NAACP®

Des Moines Branch

47TH ANNUAL

FREEDOM FUND BANQUET

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2024

WITH KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Roscoe Jones, Jr.

Dean & Professor of Law
Drake University Law School



Roscoe Jones, Jr.

Roscoe Jones is Dean of Drake University Law School. He is the 22nd dean and the first Black dean of the Law School. Before joining Drake Law, Dean Jones taught courses on mass incarceration, civil rights policy, and administrative law at Yale, Chicago, Michigan, Georgetown, George Washington, and University of Washington Law Schools and the Harvard Kennedy School.

Prior to his career in academia, Dean Jones practiced law as a partner and co-chair of the Public Policy Group in the Washington, DC office of Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP, an international law firm, where he helped clients with governmental relations and congressional investigations. He served for a decade on Capitol Hill as chief of staff to Rep. Abigail Spanberger, legislative director to Senator Dianne Feinstein, senior counsel to Senator Cory Booker, and senior counsel on the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee to then-Chairman Patrick Leahy. He worked at the U.S. Department of Justice as special counsel to then-Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights Tom Perez, appellate attorney in the Civil Rights Division, and assistant U.S. attorney in the Western District of Washington (Seattle). He was a Murnaghan Fellow at the Public Justice Center in Baltimore, Maryland. He clerked for Judge Carl E. Stewart on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit and Judge Alexander Williams, Jr. on the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland.

Dean Jones chairs the national board of the American Constitution Society and is Secretary for the national board of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. He has served on the boards of the Medgar and Myrlie Evers Institute, Stanford Athletic Board, President Lincoln's Cottage, and the advisory boards of the Center for Democracy and Technology and the International Spy Museum in Washington, DC. He is an elected member of the American Law Institute, a fellow of the American Bar Foundation, and an elected member of the Council on Foreign Relations. He was a Stennis Fellow on Capitol Hill and Wasserstein Public Interest Fellow at the Harvard Law School.

Dean Jones has received numerous honors. He was three times named to the Lawdragon list of the top 500 lawyers in America and Chambers USA ranked him as one of the nation's top government relations specialists. He was named to The Hill's Top Lobbyists list and the Top 100 Black Lawyers list by the National Black Lawyers Association. He received the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Brooks R. Burdette New Board Member Rising Impact Award and has been recognized by the Drake Black Law Students Association for his leadership.

Dean Jones graduated from Stanford University with high honors and the University of Virginia Law School, where he was editor-in-chief of the Virginia Journal of Social Policy & Law and co-founded the Center for the Study of Race and Law. He played football at Stanford University. He has been published in the Harvard Law and Policy Review.

FREEDOM FUND BANQUET PROGRAM

Welcome
Victoria Henderson Weber

Invocation
Pastor Joshua Milam

Organization Awards
Ebonee Woods

Dinner

Remarks
Betty Andrews

Consent Decree Commemoration
Henry Hamilton

Special Presentation & Individual Awards
Ebonee Woods

Keynote Introduction
Victoria Henderson Weber

Speaker
Roscoe Jones, Jr.

Presidents Award & Closing Remarks
Victoria Henderson Weber

Benediction
Pastor Joshua Milam

NAACP®

Des Moines Branch

Greetings!

It is my absolute honor to welcome you to the 47th Annual Freedom Fund Banquet of the Des Moines Branch of the NAACP. Tonight we come together—united and stronger than ever—to celebrate our shared commitment to justice, equity, and progress. This year's theme, "All In," is more than a slogan; it is a call to action for every one of us to bring our full selves, our unwavering determination, and our collective strength to the fight for freedom and equality.

On behalf of the Des Moines Branch, I want to thank each of you for your presence and support. The Freedom Fund Banquet is the cornerstone of our branch's ability to serve our community. Your attendance tonight fuels our mission and empowers us to continue this critical work.

As we reflect on the path we've walked, it's clear that we are living in a time that demands action. In our 109th year of service to the Des Moines Metro, we remain steadfast in our fight for racial equity, education innovation, inclusive economies, environmental justice, and health and well-being for all. Together, we have achieved much, but there is still so much more to do.

Our founders understood the power of community, and their charge to us was clear: stand against injustice in all its forms. They knew, as we do, that the United States of America, built by us all, belongs to us all. Tonight, we honor their legacy by reaffirming our commitment to the fight for equity and justice. This is not just a moment—it is a movement. We are "All In." Each of us has a role to play, and together, we are a force that cannot be ignored. Whether it is through advocating for policies that dismantle systemic racism, mentoring young leaders, or simply showing up for one another, we must remain engaged and unwavering. Our collective action is the foundation for the brighter future we all envision.

Thank you for being here tonight. Thank you for believing in the mission of the NAACP. And thank you for going "All In" to ensure that our shared vision of equity, justice, and opportunity for all becomes a reality.



Let's continue this work—together.

In solidarity,

Victoria Henderson Weber
President, NAACP Des Moines Branch

NAACP

Des Moines Branch

2023-2024 Officers

Victoria Henderson Weber, President
Arnold A. Woods, Jr. Vice President
Nick Peterson, 2nd Vice President
Kenyada Coney, 3rd Vice President
Ebonee Woods, Secretary
Gretchen Woods, Assistant Secretary
Annis Austin-Woods, Treasurer
Marcella Edmonds, Assistant Treasurer

Executive Committee

Betty Andrews
Diogenes Ayala
Patricia Barbee
Jacquie Easley-McGhee
Alex Hanna
Sharon Brown
Linda Carter - Lewis
Mary Chapman
Jermain Henderson
Heather Jones - Brown
Russell Lovell
Joshua Milam
John Olsen
Jacqueline Thompson
Ezell Tornes
David Walker
Brad Woods

Branch Presidents

1915-1917 S. Joe Brown
1918-1920 E. R. Hall
1921-1923 J. B. Morris, Sr.
1924 Dr. J. A. Jefferson
1925 Charles P. Howard
1926-1929 S. Sue Brown
1930 A. A. Alexander
1931 A. P. Trotter
1932-1934 S. M. Riley
1935-1939 Fred O. Morrow, Sr.
1940-1941 Georgine Morris
1942-1943 Ike Smalls
1944 John S. Coleman
1945-1947 A. P. Trotter
1948-1949 Luther T. Glanton
1950-1951 Rev. George A. Singleton
1952-1953 William Bell
1954-1955 Archie Greenlee
1956-1959 Clara Bayles
1960-1961 J. B. Morris, Jr.
1962-1968 Robert A. Wright, Sr
1969-1970 Malcolm Hogan
19971-1972 John M. Estes, Jr.
1973 Bob (Adin) Davis
1974 Charles Crook, Jr.
1975 Rev. Ivan Johnson
1976 Maude E. White
1977-1980 Vincent Chapman
1981-1992 Larry W. Carter
1993-1995 Samuel Woods, Sr.
1996-2001 Rev. Keith A. Ratliff, Sr
2002-2010- Linda M. Carter-Lewis
2011-2018 Arnold A. Woods, Jr
2018-2020 Kameron Middlebrooks
2020-Present Victoria Henderson-Weber

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Des Moines Branch

Our Founding

Written by S. Joe Brown

Sometime during the Christmas holidays in 1912, Attorney S. Joe Brown met at Topeka, Kansas, Miss Kathryn Johnson, who called his attention to the work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and promised to have some literature sent to him from the National Headquarters.

About two years later, in the fall of 1914, he received a further consignment of literature and a letter from Miss Mary Child's Nearny, then National Secretary, suggesting that he call together a group of members of both races whom he thought might be interested in establishing a branch of the movement in Des Moines. She also informed him that Dr. Joel E. Spingarn, then Chairman of the National Board, would be passing through Des Moines in January 1915, and that, if desired, he might stop off and address the group.

The committee was formed, and plans were completed for the organization of the branch upon the visit of Dr. Spingarn during his transcontinental tour in the effort of the National Association to organize branches in the Midwest. The date of the organization was moved to January 18, 1915, at which time Miss Johnson was present and perfected the organization as Branch #25 with 33 members. The following officers were elected: Attorney S. Joe Brown, President; A.A. Alexander, Vice President; Mrs. Jessye E. McClain, Secretary; Wade H. McCree, Treasurer; and the following additional members of the Executive Committee: Dr. A.J. Booker, E.R. Hall, Jesse A. Graves, Mrs. S. Joe Brown, Mrs. John L. Thompson, Mrs. J.P. Hamilton, Attorney Casper Schenk, Hon. Harvey Ingram, and Rev. E.G. Jackson.

On January 20, 1915, Dr. Spingarn arrived and addressed our first public meeting, which was held at Corinthian Baptist Church. He was introduced by Governor George W. Clark, and as a result of this meeting, our membership soon grew to 225. Hardly had the branch been organized before it was called upon to lead a fight against a "Jim Crow" marriage bill introduced in our state legislature. We won this fight, as we did another one 10 years later, both with the able assistance of Attorney Casper Schenk.

In the spring of 1916, we staged a legal battle against the production in Des Moines of the pernicious movie picture "The Birth of a Nation." After having procured a resolution from the City Council condemning the film and directing the Corporation Counsel to use every effort to prevent it from being shown, we filed information upon which warrants were issued and the operators arrested and prosecuted. The trial lasted for several days, but the court held that the picture did not violate any ordinance of our city, so we were unsuccessful. However, we were highly complimented by the attorneys for the producers, who declared we had given them the hardest fight they had experienced in any city up to that time in which they had been unsuccessfully opposed.

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Des Moines Branch

History, Cont.

In November 1917, Attorney Brown, after three years' service, retired as president, and Mr. E.R. Hall, who had been continuously on the Executive Committee from the founding of the branch, was elected to succeed him. His election brought to the support of the branch a large group of younger people who organized themselves into a dramatic club. This club attained such notoriety that their portraits were published not only in our local papers but also in The Crisis, thus giving the branch national prominence.

During Mr. Hall's administration, which also continued for three years, the membership grew. Mrs. S. Joe Brown was sent to the first National Anti-Lynching Conference held in New York City in June 1919. Attorney James B. Morris succeeded Mr. Hall and also served for three years. During his administration, the branch successfully prosecuted the residential segregation case brought by Miss Dorothy Quail, secured the passage of a resolution by the City Council against segregation at the bathing beaches, secured an amendment to our state civil rights law, and established its first junior department with Mrs. S. Joe Brown as its head. Her work so attracted the attention of the National Office that she was invited to appear upon the national conference program in Kansas City, MO, and outline a program for junior work.

Attorney Morris was succeeded by Dr. J.A. Jefferson, who served but one year, and who was followed by Attorney Charles P. Howard, who also served but one year. Under Attorney Howard's administration, the branch secured the first conviction under our amended civil rights law and defeated another proposed "Jim Crow" bill in our state legislature.

Attorney Howard was succeeded in 1925 by our first woman president, Mrs. S. Joe Brown, who during her first year placed the branch back on the honor roll at National Headquarters. She secured a second conviction under our civil rights law and represented the branch at the national conference at Chicago, where she presided and introduced Colonel Theodore Roosevelt at one of the largest mass meetings of that session. Mrs. Brown served us for five years and, toward the close of her administration, planned and presided over an NAACP exhibit in the Educational Building at the State Fair. We were awarded second place in the adult education section the first year, and the following year, under the administration of her successor, Mr. A.A. Alexander, she repeated the exhibit and secured first place.

At the expiration of two years' service, Mr. Alexander was succeeded by Mr. A.P. Trotter, and he, after two years, by Rev. Dr. S.M. Riley. Mr. F.O. Morrow then served until November 1939. Mrs. J.B. Morris was elected our second woman president, and she began her work by inviting the representatives of all the branches in the state to join us in celebrating our Silver Anniversary on January 18, 1940, at which time a state conference of branches was launched.

NAACP

Des Moines Branch

presents a

MOMENT IN HISTORY

courtesy of the Bystander

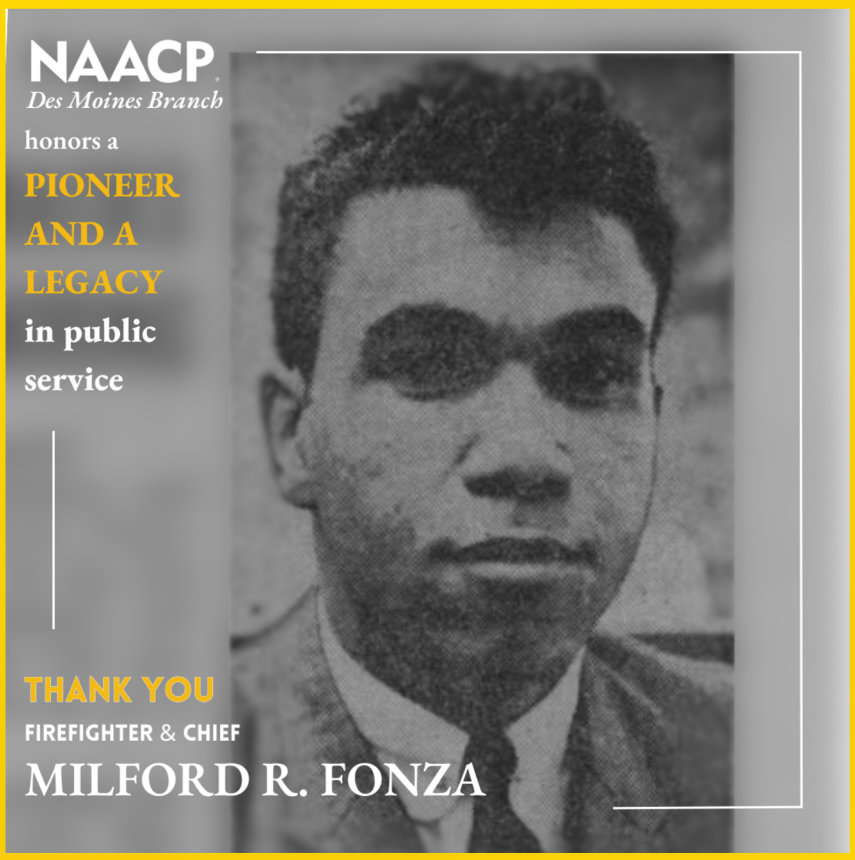
Bystander Newspaper
March 3rd 1908



The above cut is one of Des Moines best firemen, Fred Jackson, who has been a member of the fire department 24 years He is Des Moines first colored fireman and was appointed by Alderman Drady 25 years ago, first serving as assistant driver and later as regular driver for 14 years, during which time only one accident occurred. He was always first to arrive at a fire in his district and sometimes first when called to other districts.

Mr. Jackson's record as a fireman stands second to none. We have two other colored firemen, Messrs. Alex. Wilburn and Joseph Hamilton. At one time when Mr. Henry Taylor was on the department they had a colored Company. It has been promised that they shall have a station to themselves. Chief Burnett thinks it best, and it has been talked of by some of the best men of the city, colored and white.

Milford Fonza: A Pioneer and a Legacy...



We honor Milford Fonza, a trailblazer whose dedication to public service and perseverance left an indelible mark on our community and beyond.

Born in 1943, Milford grew up in a close-knit family. A graduate of East High School in 1962, he served his country in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War, from May 1962 to May 1965, as a skilled Radar Operator. But his ultimate dream—sparked at the young age of 12 after witnessing the noble work of firefighters saving his family's home—was to become a firefighter himself.

That dream did not come without its challenges. Despite facing systemic barriers and discrimination, Milford remained steadfast. His persistence, along with the support from organizations like the Des Moines Human Rights Commission and the Des Moines NAACP, led to his historic appointment on August 7, 1967, as the first African American firefighter in Des Moines since 1919.

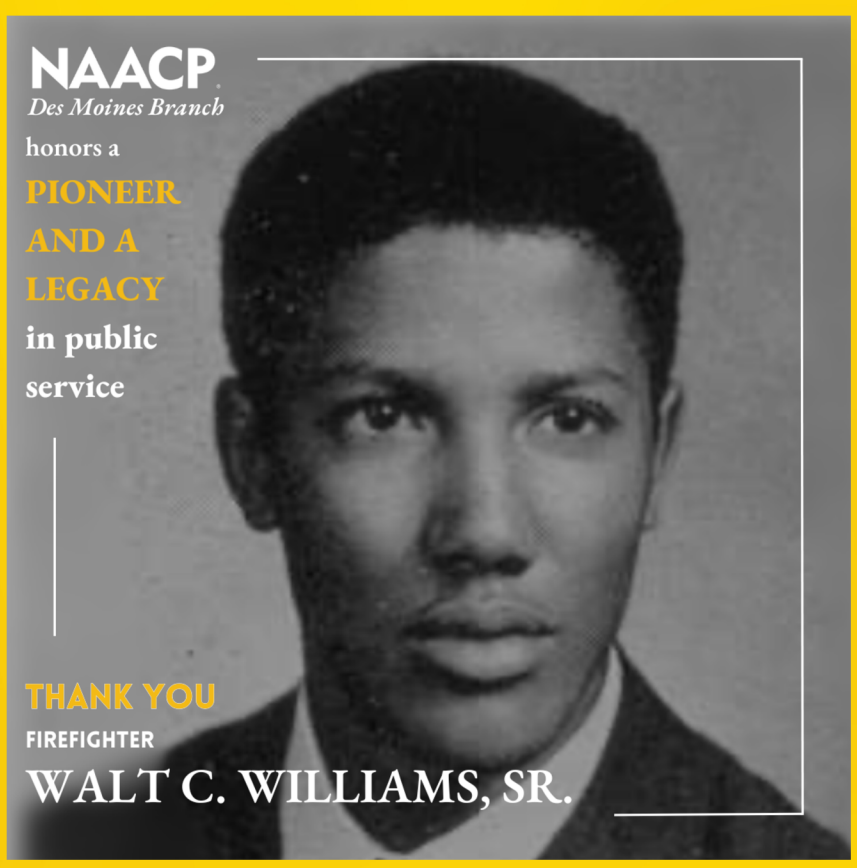
Milford's assignment to Station 15 (now Station 4) with Engine 15 in the 1st Division marked the beginning of a groundbreaking career in fire service. Though he faced resistance and discrimination early on, including being segregated from white firefighters and being denied membership in the local firefighter's union, Milford persevered. By the time he left the Des Moines Fire Department on November 19, 1973, the camaraderie among his colleagues had begun to grow, as evidenced by the going-away lunch they held in his honor.

Milford's passion and dedication continued to shine as he moved to California, where he built a remarkable career. Joining the Pasadena Fire Department, he rose through the ranks to become Battalion Commander, overseeing 400 firefighters. His exceptional leadership then led him to serve as Fire Chief of the Compton Fire Department for more than a decade.

Milford Fonza's story is one of courage, resilience, and unwavering commitment to justice. His fight to achieve his dream paved the way for greater diversity within the fire service, inspiring generations to dream big and persevere.

We honor Milford Fonza not just for his extraordinary career but for his enduring legacy—a legacy built on a foundation of determination, service, and a deep belief in the power of equality.

Walter Williams, Sr.: A Legacy of Determination and Service...



We honor Walt Williams, Sr., a man whose perseverance and dedication paved the way for inclusion within the Des Moines Fire Department.

Born in 1940, he faced significant adversity as a child, battling rheumatic fever, an autoimmune disease that could have ended his life early. Yet, Walt's resilience and determination defined him—he trained his body and mind to overcome these challenges, excelling as a high school athlete in football and wrestling and a two-time Golden Gloves welterweight boxing champion. Walt then served his country as a radar operator in the U.S. military. His service reflected the discipline and commitment that would later characterize his work in the fire service.

In the mid-1960s, Walt Williams and Milford Fonza courageously applied to join the Des Moines Fire Department during a time when no African Americans had been hired in nearly five decades. Alongside Fonza, he fought tirelessly to break the barriers that had excluded African Americans from the department for decades. Although Walt was hired at the same time as Fonza in 1967, his start date on January 22, 1968, was delayed due to his obligations with another City department.

Walt's entry into the fire service at Station 15 (current Station 4) with Engine 15 in the 3rd Division marked a significant turning point for the department. He served with dedication until January 8, 1979, giving over a decade of his life to protecting and serving the Des Moines community.

After leaving the Fire Department, Walt channeled his skills into a successful career as a contractor, building and remodeling homes—a talent passed down from his father. Walt is remembered for his deep commitment to his family, helping others and his enduring contributions to justice.

Walt Williams, Sr.'s legacy is one of bravery, perseverance, and service. His remarkable ability to overcome obstacles, helped shape the future for generations to come.

We honor Walt Williams, Sr., for his courage, resilience, and determination. His contributions will forever inspire us to continue striving for equality and justice.

Terry Knox: A Pioneer of Brotherhood and Service...



We honor Terrall "Terry" Knox, a man whose legacy reflects courage, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to service.

Born in 1946, Terry dedicated his life to protecting and serving others.

On May 25, 1970, he joined the Des Moines Fire Department, where he worked at Engine 4, 2nd Division, Station 4 (then called Station 15). His career in Des Moines spanned seven years, ending on September 24, 1977. During his time with the department, he worked alongside fellow pioneers Milford Fonza and Walt Williams, sharing in their fight to break barriers and ensure equality within the fire service. The three men formed a bond that would last a lifetime.

Terry's path was not without challenges. Like many African Americans in the fire service during that time, he faced obstacles rooted in discrimination. Yet, his determination to succeed and serve his community never wavered.

After leaving Des Moines, Terry moved to Georgia, where he continued his fire service career. His dedication and leadership were recognized as he rose to the rank of Fire Captain in the Dekalb County Fire Rescue Department. On May 3, 1997, Dekalb County made history by welcoming its first fire company staffed entirely by Black firefighters. Captain Terry Knox led this historic team alongside Driver Engineer Sell Caldwell, Fire Fighter II Willie Smith, and Fire Fighter II Gary Cleveland. This milestone highlighted Terry's impact on advancing equity and creating opportunities for others in the fire service.

Terry passed away on February 1, 2013, leaving behind a legacy of courage, leadership, and friendship. His lifelong dedication to service, his pioneering work in Des Moines and Dekalb County, and his commitment to building a better future for others continue to inspire.

We honor Terry Knox not only as a firefighter but as a man of deep conviction and enduring friendship. His contributions to the fire service and his community will forever be remembered.

The Integration of the Des Moines Fire Department: The Lawsuit with No Losers

The story of the Des Moines Fire Department's (DMFD) integration is a landmark in Iowa's civil rights history. It tells of perseverance, legal advocacy, and the courage of individuals who demanded fairness and equality in public service.

Early History and Exclusion

When the DMFD was founded in 1882, it reflected the racial inequalities of its time. Though Black firefighters served in the department until approximately 1919, they were later excluded entirely for decades. This racial barrier persisted until 1967 when federal civil rights laws pressured the city to hire Milford Fonza and Walt Williams. Terry Knox followed in 1970, but the experiences of these first Black firefighters revealed the department's deeply rooted hostility.

At Station 15 on 9th and University, the firehouse where Black firefighters were placed, Fonza, Knox, and Williams endured relentless racial harassment. They were segregated within the station, forced to sleep in a separate "Black bunk," and denied basic privileges like kitchen access. The severe and pervasive hostile environment and lack of support led all three to leave the department. The reasons for their resignations were well known and sent a powerful message to Des Moines' Black community, effectively deterring others from applying to the DMFD for the next decade. The City's lame explanation that Fonza and Knox didn't have the "grit" required "to do the job" fell flat as Fonza went on to become the battalion commander of the Pasadena Fire Department and later the Compton Fire Chief and Knox became a Captain in the DeKalb, Georgia (Atlanta) Fire Department.

The Legal Fight for Justice

By 1980, the DMFD employed only one Black firefighter among its 311uniformed personnel, despite Des Moines' Black population comprising 7% of the city. Recognizing the systemic exclusion, Dennis Moore and Greg Perry, two qualified Black applicants denied employment, sought the support of the Des Moines NAACP.

Led by attorney Russell Lovell, and assisted by Robert Wright, Sr., the NAACP initiated a legal battle against the City of Des Moines. The case, filed in federal court in 1982, accused the city of widespread pattern and practice racial discrimination. Key evidence included statistical data, exclusionary recruiting and hiring practices, and the DMFD's longstanding reputation based on racially exclusionary hiring practices and the hostile environment that had driven Black firefighters away. The case drew upon the Supreme Court's precedent in Teamsters v. United States, which highlighted how longstanding discriminatory practices could deter even qualified candidates from applying.

The NAACP's advocacy went beyond the courtroom. Volunteers like Larry Carter and Herman Wadsworth contributed to the case with strategic insights and crucial evidence, such as Civil Service Commission (CSC) records showing how recruitment processes favored white candidates through word-of-mouth advertising and subjective personality tests.

The Integration of the Des Moines Fire Department: The Lawsuit with No Losers

The Consent Decree

After intense negotiations, the NAACP and the city reached a historic Consent Decree in 1984. This federal court order mandated sweeping reforms, including:

- Affirmative action hiring to ensure Black representation matched the city's workforce percentage (6.8%).
- Comprehensive changes to recruitment, testing, and hiring practices.
- Court-monitored oversight of implementation of the Decree to ensure compliance and protect newly hired Black firefighters from retaliation.

The decree also required targeted recruitment in the Black community and guaranteed equal treatment for applicants under revised, nondiscriminatory standards.

Implementation and Impact

The Consent Decree marked the beginning of a new era for the DMFD. Within the first two years, more than a dozen Black firefighters were hired, creating a critical mass that strengthened the integration process. Over the next decade, the department hired 35 Black firefighters, representing more than 12% of its workforce by 1994 (36/288). These gains were achieved through constant monitoring by NAACP attorneys, ensuring the city adhered to the decree's requirements.

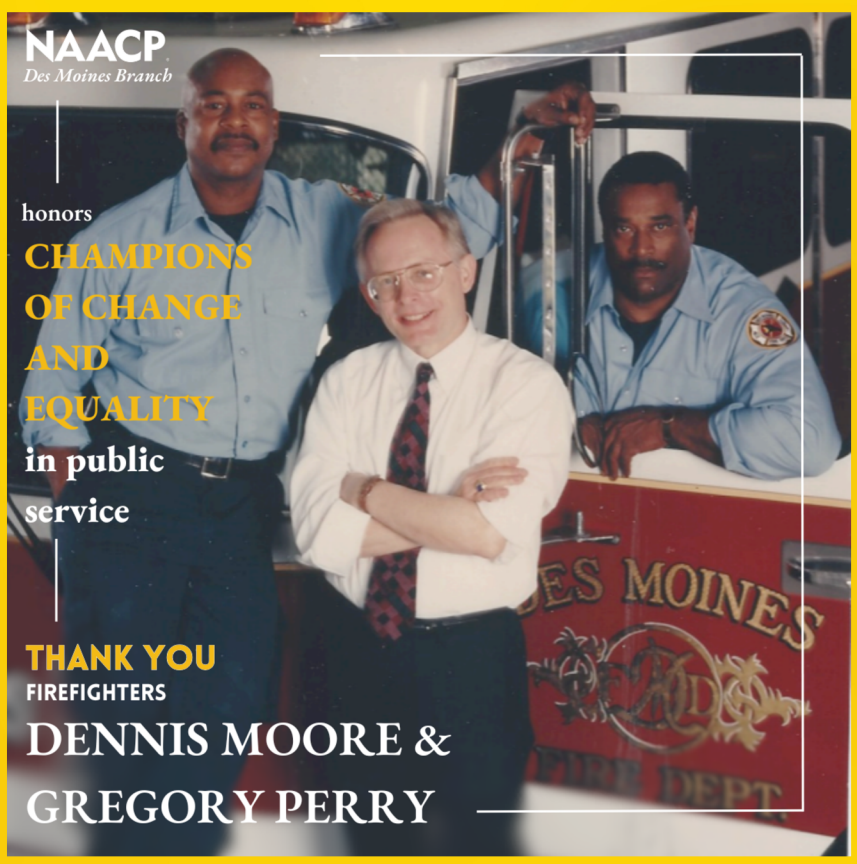
The decree also opened the door for the hiring of women firefighters by addressing gender bias in physical agility testing. By revising scoring methods, the city removed barriers that had previously excluded women from consideration.

Legacy

The integration of the DMFD was not just a local victory—it became a model for addressing systemic discrimination in public service nationwide. It also shined a light on the tragic reality that the nationwide exclusion of Black people from firefighter and police public service jobs was not just a southern phenomenon but pervasive, including New York City and San Francisco and Chicago—and Des Moines. The NAACP's legal strategy combined grassroots advocacy with rigorous legal expertise, ensuring lasting change. While challenges remained, the courage and dedication of Black firefighters, alongside vigilant enforcement of the decree, created a more inclusive department.

Today, the DMFD's history serves as a reminder of how deliberate action and unwavering commitment can overcome entrenched inequality. On the 40th anniversary of the Consent Decree, the Des Moines NAACP honors not only the legal pioneers who fought for justice but also the firefighters who proved their worth through service and perseverance. Their efforts transformed a department once defined by exclusion into a symbol of progress and equity.

Dennis Moore & Greg Perry: Champions of Change



As we celebrate the legacy of the Federal Court Consent Decree, we must recognize two key individuals whose courage and dedication made it possible: Greg Perry and Dennis Moore. Their work was instrumental in paving the way for racial equity within the Des Moines Fire Department and setting a foundation of accountability and inclusion for generations to come.

Greg and Dennis first brought their charges of discrimination in the 1980 DMFD firefighter selection process to the NAACP. They became named plaintiffs in the class action lawsuit, partnering with NAACP attorneys and helping expose the systemic racial discrimination that had plagued the department for decades. Their willingness to step forward and lead this fight ensured the success of the landmark Consent Decree of 1984, which transformed the hiring process and introduced federal oversight to prevent harassment and retaliation.

Despite the protections of the Consent Decree, Greg and Dennis faced considerable challenges. When their names and home addresses were published on the front page of the Des Moines Register in 1982, their families were understandably fearful of retaliation. However, their commitment to justice and equality remained steadfast, and they continued to serve as liaisons between newly hired African American firefighters, NAACP attorneys, and the court throughout the decade-long monitoring process.

Greg Perry, a high school football standout invited to the Minnesota Vikings tryout camp, was a natural leader. Known for his outgoing personality, Greg took on the role of informal leader among the African American firefighters hired under the Consent Decree. After serving 25 years as a firefighter, Greg became a vocal advocate for racial equity and shared his experiences as a guest speaker in civil rights classes at Drake University, inspiring countless students to continue the fight for justice.

Dennis Moore, a quiet and conscientious man, brought a different but equally vital strength to the movement. A former Air Force firefighter, Dennis's calm determination helped stabilize the group during turbulent times. He was a devoted family man, a talented drummer, a lover of music, and a grill master. Dennis also served more than 20 years with the DMFD, leaving a legacy of professionalism and dedication.

Dennis Moore & Greg Perry: Champions of Change, cont...

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The Consent Decree would not have been possible without Greg and Dennis. Their leadership, courage, and determination broke down stereotypes, dismantled systemic barriers, and created opportunities for others to thrive. They understood the gravity of being among the first representatives and role models for African Americans in the department.

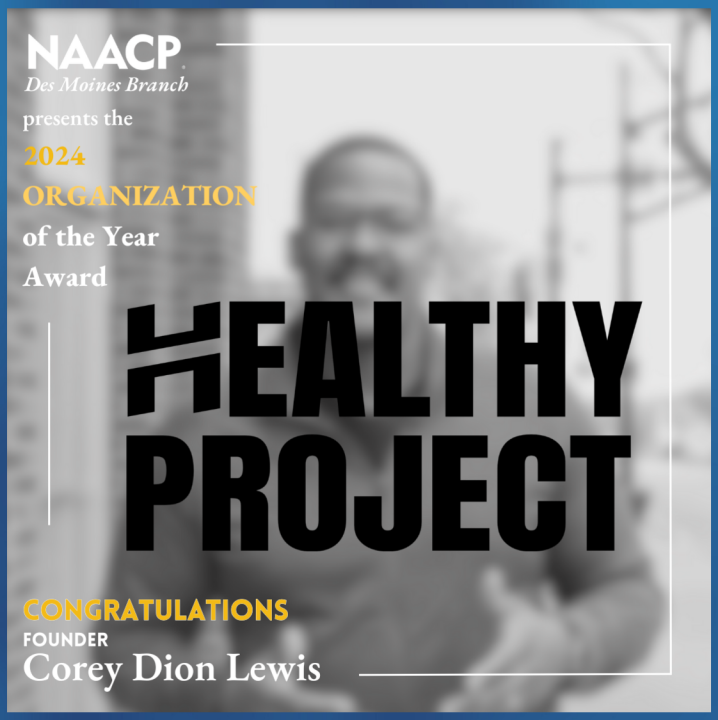
Greg and Dennis's contributions serve as a reminder of what can be achieved when individuals stand up for justice, even in the face of significant risks. We owe them our deepest gratitude for their role in ensuring that the principles of equity and inclusion became a lasting part of the DMFD.

Their legacy is woven into the story of the Consent Decree and into the broader narrative of civil rights progress in Des Moines. We honor their memory and their invaluable contributions to the fight for equality.



2024 Freedom Fund Award Honorees

These organizations have demonstrated exceptional dedication to advancing our Enduring Commitments.



Healthy Project

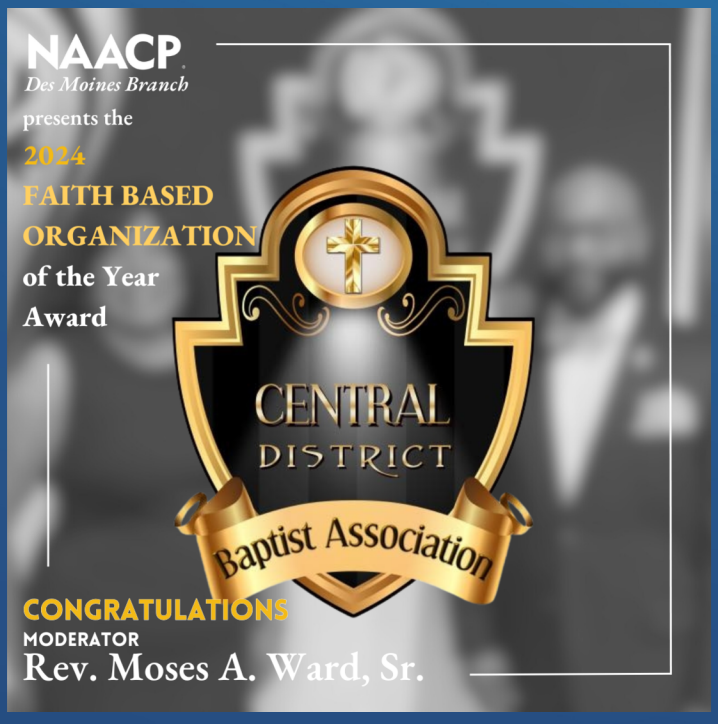
Dedicated to "Bridging Health, Culture, and Justice," The Healthy Project is a pioneering public health media organization reframing health narratives through an equity lens. Led by Corey Dion Lewis, their innovative work includes initiatives like the "Coffee Can't Fix Everything" podcast, destigmatizing mental health conversations, and a growing portfolio of impactful projects and partnerships that empower underserved communities.

Their commitment to delivering accurate, accessible, and actionable health information has strengthened community connections and amplified diverse voices in health communication.

Central District Baptist Assoc.

With over 90 years of service, the Central District Baptist Association has demonstrated unwavering commitment to uplifting the community through outreach programs and partnerships. Under the leadership of Rev. Moses A. Ward, Sr., the organization has engaged in impactful initiatives such as voter registration drives, financial literacy workshops, mentoring, and providing critical resources like food pantries, clothing closets, and health clinics.

Their collective strength lies in their 20-member churches, which work together to transform lives and embody the spirit of faith and service.



2024 Freedom Fund Award Honorees

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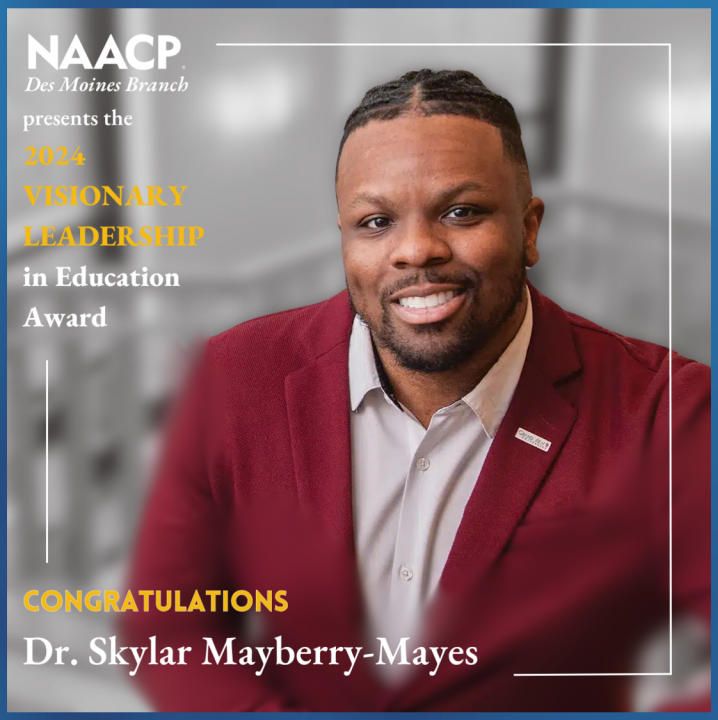


Skylar Mayberry - Mays

Dr. Mayberry-Mayes has exemplified outstanding dedication to education, workforce development, and advocacy. As the Executive Director of The Jacobson Institute, the Vice Chair of the Des Moines School Board, and a leader in numerous other boards and community organizations, he works to create pathways for success all people. His commitment to equitable access to education and career opportunities addresses systemic barriers and empowers underserved communities, ensuring that the next generation is prepared to thrive. His unwavering dedication continues to inspire those around him to strive for excellence and equity in all areas of life.

Candace Carr

From mentoring peers to addressing critical community issues like food insecurity, educational access, maternal health outcomes, and youth empowerment. Candace has proven herself to be a dedicated advocate for change exemplifying leadership, service, and excellence.

A senior at Drake University, Candace's academic achievements and community impact inspire her peers and elders alike. Her efforts to unite and uplift her community remind us all that "compassion for one another" should truly be a lifestyle.



2024 Freedom Fund Award Honorees

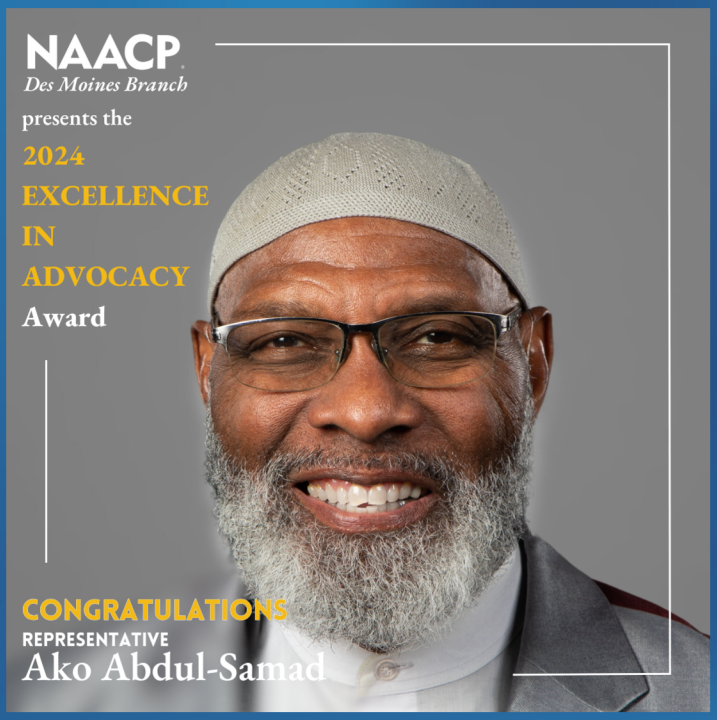
These individuals have demonstrated exceptional dedication to advancing our Enduring Commitments.

Ruth Ann Gaines

This award, named after the trailblazing Sue M. Wilson Brown, honors her legacy as a civil rights activist, suffragist, and the first female president of the Des Moines Branch NAACP. Brown's dedication to equality set a powerful precedent for leadership and service.

Rep. Gaines embodies this legacy through her remarkable contributions to education, mentorship, and advocacy. As founder of Sisters for Success, a mentor to countless youth and women, a life-long educator, and a servant leader in the community and the Iowa House of Representatives, she continues to uplift and inspire her community.





Ako Abdul - Samad

Rep. Abdul-Samad's life has been a testament to the power of advocacy and community leadership. As the founder of Creative Visions Human Development Institute and a state legislator for 18 years, he has championed initiatives that address systemic inequities, from police reform to poverty alleviation.

Ako's impact extends far beyond policy. His work includes mediating conflicts, empowering underserved populations, and fostering collaboration across community and government sectors. His leadership and dedication have made a lasting difference in countless lives.

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PRESIDENT'S AWARD

Russell E. Lovell, II

2024 President's Award

Russell E. Lovell, II

Drake University Law Professor Emeritus Russell Lovell taught constitutional law, employment discrimination and civil rights law, and remedies from 1976 to 2014. During his tenure, he served as Associate Dean for ten years—collaborating closely with Dean David Walker—and directed Drake's Clinical Programs from 1995 to 1999. As the founder and director of Drake's Public Service Scholarship Program, he mentored more than eighty Public Service Scholars. In recognition of his innovative teaching, Drake University honored him as its Outstanding Professor for Experiential Learning, notably for creating a program that allowed the entire 1L class to observe a live Iowa jury trial. Bloomberg Law highlighted this innovation in 2023, naming it one of the 10 most innovative law school programs.

Lovell's commitment to advancing civil rights began during his clerkship for Federal Appeals Judge Floyd Gibson, when he contributed to dismantling racial barriers in an Arkansas school desegregation case. Subsequently, as Director of Litigation for the Legal Services Organization of Indianapolis, he specialized in federal civil rights litigation. His prison reform advocacy led to a federal injunction shutting down a "dungeon-like" 48-cell solitary confinement unit in Indiana's maximum-security prison. He also played a major role in securing due process rights for parolees, culminating in the landmark 1972 Supreme Court decision in Morrissey v. Brewer.

In 2023, Lovell marked fifty years as a pro bono civil rights lawyer for the NAACP. Among his proudest achievements are serving as lead counsel in two NAACP pattern-and-practice employment discrimination cases resolved by comprehensive Consent Decrees, which integrated the Indiana State Police Department in the 1970s and the Des Moines Fire Department in the 1980s and 1990s. He also served as NAACP co-counsel in pivotal school desegregation cases in Indianapolis and Kansas City, including successful advocacy before the Supreme Court in Jenkins v. Missouri (1989). Since 2014, Lovell and Walker have filed nine NAACP amicus briefs in the Iowa and Nebraska Supreme Courts. Their work has reinvigorated Iowa's jury trial jurisprudence, expanded jury service eligibility to more than 160,000 individuals who had their citizenship rights restored, and influenced the adoption of the Des Moines Unbiased Policing Ordinance.

Former Drake Law Dean Alan Vestal noted that the NAACP has honored Lovell "at every level." His recognitions include:

- NAACP honors at the local (Des Moines) and state levels (Indiana and Iowa)
- NAACP 10-state Central U.S. Region recognition at the 50th anniversary of Brown v. Board of Education (2004) in Topeka, Kansas
- NAACP Foot Soldier in the Sand Award at the 2005 National Convention
- Iowa Juneteenth Celebration "Iowa Citizen of the Year" (2013)
- ACLU of Iowa Louise Noun Award for "uncommon courage on behalf of civil liberties" (2018)
- Iowa National Bar Assoc.'s Journey Award for commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (2020)
- Election as an American Bar Foundation Fellow (2022)
- Notre Dame Alumni Association's Fr. Louis Putz Social Justice Advocacy Award (2023)
- American Bar Association Making A Difference by Breaking Barriers Award (October 20, 2023)

Lovell's enduring dedication to civil rights, social justice, and equitable legal systems continues to shape his legacy as a teacher, mentor, advocate, and practitioner.

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