

Loebsack Column: Reflecting on African American History Month

Written by Joe Hand
Thursday, 28 February 2013 09:21

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By Congressman Dave Loebsack

Throughout the month of February, Iowans gathered for different events and celebrations across the state to honor and pay tribute to the many contributions African Americans have made to our great state and nation. Iowa has always had a proud history of leading the way in advancing civil rights.

As we reflect on the long history of African Americans and their struggle for freedom and equality, we must also take the time to commemorate the great achievements of African Americans right here in Iowa. From the Civil War to the 21st Century, some of our country's greatest African American leaders have called Iowa home.

As a graduate of Iowa State, I have long appreciated the story and achievements of George Washington Carver. Born on a plantation in Missouri, Carver came to Iowa and became the first African American to enroll at what would later be known as Iowa State University. Completing his bachelor's degree in 1894, he became the school's first African American faculty member. After graduating with his master's, he joined Alabama's Tuskegee Institute, where his work resulted in hundreds of new products from peanuts and other crops. Today, he is remembered for improving farming practices and being one of the first prominent African American scientists.

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I'm proud to represent an area that is home to many great African American leaders. Born in Ottumwa, Archie Alexander went on to study engineering at the University of Iowa. He later became a renowned architect and designed a variety of projects around the country. One of his most well-known endeavors was the design of an airfield where the legendary Tuskegee airmen trained during the Second World War.

In 1941 President Franklin Roosevelt overruled his top generals and ordered the creation of an all African American flight training program. These pilots, navigators, bombardiers, maintenance, and support staff became known as the Tuskegee Airmen. They served with distinction during World War II despite facing segregation both inside and outside the military. A few years ago, I had the great honor of presenting the Tuskegee Airmen Bronze Medal to a constituent in the Second District in honor of his service during World War II as one of the first African American military pilots.

I am proud to be an Iowan and I hope that over the last month you have found a way to commemorate the great achievements of African Americans here in Iowa and across the United States. Our state and our country have made great advances in equality and we must honor those who struggled so long against injustice and discrimination. As we have done in the past, it is my hope that Iowa will move forward together and continue to fight for equality for all our people.

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