

There are too few landmarks celebrating African American accomplishments in history. We all know The Lorraine Motel, the Edmund Pettis Bridge and the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. But few people know about many of the great, non-violent accomplishments by African-Americans prior to what is known as the modern day civil rights movement. E.A. Ware Elementary School (now Jordan Hall) is one such building. It opened in 1922 and was named for the first president of Atlanta University and is the first ‘brick and mortar’ school for African-Americans in Atlanta. It is also a contributing building to the University Historic District as named and identified by the National Park Service.

Ware School is evidence of the ***first time in American history*** that the African American community used ***the power of the vote*** to change how the white power structure spent tax money. In 1918, AD Williams, grandfather of Martin Luther King, Jr, led a voter registration drive for black residents. These voters defeated a city bond issue to fund police, fire and white schools, since it needed a 2/3 majority to pass. They defeated it 3 times in 10 months, until they received a guarantee of \$3.5 million to build black schools. Ware School was the first school built, Washington High, Brown Middle and Howard Middle would follow. This event marks the point in time when the black community transitioned from the politics of accommodation professed by Booker T. Washington, to the politics of confrontation. For this reason, I believe this was the true start of the modern civil rights movement.

Education was critically important to the black community. Before the Civil War, it was illegal to educate slaves. This is why within 17 years after the war, the community had Atlanta University, Gaines Hall and Stone Hall (now Fountain Hall). Many of the leaders of the Civil Rights movement were educated in these schools, raising the overall education level of the community. This, in turn, raised the quality of the colleges of the AU Center since they no longer needed to teach high school level classes. The importance of this cannot be overstated. I have heard it said that one reason Atlanta navigated racial issues better than most cities is that there were highly educated African-Americans leading the way.

This was a very dangerous time for African Americans in America and Georgia, which makes their effort all the more remarkable. For example:

- In 1906, there were race riots in Atlanta. In 1912, white mobs in Forsyth County lynched blacks and then chased all black residents from the county.
- In 1915, “Birth of a Nation” was released and premiered at the Fox Theater. This caused the rebirth of the KKK in the south.
- 1919 was called ‘Red Summer’ because of the hundreds of African Americans killed during race riots by white mobs.
- 1921 Tulsa Race Riots left 15,000 blacks homeless, with 300-3000 blacks killed
- More than 620 blacks were lynched in America 1910-1920
- Many people had to pay 15-20 years of poll taxes to be able to register to vote, yet they did it and succeeded.
- This was more than ***40 years before ‘Bloody Sunday’ in Selma***, where people marched for the ***RIGHT*** to vote.

In spite of this nasty climate that African-Americans had to live in, they succeeded. That same year, AD Williams attended the NAACP national convention in Cleveland, Ohio, carrying letters from mayor James Key and Governor Hugh Dorsey inviting the NAACP to hold the next convention in Atlanta, which they did! Imagine, the NAACP, an interracial organization working for civil rights welcomed to Atlanta in 1920! Even though Georgia was considered one of the most active KKK areas in the nation, the NAACP was welcomed and treated well.

This history of African Americans working to change the world can only be told in its entirety in Atlanta. I am part of a team working to create an approach to history that is rooted in entertainment in the knowledge that people are not as excited about going to museums. Our goal is to use this to build a real tourism industry that highlights our civil rights history and revitalizes the WestSide.

Since Jordan Hall is part of the University Center National Historic District, it should be protected. Jordan Hall is an important part of the fabric of historic buildings that tell an even bigger story.

The YMCA should be in Vine City, but there is so much vacant land in Vine City that it is hard to understand why it is necessary to destroy such a historic building.

This is a potential black eye for the City and for the Y. Please let me know what we can do to avert this tragedy.