

Governor Officially Proclaims February as Black History Month in Delaware



Governor Markell signs Black History Month proclamation with author Orlando Camp looking on

The observance of Black History Month in Delaware officially began with an event last week at the First State Heritage Park Welcome Center and Galleries at the Delaware Public Archives in Dover. [Governor Jack Markell and other dignitaries spoke](#) about how our heroes of the past can serve as an inspiring lesson to today's youth, such as the students from Dover's Central Middle School who were also in attendance.

"It's unfortunate that we single out just one month for Black History," said Governor Markell. "Every single day we ought to be thinking about the lessons that we have learned from those who have gone before us and we ought to be acting on them."

Calvin Christopher, Chair of the Delaware Human Relations Commission added: "We are here to celebrate American History and the significant contributions African Americans have made to that history."

Both Mr. Christopher and Executive Director Romona Fullman spoke of the Human Relations Commission's role throughout its 50 year existence to increase public awareness of civil and human rights and to promote amicable relationships among the various racial and cultural groups within the state, in addition to administering Delaware's Equal Accommodations Law

and Fair Housing Law.

Deputy Secretary of State James Collins said: “We are encouraged by the significant progress [that has been made] but we must also face the reality that there is still much work to do in striving for mutual respect and equal opportunity, not only for Blacks but for other minorities and women.”

Much of the sentiment expressed by the other speakers was echoed in a particularly personal way by author Orlando Camp who spoke about being one of the “Milford Eleven” – the first African-American students integrated into a white Delaware school.

Mr. Camp has recently written a book on the subject along with Ed Kee, Delaware Secretary of Agriculture. As the synopsis of the book states: “On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States outlawed segregation in public schools. This decision was momentous; it meant the end of a system that was unjust and degraded blacks. For these [eleven] students it meant they had a chance to get an equal education in the public schools of Delaware, but it was not meant to be.”

The Delaware Public Archives (DPA) hosted the event, in part, because it is currently featuring a display about the history of African-American education in Delaware. Entitled *The African-American Educational Journey in Delaware*, this exhibit includes numerous photographs of early African-American schools and, in particular, those schools that played a significant role in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* Case in 1954.

In addition, the DPA has made [three eBooks](#) on the history of African Americans in Delaware available free of charge through archives.delaware.gov.

All three were published by the Delaware Heritage Commission. They are:

- *A History of African Americans of Delaware and Maryland's Eastern Shore* – Carole C. Marks (ed.)
- *Troubled in Mind: J. Saunders Redding's Early Years in Wilmington, Delaware* – J. Saunders Redding
- *African American Education in Delaware: A History Through Photographs, 1865-1930* – Bradley Skelcher, Ph.D.

The Delaware Public Archives also has numerous collections on its website that contain African-American historical resources and hosted an event focusing on the Tuskegee Airmen – our nation's first African-American military aviators – who fought so bravely in World War II.

[The Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs has several events focused around the observance of Black History Month](#) which are free and open to the public, such as a storytelling program about the life of one of Delaware's leading Underground Railroad conductors and a program discussing the United States Colored Troops from Delaware who served in the American Civil War.



Students from Dover's Central Middle School stand in front of the new display with Governor Markell