



THE

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IOWA LAWYER

**A MONUMENTAL
JOURNEY
BEGINS IN IOWA**

**A HISTORY OF THE
NATIONAL BAR ASSOCIATION
ON RACE AND PLACE
HONORING ORVILLE BLOETHE**

A Monumental Journey

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.

A HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL BAR ASSOCIATION

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, African-American lawyers were struggling to find professional support through traditional peer organizations at local and national levels. In most areas across the country, they were not included in bar associations in their communities, and the American Bar Association ("ABA") had admitted only one African-American lawyer by 1911. When a group of well-credentialed African-American lawyers were denied membership in the ABA during this early period, instead of accepting what was clearly unacceptable and wholly inconsistent with the basic justice of their profession, they rose together and created the National Bar Association ("NBA") in 1925, which now serves over 60,000 members in the United States and select international locations.

Consistent with the early environment in the state of Iowa to support justice for all people, the historic and profoundly important creation of the NBA took place in Des Moines, Iowa. Before its founding, the Iowa Supreme Court had acted to protect equality and empowerment including:

- Recognizing the freedom of a black slave.
- Striking down separate but equal schools.
- Granting women the right to practice law.
- Eliminating racial discrimination in public accommodations.

Prior to the NBA's creation, efforts grew in southern states to recognize the need for association among African-American lawyers, including the forming of the Colored Bar Association of the State of Mississippi. These early efforts are often referred to as the Greenville Movement, based on its first meeting taking place in Greenville, Mississippi. In Iowa, the first convention of black lawyers occurred in 1924 as the Iowa Colored Bar Association.

All of these efforts served as the platform for Iowa lawyers S. Joe Brown, Charles P. Howard, Sr., James B. Morris, Sr., Gertrude E. Durden Rush and George Henry Woodson to gather their colleagues from Chicago and Kansas City to form the NBA, as of August 1, 1925. Each of these Iowa lawyers was ground-breaking for reasons even beyond their critical leadership in the NBA.

The following 12 African-American lawyers founded the National Bar Association in 1925 in Des Moines, Iowa.

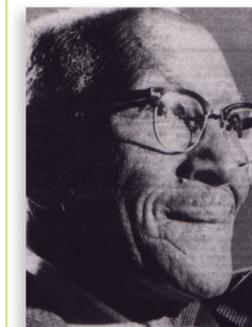
FROM DES MOINES, IOWA



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 1889, Brown was the first African-American graduate from the University of Iowa in liberal arts (earning Phi Beta Kappa.) He was among 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 attorney to appear before 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 successfully argued the first discrimination case before the Iowa Supreme Court in 1906. 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. 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 Iowa's own 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.

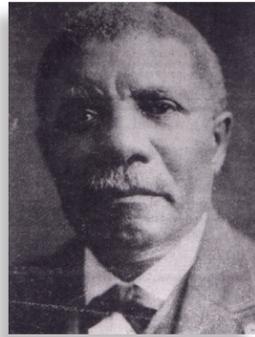


JAMES B. MORRIS, (1890–1977) was a 1915 graduate of Howard University Law School, Washington, D.C. He came to Des Moines in 1916 to visit a college classmate, George Woodson, and began his law practice in 1917. During World War I, he was a U.S. Army battalion intelligence officer in France and was wounded 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) launched her legal career after her landmark admission to the Iowa Bar, in 1918, as Iowa's first African-American woman attorney. She practiced law until the 1950s in Des Moines and Chicago, and advanced the rights of African-American women. She graduated from Quincy Business College in Parsons, Texas in 1906. She moved to Des Moines in 1907 and married a prominent Des Moines attorney. A native of Texas, Rush was also an accomplished composer and a playwright. She studied at Western Music Conservatory in Des Moines, and in 1914 earned a Bachelor of Arts degree at Des Moines College. An important civic leader and activist in Iowa's history, 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.

FROM DES MOINES, IOWA



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. DuBois 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 (d’d.) 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 – d’d.), a native of Louisiana, earned a law degree from Howard University Law School in 1917. He practiced law in Illinois, Wisconsin and Iowa and 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. In 1921, he and attorney L. A. Knox sought and won the governor’s support on a civil rights case where African Americans were being returned to a state where peonage was practiced. Calloway was among the Missouri delegation that founded the NBA and was President of the organization from 1926–27.

AMASA KNOX

(1870 – d’d.) 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.

The mission of the NBA in 1925, was in part “to strengthen and elevate the Negro lawyer in his profession, to improve his standing at the bar of the country...and to create a bond of true fellowship among the colored members of the Bar of America...and for the encouragement of the Negro youth of America who will follow their choice of this profession.” NBA archives, Drake University Law School

In the decades since its founding, the NBA has been active in pursuing the integration of the federal courts at all levels, and in pushing the Department of Justice to protect and pursue the rights of African Americans. In addition, the NBA recognized early on the critical need for pro bono legal support for African Americans across the country and established legal aid clinics beginning in the 1940’s. Consistent with its founding commitment to support the ongoing education of black lawyers, the NBA also established a National Bar Journal in the 1940’s, but its publication ultimately discontinued. The organization’s intent to support black youth entering the profession has continued throughout its history

Today, the NBA, on behalf of its over 60,000 members, pursues a critically important agenda consistent with its founding principles. Its efforts focus on education, economic equity and empowerment; juvenile justice reforms; preservation and advancement of historically black colleges and universities; human trafficking; criminal justice reforms; voting rights; and the pursuit of diversity on the federal bench.

As Iowa lawyers, we have many reasons to be proud of, and inspired by, the national groundbreaking efforts of our early leaders to advance equality and empowerment for all people. Our lawyers and courts have passionately protected the rights of all people who live, work and build families in our state. The founding of the National Bar Association in Iowa in 1925, in significant part led by pioneering African-American Iowa lawyers, is a profound statement that the State of Iowa represents justice and equality and all of us have an obligation to build on this groundbreaking heritage.

Kim Walker joined Faegre Baker Daniels as one of the co-founders of the Iowa office in 1990. Over the years he assumed a variety of leadership roles, and served as the firm’s leader of its national food and agriculture team until mid-2015. Walker is a member of the Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation’s Board of Directors. In July, President Barack Obama announced his intent to nominate Walker to serve as Inspector General, Export-Import Bank of the United States.

The author acknowledges that material portions of the information contained in this article came from a number of publicly available sources including the NBA Archives, Drake University Law Library, the website of the National Bar Association, the website of the Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation, and an article entitled “The Black Bar Association and Civil Rights” authored by J. Clay Smith, Jr. and published in the *Creighton Law Review*, Vol. 15, No. 3, page 651, 1981–1982. In addition, the author acknowledges the review and input provided by Judge Odell McGhee. Also, thanks to the NBA Archives, Drake University Law Library and to M. Jessica Rowe, Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation Director.

From the first 12 lawyers who formed the organization, the NBA is now recognized as the oldest and largest national association of predominately African-American lawyers, judges, educators and law students. From representation of the association in less than five cities, the organization now boasts 84 affiliate chapters throughout the United States as well as in Canada, the United Kingdom, Africa, Morocco and the Caribbean. Much praise to the founders, many of whom boast Iowa as the birthplace of their professional roots, and their vision which has blossomed into an international organization of more than 60,000 members. J. DANIELLE CARR | Regional VIII Director, National Bar Association

A Conversation with Judge Romonda D. Belcher and Attorney Paxton Williams

BRINGING THE STORY OF GERTRUDE RUSH TO LIFE



Gertrude Rush (1880–1962), one of the 12 founders of the National Bar Association and Iowa District Associate Court Judge Romonda D. Belcher are two Iowa legal pioneers. Judge Belcher became the state's first female, African-American judge in 2010. Perhaps fittingly, Judge Belcher has developed and performs a one-woman

vignette about Rush. *The Iowa Lawyer* asked Paxton Williams, an Assistant Iowa Attorney General who is involved in the law and literature movement and who is a playwright and sometimes actor himself, to visit with Judge Belcher about Gertrude Rush, the founding of the NBA in Des Moines, and Judge Belcher's presentation. Below are excerpts from their conversation.

Tell me a little about Gertrude Rush.

Rush was born in 1880 in Texas, the daughter of a Baptist minister. In 1914, after graduating from Des Moines College, she studied law under the tutelage of her attorney husband, James B. Rush. Only one woman, Arabella Mansfield, practiced law in the state of Iowa at that time. After studying at Drake and LaSalle University, in 1918, she passed the bar and became the first black woman to practice law in the State of Iowa.

How did you become aware of Gertrude Rush and her connection to the National Bar Association?

Surprisingly, I stumbled across the history of Gertrude Rush and the NBA's founding here in Des Moines. Given that history, one would think that information would be readily available and publically known. I was surprised to learn that the NBA was founded in a state where African-Americans make up less than three percent of the population. This rich Iowa history should be well-known, and those of us who study and practice law should be proud to be a part of this legacy.

What are the most important lessons you would like those who see your play to take away from the performance?

Perserverance, creating opportunity and the importance of making a difference. Despite considerable difficulties, opposition, inequalities and resistance, Gertrude Rush had the fortitude to persevere. She was committed to getting an education and pursuing a legal career. Ensuring others had equal opportunity was her motivation. Additionally, her pioneering spirit demonstrated leadership in the community and in the legal profession and concern for human and civil rights. She believed organizing and sharing a vision of communication among black lawyers were the keys to equal opportunity. I believe that holds true today.

What did your study of the life and times of Gertrude Rush teach you in general? In particular, what did it teach you about the challenges faced by African Americans, women, and female attorneys today?

While we have made many advancements and have many more opportunities than Gertrude Rush experienced, female attorneys and African Americans still face many challenges. Nationally, overall student enrollment in law schools is down. Some of the challenges today are due in part to a lack of opportunities, implicit bias and some lack in commitment to diversity. Locally, the retention African-Americans lawyers in Iowa has proved to be a challenge. Nonetheless, despite any challenges that still may exist today, we can be encouraged by the example set by Rush in the face of the number of adversities she experienced. With the benefit of education and availability of opportunity, we too, can make a difference and ensure equal justice under the law.

Tell us a bit about Gertrude Rush's non-legal interests and accomplishments. It seems to me she had multitudes.

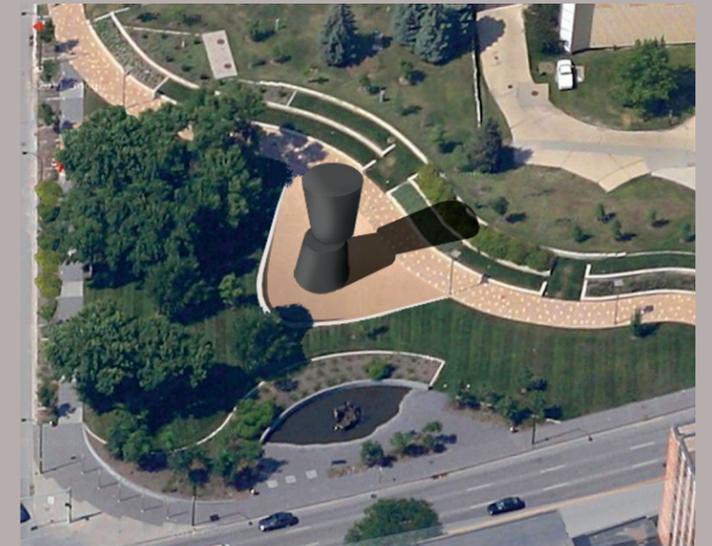
We know that Rush founded and directed a number of civic and church organizations. She was also a noted playwright and penned many poems and songs, including one that is still well-known today: *Jesus Loves the Little Children*. Her activity showed that despite racially turbulent times and amidst the threat of intimidation, she stood fast as a believer of justice. She preached and practiced the gospel through coalition building and used her God-given talents and professional skills to better conditions for Blacks, becoming affectionately known as the "Sunday School Lawyer." She used all of her talents to make life better for others and believed in living by the Golden Rule.

A Groundbreaking Celebration

This groundbreaking for A MONUMENTAL JOURNEY was a milestone in celebrating this extraordinary accomplishment with a world-class public art project by an internationally recognized artist.



A crowd of more than 150 people watched as this distinguished group ceremoniously broke ground for A MONUMENTAL JOURNEY which will be completed in 2017. (LEFT TO RIGHT) Betty C. Andrews, Iowa-Nebraska NAACP | Vicky Long-Hill, attorney | The Honorable Odell McGhee, Polk County District Judge, INBA representative | The Honorable Christine Hensley, Des Moines City Council, GDMPAF Board of Directors | Tom Whitney, attorney, Prairie Meadows representative | The Honorable Romonda D. Belcher, Iowa District Associate Judge, INBA representative | J. Danielle Carr, regional director, NBA | Broderick Johnson, White House representative | Katherine M. Murphy, president, GDMPAF Board of Directors. GROUND BREAKING PHOTOS BY ERIC SALMON



An early rendering shows the sculpture sited in the Hansen Triangle at Grand and 2nd Avenue west of the Des Moines River on the Principal Riverwalk, the site of the groundbreaking ceremony. RENDERING BY SUBSTANCE ARCHITECTURE



Guest speaker Broderick Johnson, Assistant to the President/Cabinet Secretary for President Barack Obama and Chair of the My Brother's Keeper Task Force gave a moving account of his own path to becoming an attorney. In his remarks about the NBA founders, he recounted the story of Thurgood Marshall and his mentor, Charles Hamilton Houston's nearly 20 year effort to succeed in bringing the cause to overturn segregation before the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education*.



Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation Board President Kathy Murphy acknowledged major supporters and announced that the groundbreaking was a milestone in celebrating this extraordinary accomplishment with a world-class public art project by an internationally recognized artist. Later in the program Murphy introduced guest speaker Broderick Johnson.



The Honorable Odell McGhee, Polk County District Court Judge, past president of the Iowa National Bar Association described the genesis of the establishment of a national memorial to celebrate the spirit of the NBA founders during a dialogue he had with NBA past president Evett L. Simmons. McGhee noted that in 2000, only a single headstone marker in a church parking lot indicated the NBA founding.



J. Danielle Carr, Regional VIII Director, National Bar Association, acknowledged that this project was brought about by dedication and financial support for which the NBA gives much thanks and appreciation. She said, "the breaking of this ground marks the beginning of an artistic tribute to those who paved the way for an organization that still holds true to its original purpose."

ON RACE AND PLACE

Celebrating the National Bar Association and A MONUMENTAL JOURNEY with Angela Onwuachi-Willig



Angela Onwuachi-Willig is the University of California, Berkeley School of Law, Chancellor's Professor of Law and an Iowa State Bar Association member. Onwuachi-Willig spoke with *The Iowa Lawyer* magazine as she prepares for her 2017–2018 American Bar Foundation Fellowship as the William H. Neukom Fellows Research Chair in Diversity and Law.

The Neukom Fellows Research Chair was “created to lead the ABF’s empirical research on law and legal processes, relating to issues of diversity and inequality that woman, people of color, people with disabilities, and persons from the LGBTQ community face in the justice system.”

Part of your 2017–2018 ABF Fellowship will include a project that explores the founding and development of the National Bar Association. What unanswered questions are you most interested in exploring in your upcoming fellowship?

Besides questions regarding the process of the NBA’s development, there are a wide variety of questions that I hope to explore. (To read a history of the National Bar Association see pages 6–9). To be honest, it’s hard to know what I will ultimately focus on until I dig into the archives for the NBA. These archives are located at Drake University Law School in Des Moines, so there is this great treasure right in the heart of Iowa and, more importantly, in the home of the NBA’s founding.

For now, I want to explore how the five Iowa founders of the NBA understood their role as lawyers, and specifically as black lawyers, within the state and within the nation. What was their vision for what the law and the establishment of a professional organization for black attorneys could and would accomplish, and whom was that effort designed to serve? How does the organization serve each of those lawyers, and other black lawyers, across the country in their careers after its founding? Also, I want to compare and contrast the answers to those questions with the meaning and the purpose that the organization serves for today’s black lawyers. How do the challenges that black attorneys faced from the 1920s to the pre-Civil Rights era differ or resemble the challenges that black attorneys face and have faced in a post-Civil Rights era? Another way of phrasing that question is “How far have we come and not come since 1925?”

A deep reverence for the history of Civil Rights Movement and the analysis of its relevance today is apparent in your work. What do you want to explore in your work on the NBA?

Yes. I want to explore the extent to which the NBA may be part of a broader story about what I call contradictions in Iowa’s racial civil rights history and present. The 2009 *Varnum v. O’Brien* decision, in which the Supreme Court of Iowa held that the state’s ban against same-sex marriage was unconstitutional, brought to the forefront Iowa’s history as a civil rights pioneer. For instance, the decision revealed that, in 1868, the Supreme Court of Iowa held—nearly 100 years before *Brown v. Board of Education*—that denying a black child admission to public schools because of race violated the state constitution.

Ironically, despite Iowa’s impressive civil rights history on the books, the state has grappled with racial prejudices and hostility and systemic racism that have stilted the growth and development of its black population and legal community. For instance, Iowa is number one, out of all states, in racial disproportionality between its population of African Americans and the percentage of African Americans in its prisons. It’s close to the top in racial disproportionality in terms of foster care removal. Prominent leaders like Chief Justice Mark Cady are paying deep and sincere attention to these issues, particularly as they relate to criminal justice, which reveals a continued concern for racial equality, but it is striking to see such disparities in a state with a pioneering racial history. Also, overall, despite Iowa’s progressive history, its black population has remained small, and its black population of lawyers is even smaller, percentage-wise. African Americans are not as visible as one would like in the key areas of our government and legal system—on the courts, at top firms, in high level government positions, and so on. And, I am interested in understanding if the narrative of the NBA’s founding sheds much light on the relatively distant past of Iowa’s mid-nineteenth century decisions regarding miscegenation and school segregation or on its even more distant future of staggering racial disparities in the carceral state and foster care system today.

What kind of research process do you anticipate utilizing and what kinds of questions will you ask to get to the heart of these issues?

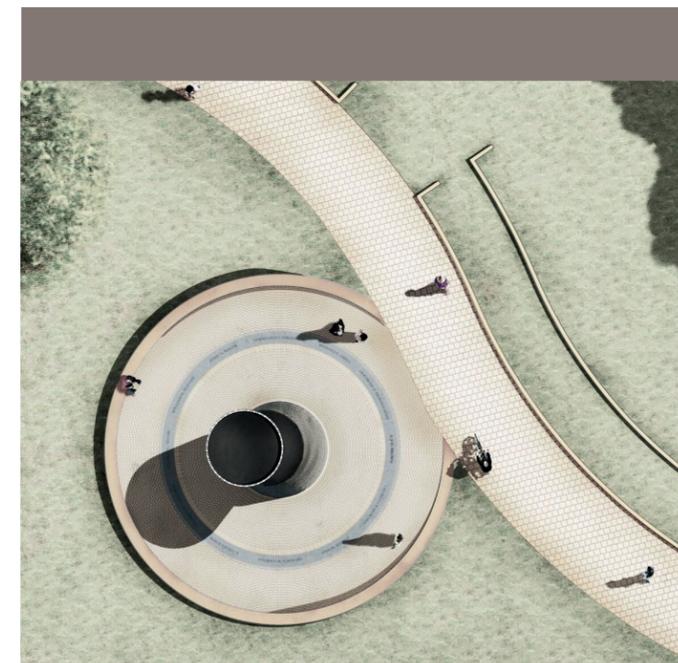
I have long wanted to dig into the NBA archives. Again, it’s hard to talk about the process and the questions that I will focus on before I have fully immersed myself in the archives. My process will involve archival research, content analysis of newspaper articles and relevant opinions and case materials, and interviews of African American attorneys and judges in

Iowa as well as interviews of black attorneys throughout the nation who are involved in the NBA.

I might be able to glean answers to a number of questions from my archival research. The archives might answer questions like:

- What does it mean that the organization could be founded and was founded in Des Moines, Iowa? And, why Des Moines, Iowa versus any other place?
- What about the founders in particular and their location in Iowa molded them to become the people who created and developed the NBA?
- What forms and types of racism and sexism did the founders face in the bar and in the courtroom, and how did some of those struggles compare to those of black lawyers in other states? How did the organization assist them in addressing these obstacles and challenges?

I have my own ideas about what the answers to these questions might be, but ultimately I will have to dig through the archives and figure out what that story is, and then once I



A MONUMENTAL JOURNEY will be located in the Hansen Triangle in downtown Des Moines, Iowa, west of the Des Moines River, at the northeast corner of Grand Avenue and 2nd Street. This bird’s eye view of the sculpture illustrates a circular plaza flowing into a serpentine walkway along the Principal Riverwalk.

The 12 NBA founders’ names form a ring around the base of the sculpture and will be made of black-patinated metal.

RENDERING BY SUBSTANCE ARCHITECTURE

have all the data, I can use it to tell my own narrative, my own interpretation, as seen through the eyes of black attorneys then and now, of the social meaning of the founding.

It’s clear that the founding has a lot of meaning to African-American attorneys who work in Iowa—those like Judge Odell McGhee and Judge Romonda Belcher and Vicky Longhill who put in lots of time—blood, sweat, and tears—into making the monument a reality. Also, the Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation has been absolutely instrumental to the success of this project. This story, too, deserves to be told.

A Monumental Journey is a tribute not only to the impact the founders had on our local communities here in Des Moines and Iowa, but also to the national and international impact that their work had and continues to have.

It seems that while there are questions to be answered, you know that the power of place is an essential part of this story.

Yes, it is. Many stories in our nation, and some would say all stories in our nation, revolve around race and place. Race and space are central to part of the story I am crafting about Emmett Till, Trayvon Martin, and the trials concerning their deaths, for example. With respect to notions of place and the NBA, one can get a sense of the power of place in responses I get about the organization’s founding in Iowa of all places. It’s funny. Whenever I tell people that the NBA was founded in Des Moines, they are shocked, just flabbergasted, no matter what race they are.

“What?!” They say. “The NBA was founded in Iowa?” It’s similar to the reaction I got when I told people I was from Iowa. “There’re black people in Iowa?”

I usually respond by saying, “Yes, the NBA was founded in Iowa. And, you know what? Iowa has a progressive civil rights history on race . . .” And, then I have to note the contradictions I talked about earlier.

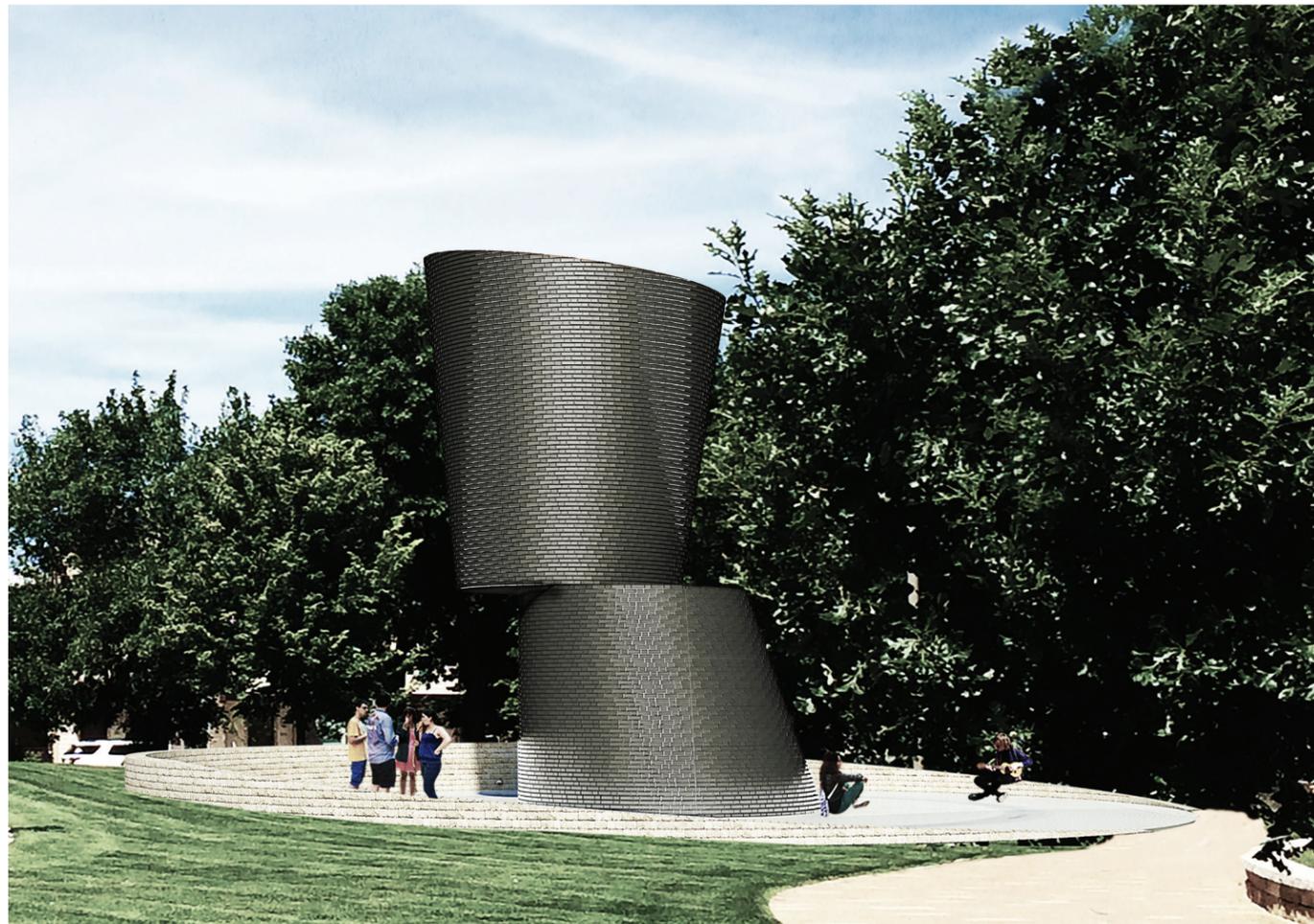
My point is, and I think it’s fair to say, that most people do not think of black people when they think of Iowa. There is a racial association in how people, even Iowans, think of Iowa.

So, it’s fascinating to explore what was it about Iowa that made it the right place for the NBA’s founding, and why are black attorneys in the state so committed to commemorating and giving honor to that history?

Obviously, the story about the NBA is, in many ways, just a story about the people who were there, those who said they were going to create this amazing organization. But I also imagine that there was something else about the state, its history, its legal culture that enabled the NBA to be formed in Des Moines, Iowa. And, I think there is some reason why the NBA holds some special meaning to so many black attorneys who have made their lives here in Iowa. I’m interested in learning from black attorneys what the founding of the NBA in Des Moines, Iowa symbolizes, what it means to them, and why it is so important to communicate this promise to everyone through the monument and other means of honoring the NBA founders, and specifically the five Iowa based NBA founders.

Making the Invisible Visible

Kerry James Marshall was commissioned by the Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation to create **A MONUMENTAL JOURNEY**, a public art project to honor the 12 attorneys who founded the National Bar Association. The project has a broad social mission: to commemorate a piece of Iowa history unknown to most Iowans. It was here in Iowa that 11 men and one woman founded the NBA to confront racial oppression.

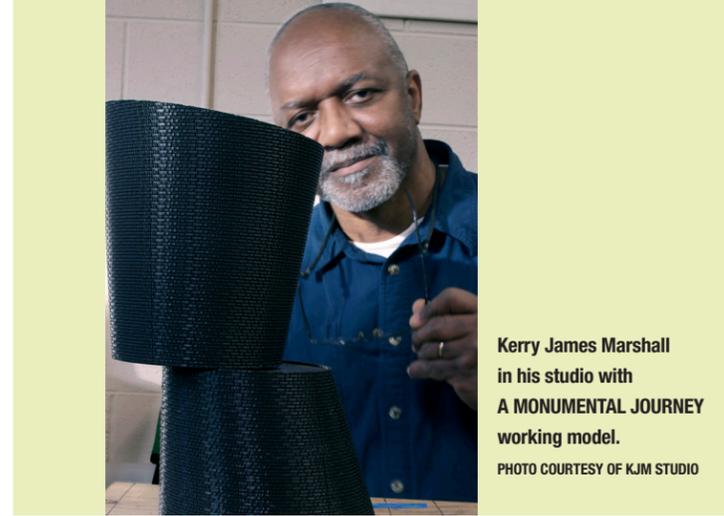


A MONUMENTAL JOURNEY by Kerry James Marshall features the 12 NBA founders' names in a ring around the base of the sculpture. RENDERING BY SUBSTANCE ARCHITECTURE

PUBLIC FOUNDATION
GREATER DES MOINES **ART**

The Greater Des Moines Public Art Foundation invites you to be a part of preserving the legacy of the National Bar Association founders. To learn more about the project visit www.dsmpublicartfoundation.org or contact Director M. Jessica Rowe at mjrowe@dsmpublicartfoundation.org.

A MONUMENTAL JOURNEY is one of many ongoing projects that fulfill the mission of the GDMPAF to place art in public spaces through public and private collaborations which engage, inspire, and enrich the lives of citizens and visitors in our community.



Kerry James Marshall in his studio with A MONUMENTAL JOURNEY working model. PHOTO COURTESY OF KJM STUDIO

THE ARTIST

The novelist and scholar Ralph Waldo Ellison wrote *Invisible Man* in 1952. Considered a milestone in American literature, it is about an African-American man who considers himself invisible simply because people refuse to see him. “It is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass.” The same heroic effort to be “seen” powers Kerry James Marshall’s art.

Kerry James Marshall is one of the most celebrated artists working in the United States today. Born in 1955 in Birmingham, Alabama, before the passage of The Civil Rights Act, and witness to the Watts race riots in 1965, Marshall has long been an inspired and imaginative chronicler of the African-American experience. He is known for his works of art focusing on African-American life and history. Mostly in paint, but also in sculpture, photography and installation, in addition to working with elements of popular culture (e.g., comics), he examines the effects of the civil rights movement on home and family.

Marshall studied in Los Angeles with acclaimed social realist painter Charles White and participated in the renowned artist-in-residence program at the Studio Museum in Harlem. He has received solo exhibitions throughout Europe and North America.

In 2014, Marshall was awarded the Wolfgang Hahn Prize, from the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, Germany, honoring exceptional contemporary artists. In 2013, he was appointed to President Barack Obama’s innovative Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. His other prestigious honors include a 1997 MacArthur Foundation ‘Genius’ Grant awarded for exceptional “originality, insight and potential.”

Organized by The Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Met), New York; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (MCA); and The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles, an expansive retrospective has drawn vast critical acclaim and encompasses more than three-decades of works. *Kerry James Marshall: Mastery* recognizes the influence of his art on the public consciousness. The show is currently on view at the Met—the largest and most visited art museum in the United States and, to date, it is the museum’s largest exhibition by a living artist.

Marshall’s artwork is in many international collections. In America, these include The Art Institute of Chicago; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Met; MCA Chicago; MOCA, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Studio Museum in Harlem, NY; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Whitney Museum of American Art, NY.

A MONUMENTAL JOURNEY

Eugene Washington Rhodes (NBA president from 1933 to 1934) wrote that justice depends upon the proper interpretation of the law: “The cause of race will be advanced in exact proportion to the strength and militancy of the [legal] bar. Disfranchisement, segregation and discrimination are issues which must be fought in American courts.”¹

The commanding presence of *A Monumental Journey* captures human dignity through its homage to the NBA founders. It is a triumph, a celebration and a rallying cry. The physical shape of *A Monumental Journey*, reminiscent of an hourglass or joined truncated cones, suggests the contours of the West African ‘talking drum.’ Owing to variations in pitch and tone of the two drumheads—which mimic the patterns of human speech—talking drums were historically used by Yoruba people to communicate complex messages over vast distances. The Yoruba drummers were among the West Africans captured and transported to the New World in the transatlantic slave trade. These unique drums helped to spread messages of defiance, petitions, or prayers, and were ultimately prohibited or restricted by slaveholders.

Marshall designed this abstracted ‘talking drum’ shape to appear horizontally sheered-off, divided in two parts, then reconstructed with one massive drum form precariously stacked upon the other. This iconic sculpture combines modernist geometry and brick masonry. When constructed, the elegant form will be clad with patterned courses of black brick with a dark-reflective sheen.

The counterbalancing weight and force—the physical equilibrium—of this gigantic black sculpture produces a powerful physical and poetic expression. *A Monumental Journey* conveys that the American legal system, although imperfect, strives for balance.

Rising 30-feet in height, *A Monumental Journey* will be sited on the east side of Hansen Triangle Park, along the Riverwalk in downtown Des Moines. The name of each NBA founder will be inscribed in a continuous black ring circling the artwork.

The story being told by Kerry James Marshall is highly relevant to our current historical moment. Not only does it touch on the principle themes of justice in the face of systems of oppression, but also it is about conversation among diverse people—an indispensable activity in our contemporary political discourse. *A Monumental Journey* is a testimony to these courageous NBA founders who were committed to working vigorously for freedom and justice for black people and, by extension, all people. By recognizing their heroic efforts with this public art project, we can imagine our future and continue to forge our path.

¹ Fitzhugh L. Styles, *Negroes and The Law* xi (Christopher Publishing House, Boston, 1937). See Dreyfuss, *Black Faith in Law Undermined*, 7 Equal Opportunity Forum 15 (July 1980). From an article prepared in connection with the BALS Civil Rights Lecture delivered by Commissioner J. Clay Smith, Jr. at Creighton University Law School on March 5, 1981.