



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Delegate Magazine 1985

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[[Image - Benjamin Banneker]]

November 9, 1731 - Benjamin Banneker was born in Ellicott, Md., and while still a youth, made a wooden clock which kept accurate time all during Banneker's lifetime. This clock is believed to be the first clock wholly made in America. Banneker was a self-taught mathematician and astronomer. He studied astronomy from borrowed books and so thoroughly mastered the science that he was able to point out the errors in the books. One of Banneker's greatest feats was serving on the six-man team which helped lay out the blueprint for the city of Washington, D.C. When the chairman of the committee, Major L'Enfant, abruptly resigned and returned to France with his plans, Banneker's precise memory enabled him to reproduce them in their entirety.

It's ironic that Washington DC., the City laid out by Benjamin Banneker, a Black architect [[architect]] surveyor, who completed its plans after the original contractor quit, that Negroes had and still have a hard road to hoe.

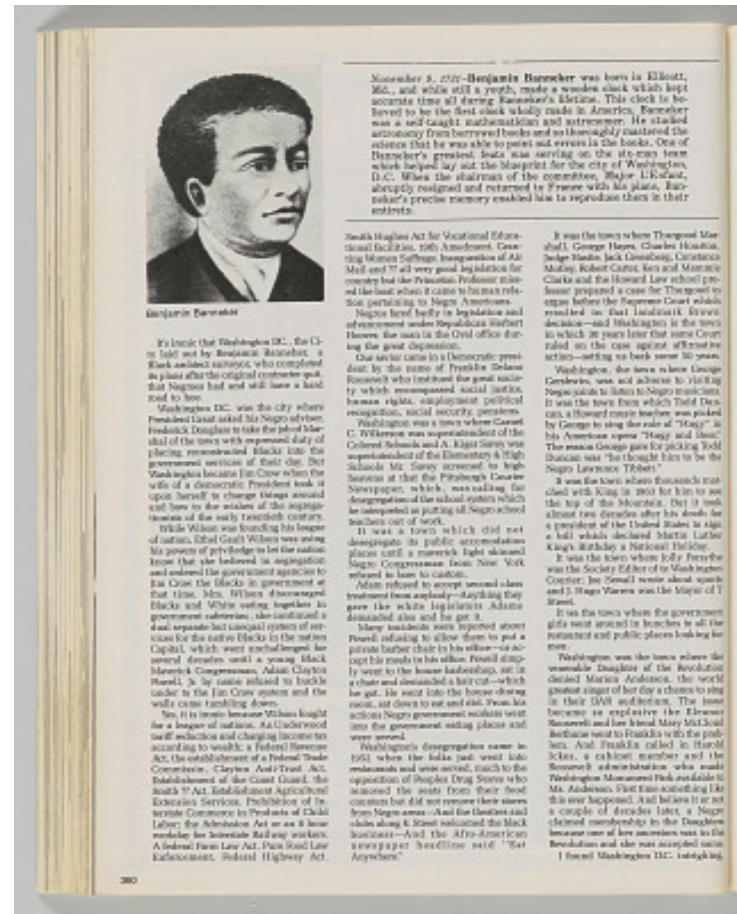
Washington D.C. was the city where President Grant asked his Negro adviser, Frederick Douglass to take the job of Marshal of the town with expressed duty of placing reconstructed Blacks into the government services of their day. But Washington became Jim Crow when the wife of a democratic President took it upon herself to change things around and bow to the wishes of segregationists of the early twentieth century.

While Wilson was founding his league of nations, Ethel Gault Wilson was using his powers of privilege [[privilege]] to let the nation know that she believed in segregation and ordered the government agencies to Jim Crow the Blacks in government at that time. Mrs. Wilson discouraged Blacks and White[s] eating together in government cafeterias; she continued a dual separate but unequal system of services for the native Blacks in the nation Capital, which went unchallenged for several decades until a young Black Maverick Congressman, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. by name refused to buckle under the Jim Crow system and the walls came tumbling down.

Yes, it is ironic because Wilson fought for a league of nations. An Underwood tariff reduction and charging Income tax according to wealth; a Federal Revenue Act, the establishment of a Federal Trade Commission, [Commission] Clayton Anti-Trust Act, Establishment of the Coast Guard, the Smith ?? Act, Establishment Agricultural Extension Services, Prohibition of Interstate Commerce in Products of Child Labor; the Admission Act or an 8 hour workday for Interstate Railway workers. A federal Farm Law Act, Pure Food Law Enforcement, Federal Highway Act. Smith Hughes Act for Vocational Educational facilities, 19th Amendment, Granting Women Suffrage, Inauguration of Air Mail and ?? all very good legislation for country but the Princeton Professor missed the boat when it came to human relation pertaining to Negro Americans.

Negros fared badly in legislation and advancement under Republican Herbert Hoover, the man in Oval office during the great depression.

Our savior came in a Democratic president by the name of Franklin Delano Roosevelt who instituted [[instituted]] the great society which encompassed social justice, human rights, employment political



recognition, social security, pensions.

Washington was a town where Garnet C. Wilkerson was superintendent of the Colored Schools and A. Kiger Savoy was superintendent of the Elementary & High Schools Mr. Savoy screened [[screamed] to high heavens at that the Pittsburgh Courier Newspaper, which, was calling for desegregation of the school system which he interpreted as putting all Negro school teachers out of work.

It was a town which did not desegregate its public accomodation places until a maverick light skinned Negro Congressman from New York refused to bow to custom.

Adam refused to accept second class treatment from anybody-- Anything they gave the legislators Adams demanded also and he got it.

Many incidents were reported about Powell refusing to allow them to put a private barber chair in his office -- or accept his meals in his office. Powell simply went to the house barbershop, sat in a chair and demanded a haircut -- which he got. He went into the house dining room, sat down to eat and did. From his action Negro government workers went into government eating places and were served.

Washington's desegregation came in 1952 when the folks just went into restaurants and were served, much to the opposition of Peoples Drug Stores who removed the seats from their food counter but did not remove their stores from Negro areas -- And the theatres and clubs along K Street welcomed the black business -- And the Afro-American newspaper headline said "Eat Anywhere."

It was the town where Thurgood Marshall, George Hayes, Charles Houston, Judge Hastie, Jack Greenberge, Constance Motley, Robert Carter, Ken and Mammie Clarke and the Howard Law school professor prepared a case for Thurgood to argue before the Supreme Court which resulted in that landmark Brown decision -- and Washington is the town in which 30 years later that same Court ruled on the case against affirmative action -- setting us back some 50 years.

Washington, the town where George Gershwin, was not adverse to visiting Negro joints to listen to Negro musicians. It was the town from which Todd Duncan, a Howard music teacher, was picked by George to sing the role of "Porgy" in his American opera "Porgy and Bess." The reason George gave for picking Todd Duncan was "he thought him to be the Negro Lawrence Tibbett."

It was the town where thousands marched with King in 1963 for him to see the top of the Mountain. But it took almost two decades after his death for a president of the United States to sign a bill which declared Martin Luther King's birthday a National Holiday.

It was the town where Jolly Forsythe was the Society Editor of te [[the]] Washington Courier; Joe Sewall wrote about sports and J. Hugo Warren was the Mayor of T Street.

It wa [[was]] the town where the government girls went around in bunches to all the restaurant[[s]] and public places looking for men.

Washington was the town where the venerable Daughter of the Revolution denied Marion Anderson, the world greatest singer of her day a chance to sing in the DAR auditorium. The issue became so explosive the Eleanor Roosevelt and her friend Mary McCloud Berthune went to Franklin with the problem. And Franklin called in Harold Ickes, a cabinet member and the Roosevelt administration who made Washington Monument Park available to Ms. Anderson. First time something like this ever happened. And believe it or not a couple of decades later, a Negro claimed membership in the Daughters because one of her ancestors was in the Revolution and she was accepted same.

I found Washington D.C. intriguing [[intriguing]],

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