

CSSD Chronicle

State of Connecticut Judicial Branch
Court Support Services Division
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Celebrating Black History Month

Since 1976, every U.S. president has officially designated the month of February as *Black History Month*—an annual celebration that recognizes the achievements of black Americans and their central role in U.S. history. The origins of the event began with “Negro History Week,” the brainchild of noted historian Carter G. Woodson and other prominent African Americans.

Each year, a theme is chosen for Black History Month. For 2013, it was **At the Crossroads of Freedom and Equality: The Emancipation Proclamation and the March on Washington**. The chosen theme addressed two events with significant importance:

- In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln's deeply controversial Emancipation Proclamation was enacted, freeing all slaves in the United States.
- In 1963, a full century later, the March on Washington which marked a tipping-point in the civil rights movement.

In a February memo to CSSD staff, Executive Director Bill Carbone acknowledged the agency's continuing efforts to recognize the “value and importance of different cultures in our society” and encouraged offices to take the time to observe Black History Month in various ways. Subsequently, there were many CSSD events across the state. This edition of the CSSD Chronicle highlights the celebrations in the Adult Probation Offices of Bridgeport, Stamford, Hartford, and Manchester.



Red velvet cake, made by APO II Kesheonia Courts, celebrating Black History Month



The Reverend Ina Anderson

Bridgeport Adult Probation—The Bridgeport office has celebrated Black History Month celebration for the past 10 years. This year, it was held on February 19th and the guest speaker was the Reverend Ina Anderson, a local minister, motivational speaker, and community advocate. Anderson was also the first African American woman hired by the Bridgeport Fire Department where she rose to the rank of officer before her retirement.

After being introduced by Bridgeport Chief Sandra Eziokwu, Anderson took the podium and spoke to a large audience on the importance of researching, reading, and understanding black history—the good, the bad, and everything in between. “Black history IS American history,” Anderson said, “and I think there’s often times an issue in merging the two together.”

Anderson followed with a stirring speech that began, “There is no America without me. Not without my song, without my dance, without my planting in the fields; not without my contributions to science or math; not without all those things.” Anderson paralleled the accomplishments of white American historical figures of the last two centuries with the equal contributions made by black Americans—Louis Lattimer, Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and others who helped “contribute to society in such a magnificent manner.”

Anderson then discussed the controversial and pivotal 1857 Dred Scott Supreme Court decision which upheld slavery. Historians agree that the Dred Scott decision, intended to quell antislavery agitation, only fueled antislavery sentiment in the North and was a factor in the eruption of the Civil War in 1961. Anderson ended her remarks

by urging the audience to take the time to learn about the struggles of the past in order to appreciate the freedoms enjoyed today, and the work that still needs to be done in the future. “Everyone thinks that because you’re black, you know the history. That’s not true. And, the history, which is our foundation, [is] something we need to build upon.”



Following the presentation, there was a catered lunch served to dozens of CSSD staff, Court employees, and guests. The food, from Southern Hospitality restaurant in New Haven, included fried chicken and fish, collard greens, spiced chopped turkey, macaroni and cheese, cornbread and other traditional Southern dishes. The lunch room was richly decorated with streamers of black, red, and green representing the Pan-Africa flag. There were printed biographies and pictures of influential black Americans on the walls, and African art was scattered around the room. A large table of desserts, including a red velvet cake, baked by APO II Kesheonia Courts, rounded out the celebratory feast. Attendees were asked to bring a children’s book relating to black American culture to the luncheon. Dozens of books were collected and will be distributed to schools in the Bridgeport area. Special thanks goes out to committee members APO Trainee Latira Nesmith, CPO I Eboni Douglas, CPO II Ulysses Sherpa, CPO I Sandra Eziokwu, APO II Chyann Higgs, APO II Mayra Munoz, APO II Rui Rainho, and APO II Kesheonia Courts for organizing the event.

Stamford Adult Probation—The Stamford Adult Probation Office celebrated Black History month for the first time on February 27th. The entire office participated in a soul food pot luck, organized by APO II Emmanuel Clemetson. Participants cooked random dishes, common in soul food culture, such as pulled chicken, macaroni and cheese, and collard greens. This allowed all participants an opportunity to learn about the preparation of their assigned dish. During the meal, participants discussed several issues related to the black American community, and



APO II Erin Jackson read the poem *Ain’t I a Woman* by Sojourner Truth. As the event concluded, several participants expressed interest in having similar events to celebrate other cultures, and of course, next year’s Black History Month celebration.

The Stamford office invited Linda Tarrant Reid, author of *Discovering Black America*, to speak on black American culture and prepared a plaque for presentation to Reid for her contributions to the black American community. Unfortunately, Reid had to postpone her appearance at the February luncheon to a date in March. However, Reid’s delayed appearance will still have an important impact on staff as March is Women’s History Month.

Hartford Adult Probation—The Wawarme Avenue office held its first Black History Month celebration on February 21st with a luncheon and program for about 60 staff and guests. Probation officers served up hot platefuls of traditional Southern food prepared by Hot Pots, a local soul food restaurant. Guests were also treated to a huge table of sweet desserts made by officers and staff. The day's program began and ended with soulful prayer, and readings authored by black Americans. A creative adaptation of the television game show *Jeopardy!* was played and small, fun prizes were given out to those who knew the answers to different categories relating to



black American history. The luncheon room, and adjoining hallways, were artfully decorated with black American and African artwork, collages, and biographies. The celebration was also marked with a reading, by APO II Heather Cato, of the Presidential Proclamation, authorizing February as Black History Month. CSSD Executive Director Bill Carbone, Director Greg Halzack, Assistant Director Gary Roberge, and Regional Manager Ed Palmieri attended and participated in the festivities. Special recognition goes to the following committee members who organized this great event: APO II Heather Cato, CPO I Holly Lloyd, APO II Lynnequa Spence, Consultant Ella Smith, CPO I Tia Debrick, APO II Maurice Flowers, APO II Warren Barnett, CPO II Dori Santoemma, APO II Catherine Spence, and APO II Don Logan.

Manchester Adult Probation—The Manchester Office of Adult Probation held a Black History Month luncheon and program on March 1st. The celebration focused on the contributions of black Americans to the Arts. A short presentation was given to officers, staff and guests on the history of black Americans by way of letters, literature, and poetry. The following is an account of the program by CPO I Lisa Cato, who also organized the event:

“Poetry has always been a way to express feelings of joy, sorrow, outrage, humor, and hope. The poetry of the black community in America is no exception. An opportunity to read a description of life from a slave’s point-of-view is limited, and often emotional to read, but also a gem of African American history. One letter, from former slave Jordan Anderson, who was freed from a Tennessee plantation, is not only world-renowned and taught by historians, but has also been praised as a masterpiece of satire.

The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s was a time of flowering for literature and the arts and that flowering has continued to this day. Writers of African-American literature have been recognized with some of the highest honors, including the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature, which was awarded to Toni Morrison.

Among the themes and issues explored in black literature are the roles of African Americans within the larger American society, African-American culture, racism, slavery, and equality. When it comes to poetry, whether the verses were put down to accompany music, or as stand-alone literature, there is a power captured in the words that can send your heart soaring or bring tears to your eyes. The Manchester office invited Danielle Lawrence-Montague, who works for one of our contracted providers, to perform a spoken word piece titled ‘Lord...why did you make me black?’ authored by contemporary poetess RuNett Nia Ebo.”

The readings were followed by a catered lunch from Hot Pots restaurant in Hartford. It included fried chicken, macaroni and cheese, corn bread, and salad, and a seafood Jambalaya was made by APO II Katherine Cummings. Dessert was red velvet cupcakes made by APO II Rudy Johnson.

The website History.com is an excellent resource for biographies, bibliographies, links, and videos about black Americans in U.S. history, as well as information on the celebration of Black History month.

The CSSD Chronicle is a regular publication of information and news about the Court Support Services Division.

Questions or comments on this edition, or suggestions for future articles, can be directed to

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