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Gwynn Oak, July 4, 1963

(From an AFRO editorial June, 1974)

Mere mention of the name Gwynn Oak Park leaves a sour taste in the mouths of many AFRO readers.

To them, it recalls the unhappy experiences in the 50's and early 60's when public places like the northwest Baltimore amusement playground admitted whites only and used police force to keep others out.

Before the park was forced to admit all in 1963, there had been nearly ten years of demonstrations, led by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), joined later by ministers of both races and other concerned citizens.

There were annual July 4 mass civil disobedience campaigns which focused on the park's All Nations day Festival because it admitted foreigners but denied participation by black Americans.

For many years, the black demonstrators had no support from their white neighbors.

In 1963, when Cardinal Shehan banned Catholic school use of the park, other white ministers and laymen joined black protestants and the die was cast.

Whenever the AFRO thinks of Gwynn Oak, the picture of ministers and students and civic leaders being carted off to Woodlawn Police Station, with an assist by police dogs, comes to mind.

And, we shall never forget the glorious Fourth in 1963, when some 500 Freedom Riders from all sections of the country came to give their non-violent support.

And when over half of them were jailed for trespassing.

A HIGHLIGHT OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, Gwynn Oak Park, July 4, 1963 demonstrations led to arrests of ministers, laymen, rights leaders and citizens from all walks of life. The photo of the citizens being carted off in patrol wagons has the ferris wheel in the background.

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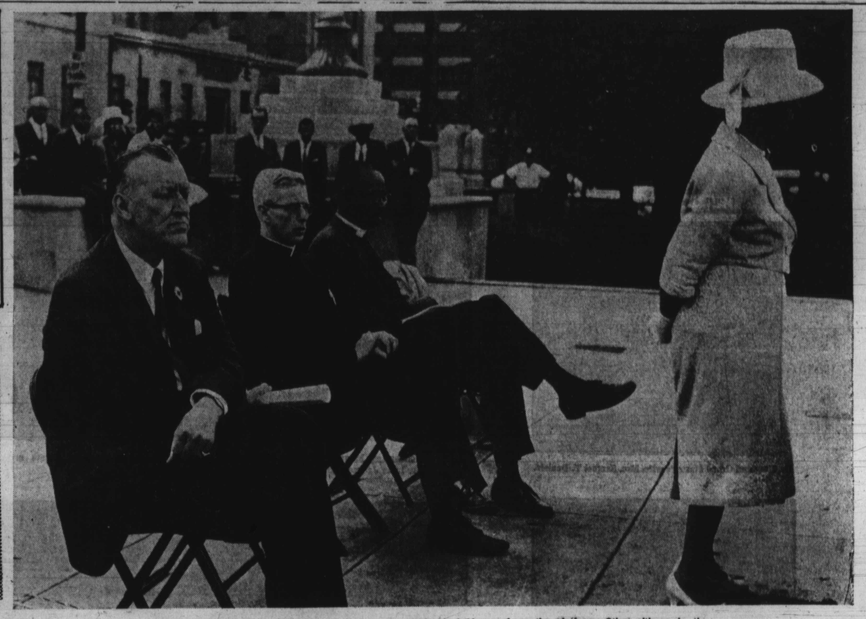

AN IMMORTAL PHOTO of Dr. Lillie M. Jackson, the great lady of Freedom, taken at City Hall Plaza with Gov. Theodore McKeldin, Father Joseph Connolly and the Rev. Robert T. Newbold seated on the platform. Other citizens in the background stood silently as she prayed.

WHAT OTHERS THOUGHT ABOUT HER

Ma Jackson---
Fighter from Way Back

Reprinted from THE NEWS AMERICAN Sunday, Jan. 24, 1971.)

By John C. Robinson
Staff Reporter

The poet Langston Hughes once wrote of Dr. Lillie M. Jackson:

"She lives, works, eats and sleeps NAACP. It is her heart and soul."

She's been called "that NAACP lady" and "Ma" Jackson. She been in the fore on nonviolent action for racial equality for more than a quarter of a century.

Dr. Jackson is also the matriarch of a remarkable family — the Jackson — Mitchell family.

There is her grandson, Clarence Mitchell III, a state senator; Clarence Mitchell Jr., director, Washington Bureau of the NAACP, a son-in-law; Parren Mitchell, congressman and brother of Clarence Jr.; Juanita Mitchell, a civil rights lawyer and daughter.

Mrs. Jackson was born Lillie Carroll in Baltimore in 1889. She graduated from Coppin State College (then known as the Colored Training School) in 1908.

She was a public school teacher when she met a traveling exhibitor of religious films, Keiffer Jackson. She married him in 1900 and they became a team traveling together singing and lecturing on religion.

Mrs. Jackson still displays the emotional spontaneity of her early religious training. At any time she might get up and hug the person closest to her and proclaim her strong belief in God's power.

"We can make it but b' and white must join h and love one another," s quick to add, "But we all n God."

Every member of the family bears the unmistakable stamp of advice. She lives in a large unpretentious rowhouse on Eutaw Place.

"Don't worry about fancy things, just get some brick and mortar. Have a house for your family first," she declares. Her tastes are simple and her love for her people pure.

Mrs. Jackson's extraordinary career in public service began in 1935 when she was elected president of the Baltimore branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. At the time the chapter had only five members, but under her leadership, 2,000 new members were quickly added and by 1946 membership had reached 17,500.

Between 1935 and 1950 the NAACP filed seven suits in the Court of Appeals of Maryland to have the University of Maryland admit all qualified black students to the schools of law, medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, nursing, graduate department of sociology and the undergraduate school of engineering.

In 1963 the NAACP, with Juanita Jackson Mitchell as one of its lawyers, filed desegregation suits in the U.S. District Court of Maryland and the Baltimore City Court that resulted in Baltimore being the first southern city to comply with the Supreme Court decree on May 17, 1954, that invalidated the separate-but-equal doctrine.

At one time there were dual salary scales for white and black teachers in Maryland. This inequity, which had been established by the Maryland Legislature, was equalized in 1938 in a suit brought before the U.S. Federal District Court by Mrs. Jackson, members of her family and the NAACP.

Mrs. Jackson always has been a staunch believer in the American system. Her efforts for racial justice have been through established channels.

She spearheaded nonpartisan voter registration in 1942 that continued on a year-around basis through the help of local churches and civic organizations. By 1968, the drive had resulted in 144,000 registered black voters, the election of two state senators, eleven state legislators, three city councilmen and the passage of statewide public accommodations, equal employment, fair housing, repeal of anti-miscegenation laws and municipal civil rights laws.

She is quick to tell you her slogan is "ballots, not bullets."

One of the most sensitive areas of race relations is the black community and the police. Mrs. Jackson was correctly reading the social seismograph a few years back and pushed for better community relations with the police. The current tremors between the black citizens and the police have been tempered considerably by the work done by her, the NAACP and Police Commissioner Pomerleau.

Mrs. Jackson and her forces also fought against incidents of police brutality. In 1942 a group of 2,000 citizens marched to Annapolis to protest the shooting of a black soldier by a policeman on Pennsylvania Avenue.

And in 1966 the NAACP won a decree in the U.S. Court of Appeals, which enjoined the Baltimore police department from conducting mass armed raids without warrants of 30 names in the black community.

There are about 150 active members all working to upgrade the neighborhood. The director is Mrs. Ester Middleton, mother of four and a close friend of Mrs. Jackson. Freedom House is another result of her brick and mortar theory. The conviction that all action should have firm concrete base.

The years of social combat are not without their medals of valor and moments of roses, and in 1956 Lillie Jackson was awarded an honorary degree of doctor of law by Morgan State College.

In 1957 she was the AFRO-AMERICAN's Mother-of-the-Year.

1960 saw her selected by Pageant Magazine as one of the 10 Americans to watch.

She was the first woman to head a chapter of the NAACP and she radically changed the philosophy of the organization by opening membership to the masses from one of seeking on the intellectual class.

"I'm a religious woman," says she, "and that means we are responsible for all the people, not just the few." She is a member of the Sharp Street Memorial United Methodist Church and in her words, "The church of God's workshop."

"Be somebody. God helps those who help themselves. Get some brick and mortar and pay your taxes." Those are the words of a woman who has dedicated her life to bettering mankind. A little gentle and emotional woman who was born on Greenwillow Street and rose to become a true leader of her people.

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In Memoriam to the late
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