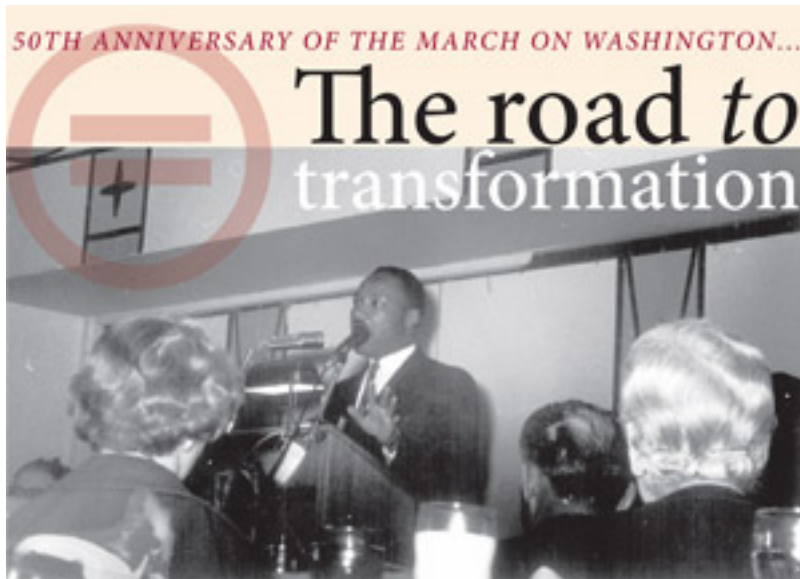


Written by

Thursday, 13 June 2013 19:46



Thousands of African-Americans migrated to the upper Midwest in search of better opportunities and to avoid the harsh Jim Crow laws prevalent in the South. The end of WWII saw the return of soldiers disillusioned from fighting for a country that didn't protect the very rights they fought for. The lack of jobs, housing and equal opportunities for African Americans edged the historically moderate Urban League to the forefront of the burgeoning civil rights movement advocating for equal opportunity and socioeconomic change.

Poll taxes and literacy tests were among the intimidating tactics employed to discourage African-Americans from voting at the turn of the last century. Pioneering efforts of Minnesotans like Nellie Stone Johnson, Cecil E. Newman, Lena O. Smith-founding members of the Minneapolis Urban League-and Dr. Josie Johnson, Shelton Granger, Katie McWatt, Kwame McDonald, Matthew Little, Dr. Thomas Johnson, Barbara Cunningham and many others, who successfully lobbied for the passage of progressive civil rights bills in Minnesota, in many respects, set the tone for landmark legislation on a national scale.



The Civil Rights Movement produced a variety of voices, reflecting the complexity and texture of the times. The non-violent passive resistance civil disobedience strategy was espoused by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Malcolm X's...by any means necessary mantra reflected a more assertive posture. Though contrasting, each strategy served to propel the movement toward a

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singular purpose: equality and justice for all. There were other strident, bold voices at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement relentlessly advocating on behalf of the disenfranchised. Whitney Young was one such voice.



Earning his Masters Degree in Social Work from the University of Minnesota, Young volunteered for the St. Paul branch of the Urban League early in his career. He went on to become one of the most prolific leaders of the organization, expanding it from 60 to 98 chapters, catapulting it to the front lines of the civil rights movement. A skillful mediator, he fostered understanding and collaboration, bridging the gap between white political and business leaders, and black moderates and militants. He is credited with almost single-handedly persuading corporate America and major foundations to support the civil rights movement. He was one of the organizers of the March on Washington in 1963. Because of his work and that of his colleagues and contemporaries, The Civil Rights Act was enacted in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act followed in 1965.



Young's boldest visionary move was the introduction of his 'Domestic Marshall Plan', a proposal that was partially incorporated in President Lyndon B. Johnson's 'War on Poverty'. Young's Plan called for an investment of \$145 billion over 10 years supporting affirmative action, social

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programs and integration across the U.S.

Whitney Young served as Executive Director of the National Urban League until his death in 1971. He enjoyed a close relationship with President Johnson and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest award to a civilian.



Today, we stand on the sacrifices of our local and national heroes...our pioneers of change. Many a Minnesotan leader has stood on the right side of history, including Hubert H. Humphrey, Walter Mondale and others, with unwavering progressive leadership on civil rights issues, in many cases, setting a precedence for the nation to follow. From the election of the first African-American and first woman mayor of Minneapolis, to the first African-American president of the United States, many have lived to see a dream come true. Despite attempts to dismantle the foundation laid by those pioneers, in 2012, Minnesotans still lead the charge to attain equality and justice for all.

As we honor the champions amongst us, past and present, the Minneapolis Urban League will continue to advocate for those in need, serving as a 'voice for the voiceless', helping our community navigate the Gateway to Opportunity!