



## 10th Annual Black Heritage Month Celebration

by John McKay and Nina Ritson

Ten years and the celebrations live on. The 10th Annual State Office Building Black History Celebration kicked off on February 18 in the North Mechanical Room. The annual tradition continued with agency commissioners and guests reflecting on the meaning of the moment, as well as songs, food and remembrances.

As is also tradition, the event is highlighted by the unveiling of the annual Black Heritage Stamp series issued each year by the U.S. Post Office. This year's honoree is Barbara Jordan, an extraordinary figure in public life, who was both a product of, and a leader in, the Civil Rights movement.

Jordan was the first African-American elected to the Texas Senate after reconstruction and the first Southern black woman ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. She was an inspirational figure in the Progressive movement through her powerful public speaking and her triumphant refusal to be defined by disability. She received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, among numerous other honors.



*DAS Commissioner Donald DeFronzo addresses the Black Heritage Month celebration.*

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*Commander Len Glasser oversees a moment of silence in remembrance of 9/11.*

## Barbara Jordan at the Heart of Black Heritage Month

With the 34th stamp in the Black Heritage series, the U.S. Postal Service honors Barbara Jordan, one of the most respected and influential American politicians of the 20th century. Her prodigious list of "firsts" includes being the first African-American woman elected to the Texas legislature, the first African-American elected to the Texas State Senate since 1883, and the first African-American woman elected to the U.S. Congress from the South.

She captured the attention and admiration of the nation with her intelligence and integrity, her ardent patriotism and steadfast dedication to public service, and her eloquent oratory and charismatic leadership. Staunchly determined to help extend social justice and

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The celebration opened with the Negro National Anthem, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, movingly performed by Mary Taylor of DPW. Please take a moment to read the article on the history of the Negro National Anthem in this issue.

The anthem was followed by a moment of silence for fallen soldiers led by State Office Building Security Commander Len Glasser in memory of all the lives of servicemen lost or wounded since September 11, 2001.

DAS Commissioner Donald DeFronzo, a long-time admirer of Barbara Jordan, spoke of his own personal experience as the youngest member of the Connecticut delegation to the Democratic National Convention in New York City in 1976. Representative Jordan was the first woman and the first African-American to deliver a keynote address at a national convention, and DeFronzo was there to hear her riveting words in person. “She was an incredible public speaker. She moved you and challenged you towards public service.” He went on to say that it’s easy to understand that her speech that evening is ranked number five on the American Rhetoric website for top speeches in American history.

Commissioner Steve Reviczky of the Department of Agriculture remembered the many Black History celebrations he has attended in the State Office Building as an Agriculture employee. He also recalled the familiar face of past committee member, Mario Tefeci of DPW who, because of illness, was noticeably not a part of the day’s celebration.

Patricia Ciccone, of the State Department of Education, CT Technical High School System, represented Interim Commissioner George Coleman. She credited Barbara Jordan for championing the quest for the best an educated life could bring. “We want America to be as good as its promise” was a popular quote attributed to Barbara Jordan that Ciccone echoed.

Jonathan Holmes, Acting Commissioner of DPW, reminded us that during the Civil War, 200,000 Blacks took up arms against the confederacy in pursuit of the quest for freedom and equality. He also noted how fortunate we are that Connecticut recognizes their contributions through the creation of the CT Freedom Trails. These trails educate residents on the rich history

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## The History of the Negro National Anthem

“*Lift Every Voice and Sing*” was publicly performed first as a poem as part of a celebration of Lincoln’s Birthday on February 12, 1900 by 500 school children at the segregated Stanton School in Jacksonville, Florida. Its principal, James Weldon Johnson, wrote the words to introduce its honored guest Booker T. Washington.

The poem was later set to music by Johnson’s brother John in 1905. Singing this song quickly became a way for African-Americans to demonstrate their patriotism and hope for the future. In calling for earth and heaven to “ring with the harmonies of liberty,” they could speak out subtly against racism and Jim Crow laws—and especially the huge number of lynching’s accompanying the rise of the Ku Klux Klan at the turn of the century.

In 1919, the NAACP adopted the song as “The Negro National Anthem.” By the 1920s, copies of “*Lift Every Voice and Sing*” could be found in black churches across the country, often pasted into the hymnals.

During and after the American Civil Rights Movement, the song experienced a rebirth, and by the 1970s was often sung immediately after “The Star Spangled Banner” at public events and performances across the United States where the event had a significant African-American population. (Information from Wikipedia.com)



Commissioner of Agriculture  
Steven K. Reviczky



Acting Commissioner of DPW  
Jonathan Holmes

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Donald DeFronzo  
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Barbara Jordan continued from Page 1

federal protection of equal rights to all American citizens, Jordan dedicated her life to working for the benefit of others and her legacy will carry on for generations to come.

Barbara Charline Jordan was born February 21, 1936, in Houston, Texas. By the time she graduated from high school in 1952, Jordan was already a champion orator. At Texas Southern University, an all-black college, she continued to be involved in debate and oratory, winning a number of awards and graduating magna cum laude in 1956. She earned a law degree from Boston University and passed the Massachusetts bar exam in 1959. Later that same year, Jordan was admitted to the Texas bar and began practicing law in Houston.

Her entry into politics came when she volunteered for John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign in 1960.

***“One thing is clear to me: We, as human beings, must be willing to accept people who are different from ourselves.”***

***- Barbara Jordan***

Initially she was put to work licking stamps, but after she had an opportunity to demonstrate her oratorical skills, she was immediately promoted to the speaking circuit. She also helped manage a highly successful voter registration program in Houston. This volunteer experience prompted her to run for political office herself.

After losing two elections for the Texas House of Representatives in 1962 and 1964, she won a seat in the Texas State Senate in 1966, becoming the first African-American woman ever elected to that body, as well as the first black Texas State Senator since 1883. Jordan's Senate colleagues elected her president pro tempore of the Texas legislature in 1972, earning her another distinctive “first”—the first black woman in the U.S. ever to preside over a legislative body. On June 10, 1972, she served as governor for the day when both the Texas governor and the lieutenant governor were out of the state. Although it was a ceremonial role, that day marked another milestone for Jordan as she became the first black governor in the U.S.

In 1972, Jordan received 80 percent of the vote when she ran for the U.S. House of Representatives from the 18th district in Texas, which included downtown Houston. With this decisive victory under her belt, Jordan went to Washington, D.C., with the accolades of her colleagues in the Texas State Senate. She knew that an important committee assignment would magnify her influence, so she pursued and obtained, with Lyndon Johnson's help, a coveted assignment to the House Judiciary Committee.

In 1976, Jordan became the first woman and the first African-American to deliver a keynote address to the Democratic National Convention. Her televised speech—considered the highlight of the convention—described Americans as “a people in search of a national community...attempting to fulfill our national purpose, to create and sustain

a society in which all of us are equal.” Once again, Barbara Jordan's message resonated throughout the country.

***“What the people want is very simple. They want an America as good as its promise.”***

***- Barbara Jordan***

Jordan ultimately served three terms in Congress, sponsoring and supporting numerous pieces of legislation extending federal protection of civil rights. Her record of success ensured social justice and equal rights for more American citizens.

In 1979, Jordan became a professor of public affairs and ethics at the University of Texas at Austin, where she quickly earned a stellar reputation as an extraordinarily inspiring and challenging professor. She was such a popular teacher, in fact, that student lotteries were held to make the final determination on enrollment in her classes. In 1982, Jordan was appointed to the university's Lyndon B. Johnson Centennial Chair in National Policy.

For more than 20 years Jordan suffered from multiple sclerosis. She died of pneumonia, as a complication of leukemia, on January 17, 1996, in Austin, Texas.



***State Treasurer Denise Nappier was the keynote speaker***

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of our state, including the North Cemetery on North Main Street in Hartford, and the AME Zion Church. Devoted to religious, educational and social causes, the AME Zion Church and its members have been instrumental in many of the freedom struggles this nation has endured, dating back to the days when former slaves Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman led the first wave of Black social activism.

Commissioner William Rubenstein of the Department of Consumer Protection also referenced the now-legendary speech Jordan gave at the national convention. He spoke of the calling to all public servants to “act for the

common good . . . and that more is required.” And he emphasized that because of her, “in a sense we are all Barbara Jordan’s legacy.”

After the speeches, a delegate from each agency in the State Office Building read biographies of important, influential, and sometimes forgotten, African-Americans. DAS’ own Johnette Tolliver read an account of Vivien Thomas, who pioneered research in surgical shock and cardiovascular surgery. Read more on these important figures on page 6 in this issue.

The audience was honored to welcome State Treasurer Denise Nappier as the

keynote speaker. Now serving her fourth term, Nappier said she was inspired by Barbara Jordan’s words, “Nothing worth doing ever comes easy.” She shared the story of Jordan and spoke of the obstacles she faced daily, overcoming the challenges of growing up, living and working in her Houston community, then moving on to the rigors of Boston University Law School. “Never give up! She always found a way to do better – no excuses – deal with the obstacle-then move on! Even though she lived the last 20 years of her life with multiple sclerosis she never gave up,” said Nappier.

Nappier also shared some impressive statistics about the Office of the Treasurer’s flagship

accomplishments. Even in the face of harsh economic times, the retirement system now has \$50 billion in state funds, since its inception CHET has grown from \$18 million to \$1 billion, and there is now \$100 million in the Housing Trust Fund.

Nevertheless she said, “Every state employee is being called upon during this fiscal crisis – we can all learn from Barbara Jordan’s example. The American dream is not dead. It is gasping for breath, but it is not dead.” She concluded her remarks, saying “We all need to improve our knowledge of savings and investments – responsible wealth building is essential. Let us build foundations for our young people and future generations to survive.”

Master of Ceremonies, State Department of Education’s Ronald C. Harris, Esq. closed the ceremony promising an even larger and more exciting celebration for next year.



***Superintendent Patricia A. Ciccone State Dept. of Education***

# “The Journeys” Remembers...

*A portion of the Black Heritage Month celebration was entitled, “The Journeys.” Here, state employees read biographies of prominent historical individuals who made a difference in our world.*

**Henrietta Lacks** (August 18, 1920 – October 4, 1951) was an African-American woman who was the unwitting source of cells taken from her cancerous tumor, which were cultured by George Otto Gey, to create an immortal cell line for medical research.

The cells from Henrietta were given to researchers who discovered that her cells did something they’d never seen before: They could be kept alive and grow. Doctors named the sample “HeLa”, after the initial letters of Henrietta Lacks’ name, to protect her identity. As the first human cells that could be grown in a lab and were considered “immortal” (did not die after a few cell divisions), they could then be used for conducting many experiments. This represented an enormous boon to medical and biological research.

The growth of HeLa cells by a researcher at the hospital helped answer the demands of the 10,000 who marched for a cure to polio just shortly before Lacks’ death on October 4, 1951. By 1954, HeLa was being used by Jonas Salk to develop a vaccine for polio. To test Salk’s new vaccine, the cells were quickly put into mass production in the first-ever cell production factory.

Demand for the HeLa cells quickly grew. Since they were put into mass production, Henrietta’s cells have been mailed to scientists around the globe for research into cancer, AIDS, the effects of radiation and toxic substances, gene mapping, and countless other scientific pursuits.”

Henrietta’s husband, David Lacks, was told little following her death. Suspicions fueled by racial issues prevalent in the South were compounded by issues of class and education. For their part, members of the Lacks family were kept in the dark about the existence of the tissue line, and when its existence was revealed in a 1976, family members were confused about how Henrietta’s cells could have been taken without consent and how they could still be alive 25 years after her death.



*DPW’s Mary Taylor reads the biography of Henrietta Lacks*



*Education’s Barbara Brown read the bio of Fannie Lou Hamer*

**Fannie Lou Hamer** (October 6, 1917 – March 14, 1977) was an American voting rights activist and civil rights leader.

She was instrumental in organizing Mississippi Freedom Summer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and later became the Vice-Chair of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, attending the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in that capacity. Her plain-spoken manner and fervent belief in the Biblical righteousness of her cause gained her a reputation as an electrifying speaker and constant activist of civil rights.

Hamer continued to work in Mississippi for the Freedom Democrats and for local civil rights causes. She ran for Congress in 1964 and 1965, and was then seated as a member of Mississippi’s legitimate delegation to the Democratic National Convention of 1968, where she was an outspoken critic of the Vietnam War.

She continued to work on other projects, including grassroots-level Head Start programs, the Freedom Farm Cooperative in Sunflower County, and Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Poor People’s Campaign. She was also inducted as an honorary member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority.

Her most famous saying was, “I am sick and tired of being sick and tired.” This quote was later employed as her epitaph.

## “The Journeys” Continues...

**Emperor Haile Selassie I** (July 23, 1892 – August 27, 1975) was Ethiopia’s regent from 1916 to 1930 and Emperor of Ethiopia from 1930 to 1974. The heir to a dynasty that traced its origins to the 13th century and from there by tradition back to King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Haile Selassie is a defining figure in both Ethiopian and African history.

At the League of Nations in 1936, the Emperor condemned the use of chemical weapons by Italy against his people. His internationalist views led to Ethiopia becoming a charter member of the United Nations, and his political thought and experience in promoting multilateralism and collective security have proved seminal and enduring. His suppression of rebellions among the nobles, as well as what some perceived to be Ethiopia’s failure to modernize adequately, earned him criticism among some contemporaries and historians.

Haile Selassie introduced Ethiopia’s first written constitution on July 16, 1931, providing for a bicameral legislature. The constitution kept power in the hands of the nobility, but it did establish democratic standards among the nobility, envisaging a transition to democratic rule: it would prevail “until the people are in a position to elect themselves.”



*Education’s Lisa Rochester reads the biography of Emperor Haile Selassie*



*DAS’ Johnette Tolliver reads the biography of Vivien Thomas*

**Vivien Theodore Thomas** (August 29, 1910 – November 26, 1985) was an African-American surgical technician who developed the procedures used to treat blue baby syndrome in the 1940s. He was an assistant to surgeon Alfred Blalock in Blalock’s experimental animal laboratory at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee and later at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.

Without any education past high school, Thomas rose above poverty and racism to become a cardiac surgery pioneer and a teacher of operative techniques to many of the country’s most prominent surgeons. Vivien Thomas was the first African-American without a doctorate degree to perform open heart surgery on a white patient in the United States.

Thomas and Blalock did groundbreaking research into the causes of hemorrhagic and traumatic shock. This work later evolved into research on Crush syndrome and saved the lives of thousands of soldiers on the battlefields of World War II. In hundreds of flawlessly executed experiments, the two disproved traditional theories which held that shock was caused by toxins in the blood. At this same time, Blalock and Thomas began experimental work in vascular and cardiac surgery, defying medical taboos against operating upon the heart. It was this work that laid the foundation for the revolutionary lifesaving surgery they were to perform at Johns Hopkins a decade later.

To the host of young surgeons Thomas trained during the 1940s, he became a figure of legend, the model of a dexterous and efficient cutting surgeon. “Even if you’d never seen surgery before, you could do it because Vivien made it look so simple,” the renowned surgeon Denton Cooley told *Washingtonian* magazine in 1989. “There wasn’t a false move, not a wasted motion, when he operated.” Surgeons like Cooley, along with Alex Haller, Frank Spencer, Rowena Spencer, and others credited Thomas with teaching them the surgical technique that placed them at the forefront of medicine in the United States.

**Dr. Carter Godwin Woodson** (December 19, 1875 - April 3, 1950) was an African-American historian, author, journalist and the founder of the Association for the Study of African-American Life and History. He was one of the first scholars to value and study Black History. He recognized and acted upon the importance of a people having an awareness and knowledge of their contributions to humanity, and left behind an impressive legacy. A founder of Journal of Negro History, **Dr. Woodson is known as the Father of Black History.**

After leaving Howard University, Dr. Woodson devoted the rest of his life to historical research. He worked to preserve the history of African-Americans and accumulated a collection of thousands of artifacts and publications. He noted that African-American contributions “were overlooked, ignored, and even suppressed by the writers of history textbooks and the teachers who use them.” Race prejudice, he concluded, “is merely the logical result of tradition, the inevitable outcome of thorough instruction to the effect that the Negro has never contributed anything to the progress of mankind.”

In 1926, Woodson single-handedly pioneered the celebration of “Negro History Week”, for the second week in February, to coincide with marking the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. The week was later extended to the full month of February and renamed Black History Month.



*James Mitchell (State Department of Education) reads Dr. Carter Woodson's biography*



*Angela Berry and Hartford Postmaster Judith Martin unveil the Barbara Jordan Black Heritage stamp.*



**Dannel P. Malloy**

GOVERNOR  
STATE OF CONNECTICUT

February 18, 2011

***Black History Month Celebration***

Dear Friends:

On behalf of the State of Connecticut, it is my pleasure to extend my sincere greetings to all who are gathered at the state's Legislative Office Building for the Annual Black History Month Celebration.

Each year during the month of February, we celebrate Black History Month to broaden our knowledge and deepen our appreciation of the countless contributions and achievements African-Americans have made to our nation. African-Americans have made valuable and lasting contributions to the State of Connecticut's economic, cultural, spiritual and political development while working tirelessly to maintain and promote their own history and culture. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Commissioners of the Department of Education, Department of Public Works, Department of Administrative Services, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Consumer Protection for speaking on behalf of this annual celebration today.

It is a privilege to extend my words of tribute to everyone. Please know you have my best wishes for a memorable and successful event.

Sincerely,

Dannel P. Malloy  
Governor

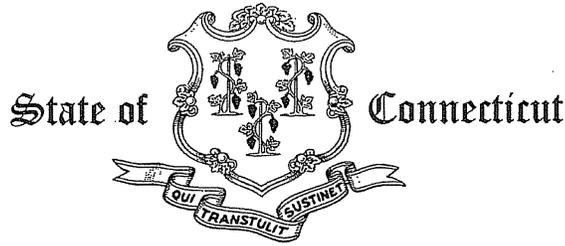
DPM/kj

***The following letter from Governor  
Dannel P. Malloy was read aloud at the  
Black Heritage Celebration***

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By His Excellency Dannel P. Malloy, Governor: an  
**Official Statement**

*W*HEREAS, each year during the month of February, we celebrate Black History Month to broaden our knowledge and deepen our appreciation of the countless contributions and achievements African-Americans have made to our nation; and

*W*HEREAS, while the celebration of our multi-ethnic heritage should be a year-round commitment, the designation of the month of February as Black History Month affords us the opportunity to highlight past and present African-American culture; and

*W*HEREAS, Black History Month has grown to become a well-known and observed celebration of culture and diversity that fosters appreciation of the struggles and achievements of our African-American population through the decades; and

*W*HEREAS, African-Americans have made valuable and lasting contributions to the State of Connecticut's economic, cultural, spiritual and political development while working tirelessly to maintain and promote their own history and culture; and

*W*HEREAS, this February marks the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Black History Month observance which began in 1976 as part of the Nation's bicentennial, making Black History Week, initiated in 1926 by American historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson, into a month-long celebration; and

*W*HEREAS, it is important that public officials, educators and all of the people of our state observe this month with appropriate programs and activities that recognize and raise awareness of the many accomplishments of Connecticut's African-American citizens; now

*T*HEREFORE, I, Dannel P. Malloy, Governor of the State of Connecticut, do hereby officially designate the month of February 2011 as

**BLACK HISTORY MONTH**  
 in the State of Connecticut.



*Dannel P. Malloy*  
 GOVERNOR

*An official Proclamation from  
 Governor Malloy was issued in  
 honor of  
 Black Heritage Month*



Lilly Caterers served Honey Roasted Chicken, Barbeque Chicken, Macaroni and Cheese, Candied Yams, Collard Greens, Cornbread, and Lemonade. The Department of Agricultural donated apples and black currant juice from Connecticut Growers.

What's a celebration without food and shopping? After the celebration, attendees were treated to some traditional foods in the first floor hallway.



DAS' Cathy Abadom (right) and Tara Talbert (left) serve cake for hungry guests. (Upper right and lower left) many vendors sold their wares in Room 126.



A visit to Room 126 saw it transformed into a market place by vendors of African attire and African-themed jewelry and accessories. Guest vendors were:

Bright and Airey  
Jackie Bright

Essential Home Styles  
Rosmond Frett

Creative Enhancement, Inc.  
Saundra Magna

KND Novelties  
Gail Tilley

D&S Handmade Costume  
Jewelry  
Denise Hawkins

SNAP Services  
Marcella Cupe

