

Civil Rights

The right to equal treatment and opportunities guaranteed under law

The 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1868 gave freed men and women equal protection under the law. Despite this, African Americans continued to face racism and segregation in their daily lives. Resistance to this discrimination grew to form the modern Civil Rights Movement after World War II.

As the national movement brought forth federal laws to reverse injustices, small groups and individuals worked tirelessly at the local level to secure the recognition of fundamental human rights and dignity for all people. They not only initiated real change in Alexandria but they also laid the groundwork for ongoing and future efforts in the fight against systemic racism.

As concerned citizens of Alexandria, Virginia, we submit this message to the City Council of the City of Alexandria, on this 14th day of May, 1968, to invite the attention of City Government to some, but by no means all, of the problems that complicate the daily lives of a significant segment of the citizenry of Alexandria. We report on the basis of our contacts with that segment of the population and with a sincere hope that the City will heed our call to action while the time to do so remains.

Abstract to the 42 Points paper written by the Secret Seven in 1968 (Ferdinand T. Day and Alexandria Black History Museum)

Secret Seven

As the fight for civil rights grew across the country in the 1950s, eight Black men in Alexandria came together to “tackle the whole myriad of segregation issues in the city” (A.M. Miller). Though there were eight men, they became known as the Secret Seven – James Anderson, Fr. John Davis, Ferdinand T. Day, Lawrence Day, Nelson Greene, Sr., Col. Marion Johnson, A. Melvin Miller, and Edward Patterson.

They became quietly influential advocates for the needs and rights of the Black community. The eight men had different areas of expertise, allowing them to focus on a wide range of issues, including but not limited to education, affordable housing, neighborhood safety, voting, and integrated job opportunities. When a problem arose, the group assessed the situation, wrote a position paper on it, and distributed the paper to the community and politicians. One of these papers, *42 Points*, outlined the issues that most disproportionately impacted their community and their proposed solutions. Most recently, in 2018, Gwen Day-Fuller, daughter of Ferdinand Day, recalled that their main goal was “to make sure there was a voice” for the Black community.

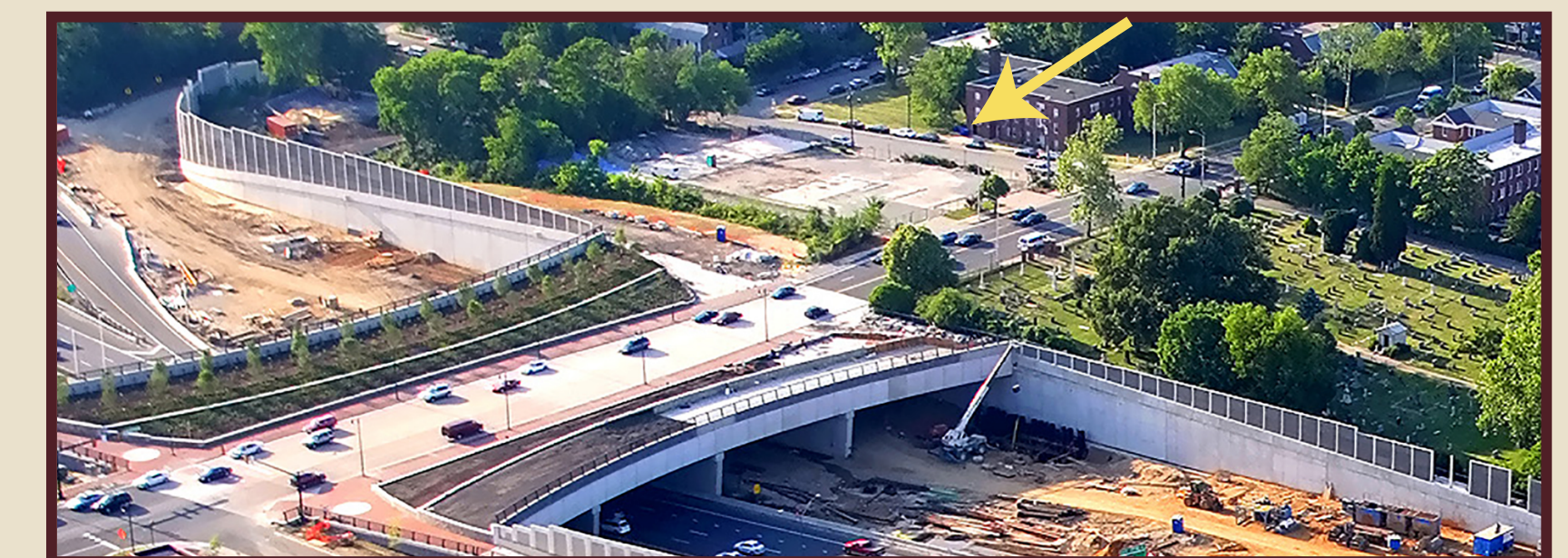
Women in Civil Rights

Throughout the 20th century, many of Alexandria’s Black women championed causes in support of the Black community and were essential to the fight for civil rights. Included among the many women who worked in various realms, largely in the second half of the 20th century, were Lorraine Funn Atkins, Georgia Brown, Rosa Byrd, Connie Belle Sitgraves Chissell, Helen Lumpkins Day, Lillie Finklea, Ramona Hatten, Blois Oliver Doyles Hundley, Elsie Charity Taylor Jordan, Eudora N. Lyles, Gwen Menefee-Smith, Eula Miller, Helen Anderson Miller, Alice Morgan, Lillian Stanton Patterson, Joyce Rawlings, Annie Beatrice Bailey Rose, Katrina Ross, Ruby J. Tucker, Dorothy Evans Turner, and Shirley Tyler. While they did not belong to a single group, these women were pivotal in changing the city for the better and improving the lives of its residents.

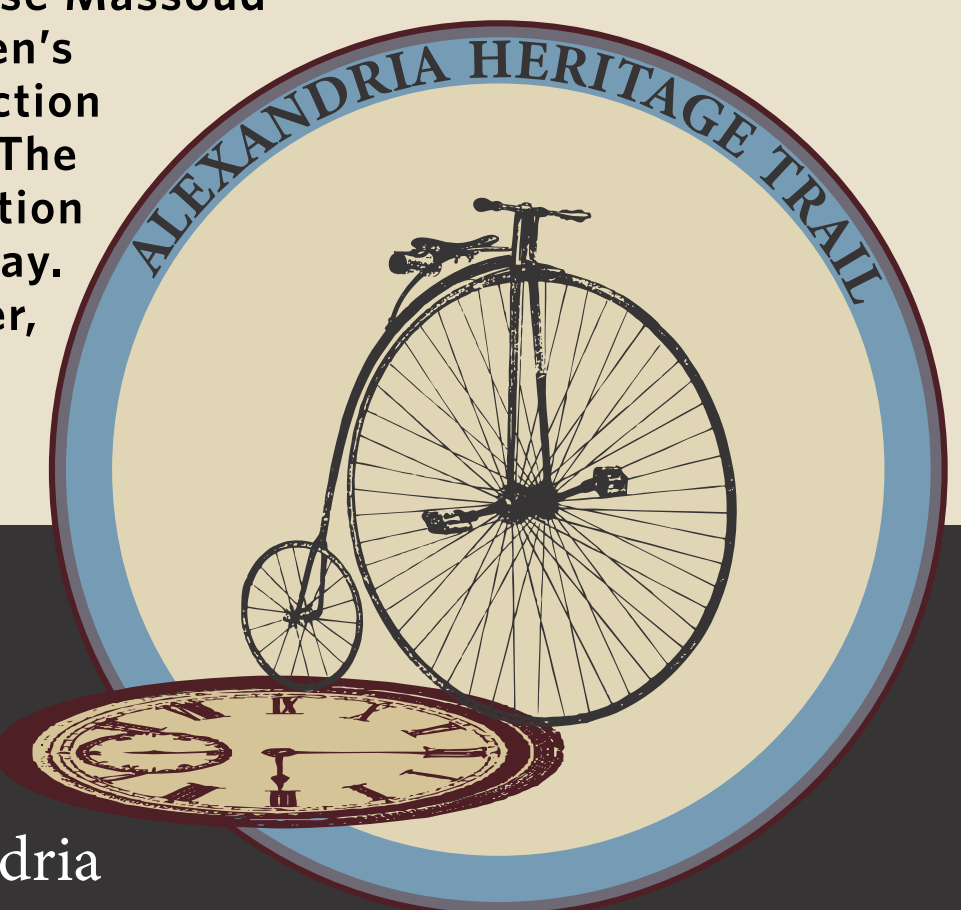
The women focused their energies on a broad array of issues such as the desegregation of schools; equality in city employment opportunities; the preservation of Black history; neighborhood safety and the fight against drug access and addiction; the protection of existing public housing, an increase in its numbers, and the enforcement of fair policies for its residents; voter registration, education, and access; and the well-being of children, families, seniors, and disabled people. These women, and many others, laid the foundation for work that continues today.

The black community has a history of being threatened by development. Lyles recalled when the city seriously considered replacing Rte. 1, which runs through the neighborhood, with a toll expressway in 1972. That led her to form the Inner City Civic Association so she could help make black residents aware that they could be pushed out of their neighborhood.

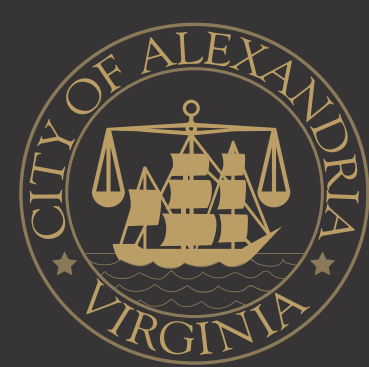
Recollections of Eudora Lyles in 1983 in which she spoke of her formation of the Inner City Civil Association in 1972 to fight the proposed Route 1 toll road from passing through and destroying the historically Black Parker-Gray neighborhood. (*Washington Post*)



In 1997, Lillian Finklea and Louise Massoud founded the Friends of Freedmen's Cemetery to prevent its destruction during the expansion of I-495. The yellow arrow indicates the location of the cemetery near the highway. The cemetery was restored later, and it was dedicated as a memorial in 2014. (Scott Kozel, Woodrow Wilson Bridge Project Photos)



Courtesy of AlexRenew and The Office of Historic Alexandria



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