

Pioneering African American lawyers dedicated to fighting segregation and legal racism started gathering between 1890 and 1900 to begin the formation of the National Bar Association. This movement had a permanent and profound impact upon a nation that at the time excluded African-American lawyers from the mainstream of society and the legal profession, whose own American Bar Association denied membership to African-American lawyers. The following 12 lawyers founded the National Bar Association in 1925 in Des Moines, Iowa.

FROM DES MOINES, IOWA



S. JOE BROWN (1875–1950) was the founder (1915) and first president of the Des Moines Branch of the NAACP, the oldest NAACP unit west of the Mississippi River. In 1898, Brown was the first African American graduate from the University of Iowa in liberal arts (earning Phi Beta Kappa.) He was among of the first African Americans who graduated from the Iowa Law School. Brown formed a partnership with George Woodson and practiced law in Des Moines. Most of Brown's work involved civil, probate, and title matters. He was the first African American to appear in front of the Iowa Supreme Court in 1905, and defended more than 30 clients who faced the death penalty; none were executed and 10 were acquitted. He was a member of the commission that drafted the nationally noted Des Moines Plan of city government in 1907. After serving in the army during World War I, Brown secured a building in Des Moines in 1918 and started the Park Street Army YMCA for black soldiers. Following the war the YMCA continued at 12th and Crocker Streets in Des Moines.



CHARLES P. HOWARD, SR. (1890–1965) served in World War I in France as a First Lieutenant, having been trained in the segregated Black Army division in Fort Dodge, Iowa. Howard received his law degree in 1922 at Drake University Law School. He had an illustrious sports career and was an accomplished college athlete, teacher and coach. As a first year law student in 1920, Howard passed the bar examination, was admitted to practice law in Iowa, and defended a client in a first-degree murder charge, with an acquittal. A brilliant lawyer and outstanding crusader, he saved more than 75 men from the gallows. Howard co-founded the National Negro Publishers Association, because black newsmen were not welcomed in national publishing associations. By 1928, he was a county commissioner, prosecuting attorney, and publisher of The Iowa Observer. In 1948, Howard was the first black keynote speaker at the Progressive National Convention in Philadelphia that ratified the candidacy of Henry A. Wallace for U.S. president. He traveled throughout the world and promoted African unity with heads of states in Africa. He was a close friend of the celebrated American singer and Civil Rights advocate Paul Robeson.

National Bar Association FOUNDERS



JAMES B. MORRIS, SR. (1890–1977) was a 1915 graduate of Howard University Law School, Washington, D.C. He came to Des Moines in 1916 to visit a college classmate, George Woodson, and began his law practice in 1917. During World War I, he was a U.S. Army battalion intelligence officer in France and was wounded at the Battle of Metz. He returned to Des Moines in 1919 and resumed his law practice with S. Joe Brown. Morris served as deputy Polk County Treasurer from 1921 to 1924. A long advocate of Civil Rights, he participated in cases which ultimately resulted in greater opportunity and equal accommodation in housing, public facilities, public school teaching, and employment in Iowa. He purchased the Iowa Bystander in 1922 and under his direction it became a crusader for equal opportunity and sought to prevent indifference in the area of race relations. Morris was its publisher and editor through 1972, helping it to become one of the five oldest African-American newspapers in the United States.



GERTRUDE E. DURDEN RUSH (1880–1962) was the first African-American woman to be admitted to the Iowa Bar and, in 1918, to practice law in the state of Iowa. She practiced law until the 1950s in Des Moines and Chicago, and advanced the rights of African-American women. A native of Texas, she graduated from Quincy Business College, in Parsons, Texas in 1906. Rush was a composer and a playwright. She studied at Westerman Music Conservatory in Des Moines, and in 1914 earned a Bachelor of Arts degree at Des Moines College. In Des Moines, she formed the Charity League and the Protection Home for Negro Girls and organized the Woman's Law and Political Study Club. She was a delegate to the Pennsylvania Emancipation Exposition of 1913 in Philadelphia—marking the Emancipation Proclamation's 50th anniversary. She also chaired departments for the National Bar Association of Colored Women, and helped form the Des Moines Chapter of the NAACP.



GEORGE HENRY WOODSON (1865–1933) was a lawyer, politician, activist, and the first president of the National Bar Association. Woodson was born to slave parents in Virginia and graduated in 1895 from Howard University Law School. By 1896, he had opened a law practice in Iowa, with offices in Oskaloosa, Albia, and Des Moines. In 1901 Woodson organized the Iowa Negro Bar Association and helped found the Iowa Chapter of the Afro-American Council. That same year he formed a partnership with S. Joe Brown that lasted 20 years. Then in 1905, Woodson answered a call from American sociologist and civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois to a group of African-American intellectual elite known as the "Talented Tenth" to form an all-black national civil rights organization. Woodson became one of the founders and one of the "Original 29" members of the Niagara Movement in 1905. The Niagara Movement was the forerunner of the NAACP. Woodson also "fathered" the Republican Party among African Americans in Iowa. In 1921, Woodson returned to Des Moines to serve as deputy collector of customs, a title he held until his death. In 1926, President Calvin Coolidge appointed him to head the commission to investigate economic conditions in the Virgin Islands. He represented the Virgin Islands at the Republican National Convention in Kansas City in 1928.

FROM CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

WENDELL E. GREEN (1887–1959) was the first African-American lawyer to become a Circuit Court Judge in Cook County, Illinois. Judge Green was a graduate from the University of Kansas and earned his law degree from the University of Chicago Law School. He began practicing criminal law in 1920. He was appointed to the Chicago civil service commission in 1935 and was elected a municipal court judge in 1942, then re-elected in 1948. Judge Green was appointed to the Circuit Court in 1950 and was re-elected in 1951 and 1957. He was a dedicated and distinguished judge and the first national secretary of the National Bar Association.

CORNELIUS FRANCIS STRADFORD (1892–1963) was one of a group of attorneys, who argued the case of *Hansberry et al. v. Lee et. al.* (311 U.S. 32) before the U.S. Supreme Court. In this landmark 1940 case, the nation's highest court abolished the restrictive covenants on the use of land that had limited racial integration in Chicago neighborhoods. Another notable experience in the legal career of C. F. Stradford was representing his father J. B. Stradford, also an attorney, following the historically significant Tulsa race riots of 1921. C. F. Stradford co-founded the Cook County Bar Association in Illinois. Since 1997, the Cook County State's Attorney's Office has been recognizing distinguished attorneys and judges within the African-American community with the C. F. Stradford Award.

JESSE NATHANIEL BAKER (1890–1976) served as treasurer (1927–28) of the National Bar Association. A native of Virginia, Baker graduated from Virginia State College in 1912 and in 1917 earned a law degree at Howard University Law School, Washington, D.C. He then began practicing law in Chicago, Illinois. He served as First Sergeant in the U.S. Army at Camp Grand, Illinois from 1918–19. In 1896, with C. Francis Stradford, Wendell E. Green and other black lawyers, Baker initiated the Cook County Bar Association (CCBA) to plan protests against discrimination in hotels, theaters, and restaurants, and to address judicial elections and school desegregation. CCBA was formerly incorporated in 1920.

WILLIAM H. HAYNES (nd) was part of the CCBA delegation that traveled to Des Moines in 1925 to form the NBA. Haynes served as an advocate to protect the rights and the well being of all citizens, but particularly black citizens.

GEORGE CORNELIUS ADAMS (b. 1889), a native of Louisiana, Adams earned a law degree from Howard University Law School in 1917. He practiced law in Illinois, Wisconsin and Iowa. He was admitted to practice in the Supreme Court of the United States in 1922. He instituted a suit in the Federal Courts in Chicago to enjoin the operation of the franchise granted in 1931 to the Illinois Bell Telephone Company by the City of Chicago for the sum of \$15-million.

FROM KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

CHARLES H. CALLOWAY (1878–1943) Born in Tennessee, Calloway graduated from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1905 and settled in Kansas City. Calloway was among the Missouri delegation that founded the NBA and was President of the organization from 1926–27.

L. AMASA KNOX (b. 1870) was a prominent lawyer and the first African American to be elected to the Missouri State House of Representatives in 1929. A native of Virginia, Knox studied at Virginia State College and earned a law degree in 1897 from Howard University Law School in Washington, D.C. He was admitted to the Missouri bar in Saint Louis in 1898 and practiced law in Kansas City.