



TRAILBLAZERS

FOR

**DIVERSITY
EQUITY INCLUSION
E-BOOK SERIES**

CHAPTER 2. BLACK HISTORY MONTH

The Best of the Best

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INTRODUCTION

The [Library of Congress](#) provides a catalog of Commemorative Observances for selected national observances and commemorative months.

Each February . nds American citizens, businesses, and organizations, paying tribute to the diversity and contributions of African Americans in what is known as “Black History Month”.

In 1926 [Dr. Carter G. Woodson](#), American historian, and father of “Black History Month” initially instituted the first week-long celebration to raise awareness of African Americans’ contributions to history. This week was chosen because it celebrates the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, both of whom dramatically affected the lives of African Americans.

Prior to this time, little information could be found regarding African American history. Important achievements were left out of history books, and there was a general misconception that African Americans had made little contribution to U.S. society or history. 50 years later, the week became a month, and today February is celebrated as African American History Month (or, more popularly referenced as Black History Month).

National African American History Month, or “Black History Month”, in February, celebrates the contributions that African Americans have made to American history in their struggles for freedom and equality and deepens our understanding of our Nation's history.

Within the Black community, it is wryly shared that February was selected because it is the shortest month of the year. However, documents show that Dr. Woodson selected the first week in February as Black History week in that the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, two key figures in the history of African Americans, were marked in this first week.

In 1976, President Ford issued the first [Message on the Observance of Black History Month](#) and hitting the reset button for the month long observance of the history of Africans brought to the American shores as slaves, along with the resulting contributions of African-Americans to this nation.

Here at Trailblazers Impact, we would like to advance the celebration of truth by continuing our January conversation, (chapter 1), on segregation by sharing more about the history of structural racism through noted luminaries.

Bombingham is a nickname for Birmingham, Alabama during the [Civil Rights Movement](#) due to the 50 dynamite explosions that occurred in the city between 1947 and 1965.

The bombings were initially used against African Americans attempting to move into neighborhoods with entirely white residents. Later, the bombings were used against anyone working towards racial [desegregation](#) in the city. One neighborhood within Birmingham experienced so many bombings it developed the nickname of Dynamite Hill.

Trailblazer Impact guest, Janice Stewart, describes seeing the 16th Street Church in Birmingham burning as she was headed to Sunday school. Four of her close friends were killed that day in this historical church bombing, in what has been described for more than 50 years as nothing short of an aftermath that looked like a war zone.

Neither "America" nor the world could close their eyes or turn their heads away from the sight of five young girls in Sunday School being carried out, blown away, by dynamite and hatred.

What happened this date, as witnessed by Janice Stewart, then age 14, turned the tide and worked to rally people of good will across the nation to say, "no more".

The civil rights movement gained new momentum on the backs of these young victims, and the injuries of 20 others.

The civil rights movement gained new allies, new funding, and a new legislative appetite in Washington, D.C., to finally extend full citizenship and constitutional rights to Black Americans, nearly 100 years after the close of the civil war, through the passage of the '65 Civil Rights Act.

JANICE STEWART

Janice Stewart bounced back from her lived experiences as a child of the deep south with a front-row seat to “The” civil rights movement: Birmingham, AL. Birmingham, AL where the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote his famous, Letter From a Birmingham Jail, contemplating the “state of the race”, and the ability to keep the civil rights movement advancing ever-forward. In this famous letter, Dr. King shares his inner most thoughts on Brown v. Board of Education; his Arrests, Career in Ministry, Political and Social Views, Threats and attacks against his life, the effects of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

While many accomplished Black women shared the same negative experiences associated with a youth constrained by limited or no access to quality education, segregated housing, the absence of youth recreation programs or centers, and career-building job opportunities, few share memories of segregation + racial violence, and even fewer, bore witness to the infamous bombing of their church and the loss of four childhood friends who, during Sunday school, had their life cut short way too soon, and simply because of the color of their skin.

Even now, almost 60 years later, Janice has moments of wondering why she was spared the same fate. However, she finds comfort in a life well lived.

A life filled with personal, academic, and professional accomplishments; a life that allowed her to dig in and provide impact in improving housing conditions for countless of families with low and moderate incomes.



Thus, she has been a living testament to the many fallacies of racial hatred and white supremacy where one is assumed to be incapable of learning or contributing, or improving based solely on their race.

Janice Stewart is President of JMS Solutions, a "regulation reality" company, specializing in affordable housing. She is a trainer for Nan McKay and Associates, and a professional in the assisted housing field for many years, with a demonstrated history of successfully working in the government administration industry. She is a strong business development professional skilled in Nonprofit Organizations, Affordable Housing, Policy Analysis, Government, and Strategic Planning.

Listen to [Janice's](#) interview on Trailblazers Impact Podcast and watch [her video](#) on YouTube. In her interview, you will learn the difference between racism that is experienced today compared to what Janice experienced more than 50 years ago.

MURIEL TILLINGHAST



Muriel Tillinghast embodies the very meaning of a Trailblazer with Impact!

In **Episode 143** Muriel shares, "The Movement continues in every aspect of life. I have carried my understanding of its principles into the classroom, to work, into prisons and jails, and in my daily walk through life. It is as vital to me as the air I breathe."

And exactly what "movement" is she referencing.? Well, for those of us born since the 1920s, black or white, that would be "the civil rights movement", spanning the 1950s and 60s, with its start marked by the refusal of Mrs. Rosa Parks exhausted at the close of a long workday, booked and arrested, for not relinquishing her bus seat to a "white man" on December 1, 1955 in Montgomery, AL.

This refusal led to the subsequent boycott of the public transit system by the black community that lasted over one year with consequential economic impact to the city, and a slew of legal challenges to the constitutionality of segregation in public accommodations.

The NAACP brought federal suit resulting in a November 1956 decision that bus segregation is unconstitutional under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Thus, began the MOVEMENT for securing civil rights of Black Americans equal to that of White Americans in all aspects of public accommodations from transportation to recreation to housing, voting rights, and beyond.

Muriel Tillinghast, born in the early 1940s, with an activist grandmother and "teacher-mom" was coming of age in the mid to late 1950s. While as a youth she lacked "context" to much of what she saw around her while growing up in the nation's capital, she was certainly aware of the inequities, neglect, and even "abuses" attendant to the Black veterans she saw struggling to regain their post-war footing and the childhood experiences and conversations that left her somehow understanding that she was different, and in one instance, with a well-stationed white woman telling her to, "stay with me, that way they won't come for you".

Both the outward indices of being marginalized as a black citizen along with the nuanced messaging informed her activism during high school, and when entering Howard University, long considered the flagship of the Black Ivy League schools, just as America opened the “turbulent decade of the 1960s. This is “the” decade that saw the convergence of the civil rights movement, the women’s rights movement, and the anti-war movement; Stonewall; the assassination of Malcolm X, President John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., presidential nominee, Robert F. Kennedy; and, the overwhelming tragic murder of four young girls attending Sunday school in “Bombingham, AL”.

The 1960s was also the decade that Black Americans were Finally granted full citizenship with the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act with Black Men AND Women registering to vote, exercising their equal right to execute “one man, one vote”.

The '65 Voting Rights Act was THE “act to enforce the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution” signed into law 95 years after the constitutional amendment was ratified. In those years, African Americans in the South faced tremendous obstacles to voting, including poll taxes, literacy tests, and other bureaucratic restrictions to deny them the right to vote. Black Americans also risked harassment, intimidation, economic reprisals, and physical violence when they tried to register or vote. As a result, very few African Americans were registered voters, and they had little, if any, political power, either locally or nationally.

Muriel Tillinghast became a foot soldier in the fight for voter registration in Mississippi, and the voting rights of Black Americans across the land.

At Howard University she was able to take the organizing and survival skills learned during high school years while a member of the Girl Scouts and the Maryland Synod Luther League, a Lutheran religious association for young people in the United States of America, to her college membership in SNCC, pronounced “snick” with its on-the-ground activism and community organizing effort and subsequent “Freedom Rides”, becoming one of only three women leaders of the now famous SNCC-Mississippi voter registration battleground.

Living in the harshest conditions, suffering both food and sleep deprivation, harassment, and personal threats; walking as much as 30-50 miles a day, hiding in the homes of rural Black sharecroppers who defied local social mores and, sleeping on cardboard over wood planks with extremely poor men and women, who in the face of potential job loss, loss of housing and even loss of life, dared to register to vote, finding the fortitude to brave the worst, as did she.

Muriel was not a casual observer of history-in-the-making, nor a “student of history”, she is the early 21st Century evidence of “Living History”.

These life-defining experiences of her college days confirmed her trajectory for the next 50 years. She took her knowledge, skills, and abilities attendant to community organizing, community development, conflict resolution and mediation, loyalty to others, fidelity to a just cause for social and political change, and much more, into her post-1960s life and career that found her working for improved living conditions and equal access to human services in cities and neighborhoods from the Big Apple (NYC), to Atlanta, to British Guyana and other national and international communities-in-need. More to the point: communities in need of Muriel Tillinghast and her baked-in-the-DNA commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Muriel credits her many successes to three basic tenets: learning to listen; respecting others regardless of education or economic standing; understanding that her opinion was just ‘one of many’.

Listen to [Muriel's](#) interview on Trailblazers Impact Podcast and watch [her video](#) on YouTube. In her interview, you will learn why the Black Lives Matter movement needs to be organized better and differently.

DELOIS STRUM

DeLois Strum also known as DeeDee Strum, a 40+ year entrepreneur, a public speaker, an affordable housing advocate, and is currently involved in offshore wind as a renewable source of energy. She's a feminist who believes that Black women continue to hold a moral high ground in America and must raise their voice to elevate the conversation on gender and racial equality if America is to achieve its full potential.

DeLois has worked in the housing and community development industry as a housing professional, and she previously chaired the National Section 8 committee of the National Association of the Housing and Redevelopment Officials. She started her housing services company, MD Strum, in 1981 where she was involved in major housing and community development programs. She is also the co-host of TrailBlazers Impact Podcast, telling the stories of Black women from the civil rights era to the young Black women of today. Nan and DeeDee have been friends since the 1970s and are enjoying working together again after all these years.



In addition to her advisory work on the wind as an energy source with Strum Contracting, she is a Senior Faculty Advisor to the UMD School of Public Health - Students Transitioning into Effective Professionals. DeLois Strum is a dynamic public speaker for the board and staff professional development, entrepreneurship, and mentoring of women and youth.

She has a strong passion for public policy and governmental affairs to increase the economic self-sufficiency of families of low income, strengthen the middle class, promote social justice and increase support for small and women-owned business development and growth. She has a strong belief that each of us must "be the change we want to see".

Listen to [DeeDee's](#) interview on Trailblazers Impact Podcast and watch [her video](#) on YouTube. In her interview, you will learn why society needs to recognize what everyone brings to the table with justice and equality.

JAMES LOEWEN

James Loewen's gripping retelling of American racial history as it should, and could, be taught, **Lies My Teacher Told Me**, has sold more than 1,500,000 copies and continues to inspire K-16 teachers to get students to the challenge, rather than memorize, their textbooks.

Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong came out in 1999. The Gustavus Myers Foundation named his book, **Sundown Towns**, a "Distinguished Book of 2005." In 2010, Teachers College Press brought out *Teaching What Really Happened*, intended to give K-12 teachers (and prospective teachers) solutions to the problems pointed out in Loewen's earlier works.

James Loewen taught race relations for twenty years at the University of Vermont. Previously he taught at predominantly black Tougaloo College in Mississippi. He now lives in Washington, D.C., continuing his research on how Americans remember their past. His mission is to overturn myths and misinformation that too often pass for U.S. history. He spent two years at the Smithsonian Institution, where he studied and compared twelve American history textbooks then widely used throughout the United States.



He has been an expert witness in more than 50 civil rights, voting rights, and employment cases. His awards include the First Annual Spivack Award of the American Sociological Association for "sociological research applied to the field of intergroup relations," the American Book Award (for **Lies My Teacher Told Me**), and the Oliver Cromwell Cox Award for Distinguished Anti-Racist Scholarship. He is also a Distinguished Lecturer for the Organization of American Historians and Visiting Professor of Sociology at Catholic University in Washington, DC.

In 2012 the American Sociological Association gave Loewen its Cox-Johnson-Frazier Award, for "scholarship in service to social justice." He is the first white person ever to win this award. Also in 2012, the National Council for the Social Studies gave Loewen its "Spirit of America" Award, previously won by, Jimmy Carter, Rosa Parks, and Mr. Rogers.

As the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War approached, Loewen asked thousands of K-12 teachers in workshops and audiences about its cause(s). Depressed at their replies, he recruited a co-editor and published *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader* (University Press of Mississippi, 2010), which sets the record straight in the Confederates' own words.

His other books include *Mississippi: Conflict and Change* (co-authored), which won the Lillian Smith Award for Best Southern Nonfiction but was rejected for public school text used by the State of Mississippi, leading to the path-breaking First Amendment lawsuit, *Loewen et al. v. Turnipseed, et al.* He also wrote *The Mississippi Chinese: Between Black and White*, *Social Science in the Courtroom* and *Lies My Teacher Told Me About Christopher Columbus*. ASALH, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, at its centennial Founders Day in 2016, honored James Loewen as one of 32 "Rays of Light".

Listen to [James's](#) interview on Community Trailblazers Podcast and watch [his video](#) on YouTube. In his interview, he tells us all about sundown towns and their effect on race relations and fair housing.

THE TURBULENT SIXTIES

Before Stonewall - Traces the social, political, and cultural history of homosexuality in America in the twentieth century focusing on the beginning of the Gay Liberation Movement after a police raid in 1969 on Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City; and the three-day riot that followed.

The Weather Underground - ... a radical group whose stated goal was the violent overthrow of the U.S. government details a valuable chapter in the history of the 60s protest movement and leftism in America. The Weathermen were a faction of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), one of the driving forces behind the period's mass protests against social injustice and the Vietnam War.

Woodstock - For three days in the summer of 1969, a rock concert was held on an upstate New York farm and 400,000 people attended -- far more than were anticipated, far more than paid, far more than could be fed or sheltered or cared for after injuries or drug overdoses. Few documentaries have captured a time and place more completely than this one.

Crisis - Behind a Presidential Commitment - In June 1963, President John F. Kennedy and his brother, U.S. Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, forced one of the gravest racial confrontations of the 20th century. Despite a federal court order, Alabama Governor George Wallace vowed he would prevent 2 black students from entering the all-white University of Alabama.

Four Little Girls - When a bomb tears through the basement of a black Baptist church on a peaceful fall morning, it takes the lives of four young girls. This racially motivated crime, taking place at a time when the civil rights movement is burning with a new flame, could have doused that flame forever. Instead, it fuels a nation's outrage and brings Birmingham, Alabama to the forefront of America's concern.

A Summer of Love - ...the hippie revolution of San Francisco during the 60s, and how the free love and music turned into a life of drug use, violence, and broken dreams.

The Kennedy Assassination - Forty years after he was fatally shot, more than 80 percent of Americans still believe there was a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy and that the assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald did not act alone. ABC News showcases a three-dimensional, computer-generated reconstruction of the assassination, more than 70 interviews, and some of the more than four million documents related to the death to prove that theories of a conspiracy are unfounded.

60s Gains (Women) - Re-emergence of women's rights movement with significant civil rights gains: adoption of the 1963 Equal Pay Act, the prohibition of inequality based on gender in the

Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the breaching of barriers to employment for women.

60s Gains (Black Americans) - landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 is considered the most comprehensive civil rights legislation in U.S. history with the act granted the federal government strongly enforcement powers in the area of civil rights prohibiting tactics to limit voting; guaranteed racial and religious minorities equal access to public accommodations; outlawed job discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; continued the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights; established the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Commission. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 expanded the 14th and 15th amendments by banning racial discrimination in voting practices. The act was a response to the barriers that prevented African Americans from voting for nearly a century.

SOURCES

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<https://library.duke.edu/lilly/film-video/spotlight/archives/turbulent-sixties>

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/civilrights/modern-civil-rights-movement>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



DeeDee Strum, CDP®, TrailBlazers Impact Podcast Co-host & e-Book Author

The e-book is authored by a Certified Diversity Professional. It is organized around various themes, such as this one on segregation, with stories of the women who went on to succeed even in the face of lawful segregation.

“Empowered women, Empower women.” While the author of this quote is unknown, it captures the essence of who I am, and that which has fueled my journey.

My prayerful mother, along with my dad, Major P.G. Strum, Jr. (USAF, Ret.), ensured every exposure & opportunity for the five of us to succeed teaching us from childhood the lived value of “Diversity Equity Inclusion”.



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