles they faced without an education.

I share their passion for education equality. I've fought for it all my life.

My own battle started in 1961, when I joined 25 other Black students to integrate a segregated junior high school in Richmond, Virginia. And it hasn't stopped since. I fervently believe all children — no matter their race, religion, income, age, or address — have an equal right to receive an excellent education.

That's more than opinion. It's the law of the land. In the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling that ended school segregation, Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote, "It is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity,



Kay Coles James
Pres., The Heritage Foundation

where the state has undertaken to provide it, is 'a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.'"

Nearly 65 years later, however, it's painfully obvious that education in America remains very unequal. Too many schools are failing their students. Schools that squash children's dreams, beat down their hopes, and diminish their expectations have created a crisis in the Black community. Today, in many large U.S. cities, more than half of all African American students never graduate high school.

All children deserve to get the tools they need to make their dreams come true. But high school dropouts typically don't have them. As a result, it's much harder for them to get a job, much less earn what those who do graduate make. They're also more likely to commit crimes and be victimized by crime. Far too often, the dreams they once had turn into nightmares.

I was fortunate. Even though I was kicked, punched, and stuck with pins during the integration battle, I was able to attend a better school. Too many kids today don't have that chance. Instead, anti-reform forces block them from going to better-performing schools.

Who are the anti-reformers? A determined cartel of teacher unions, education bureaucrats and career pol-

“All children deserve to get the tools they need to make their dreams come true

iticians. They make a lot of money from the current system in the form of union dues, salaries and political contributions. And they view any attempt to change that system as a threat and anyone seeking to advance education equality as their enemy.

Just ask U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. Testifying before Congress, DeVos explained her goal is "ensuring that every student has an

equal opportunity to receive a great education." But rather than be hailed for seeking the equality promised decades ago, she's being attacked by those who want things to stay just as they are.

If you are wealthy, connected, or elected, chances are your child goes to or graduated from a great school. But if you live in a poor urban neighborhood, your child is much more likely to go to a failing school, a school where more than half of all students can't read or write well, have low math scores, face the daily threat of bullying and violence and won't graduate.

Do these sound like "equal terms" to you?

I say — no more! The crisis of failing schools has afflicted too many Americans for too long, and it will never end so long as we continue to deny every child their equal right to an excellent education.

And so I call on all caring Americans to join me in this fight. It's a part of our heritage as a people — and of our inalienable rights as citizens of this nation.

Kay Coles James is president of The Heritage Foundation. You can follow Kay on Twitter @KayColesJames.

The Hidden History of Black Nationalist Women's Political Activism

(THE CONVERSATION) Black History Month is an opportunity to reflect on the historical contributions of Black people in the United States. Too often, however, this history focuses on Black men, sidelining Black women and diminishing their contributions.

This is true in mainstream narratives of Black nationalist movements in the United States. These narratives almost always highlight the experiences of a handful of Black nationalist men, including Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X and Louis Farrakhan.

Contrary to popular conceptions, women were also instrumental to the spread and articulation of Black nationalism — the political view that people of African descent constitute a separate group on the basis of their distinct culture, shared history and experiences.

As I demonstrate in my new book, "Set the World on Fire," Black nationalist movements would have all but disappeared were it not for women. What's more, these women laid the groundwork for the generation of Black activists who came of age during the



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Civil Rights-Black Power era. In the 1960s, many Black activists — including Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Robert F. Williams, Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael — drew on these women's ideas and po-

“Contrary to popular conceptions, women were also instrumental to the spread and articulation of Black nationalism

litical strategies.

So, let's use this Black History Month to begin to set the record straight.

The Universal Negro Improvement Association

In 1914, when the Jamaican Black nationalist Marcus Garvey launched the Universal Negro Improvement Association, Amy Ashwood — who later became his first wife — was the organization's first

secretary and co-founder.

Her efforts were invaluable to the success of the association, which became the most influential Black nationalist organization of the 20th century. The organization's earliest meetings were held at the home of Ashwood's parents. When the organization's headquarters relocated from Jamaica to Harlem, Ashwood was actively engaged in its affairs.

In addition to serving as general secretary in the New

York office, Ashwood helped to popularize the Negro World, the organization's official newspaper. She also contributed to the financial growth of the organization, relying on her parents' money to meet some of the growing expenses.

In 1922, months after Garvey's divorce from Amy Ashwood, Amy Jacques became Garvey's new wife — a posi-

tion she used to leverage her involvement and leadership in the organization. During these years, she helped to popularize and preserve her husband's ideas. When her husband was imprisoned in 1925 and later deported — on trumped-up charges of mail fraud orchestrated by the FBI — Amy Jacques Garvey oversaw the organization's day-to-day activities.

In the aftermath of Garvey's 1927 deportation, women helped to popularize Black nationalist politics. With limited financial resources and resistance from the FBI, these women asserted their political power in various cities across the United States.

See ACTIVISM on page 3