

Simeon Booker deserves Medal of Freedom award

Written by William Reed

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The Presidential Medal of Freedom is bestowed by the president of the United States and is – along with the comparable Congressional Gold Medal bestowed by an act of the U.S. Congress – the highest civilian awards in America. The awards recognize individuals who have made "an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of U.S. world peace, cultural or other significant public or private endeavors."

Black Americans should take a stand in 2013. Stand up for the chronicling of "Black Life in America" and petition President Barack Obama to award a 2013 Presidential Medal of Freedom to Simeon Saunders Booker, Jr. for "meritorious contributions" he has made to the country. The 94-year-old African-American magazine and newspaper reporter has been giving Blacks news through the lens of their own eyes for more than 65 years.

Because of their enthusiastic support of his presidency, Blacks should get President Obama to publicly acknowledge individuals and works geared toward "serving and educating" their communities. Blacks need to praise their press and tell the president and Congress what Booker, and the medium he represents, means to them. The well-known and highly respected writer and author was born August 27, 1918 in Baltimore, Md. He is steeped in race and Black culture. He became interested in journalism through a family friend, Carl Murphy, the owner and operator of Baltimore's Afro American Newspapers. In 1942, after receiving his bachelor's degree in English from Richmond's Virginia Union University, Booker accepted a position as a reporter with the *Afro American* newspapers. By 1945, he worked for the Black *Cleveland Call and Post* newspaper, where he won Newspaper Guild and Wendell L. Willkie awards. Then, Booker

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received a Nieman Fellowship to study journalism at Harvard University where he developed his reportorial talents. In 1951, Booker became The *Washington Post's* first full-time Black reporter.

Not to be confused with contemporary journalists who "just happen to be Black," Booker has a long history of engagement in civil rights. His book, "Shocking the Conscience: A Reporter's Account of the Civil Rights Movement," is legend. Booker has played a unique and important role in Black American history. In the 1950s, he covered many of the major events that affected the lives of Black Americans; including moments, such as the desegregation of Little Rock's Central High School and the administrations of 10 U.S. presidents.

Our man is worthy of this nation's top honors recognition. Booker is overwhelmingly supported by his peers. During Black Press Week 2007, Booker was honored with the National Newspaper Publishers Association's News Maker of the Year Award. In January 2013, Booker was inducted into the National Association of Black Journalists' Hall of Fame. He has also been honored by the National, and Capital, Press clubs.

Much of Booker's acclaim comes from his dates and datelines with *Jet*. In 1954, Booker was hired by John H. Johnson's publishing company to report on current events in its weekly news digest, *Jet*. Booker

became the publication's Washington bureau chief in 1955. A pocket-sized weekly magazine, *Jet*

was founded in November 1951 and was considered the bible of things of interest to African Americans. He made his mark in 1955 with coverage of Emmett Till's murder and trial. In 1961, Booker rode with the Congress on Racial Equality's Freedom Riders through the Deep South. Booker wrote

Jet's

Ticker Tape column, which gave credit to Blacks who were achieving important things in America. Booker ruled the Johnson Publishing Company's roost in the nation's capital, at 1750 Pennsylvania Avenue, which was often filled with that time's Black members of the media.

Let's stand up and be counted showing appreciation for his body of work, by writing the president and/or Congress imploring them to give a medal to Booker. Nominations for the Congressional Gold Medal can be made by writing to your member of Congress. Nominations for the Presidential Medal of Freedom can be made by writing the president at the White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20500

William Reed is publisher of "Who's Who in Black Corporate America" and available for projects via the BaileyGroup.org