



2020 Legendary Landmark

## TIMUEL BLACK

Timuel D. Black was born in Birmingham, Alabama on December 7, 1918. His family became part of the first Great Migration of African Americans from the Deep South, settling in Chicago in 1919, and he has lived in the same south side neighborhood since then.

Tim Black is a nationally respected educator, political activist, community leader, oral historian, philanthropist and philosopher.

During his early school years at Edmund Burke Elementary School and DuSable High School, Black worked as a paper boy for the Chicago Defender. As a teen during the Great Depression, he worked as a delivery boy for a local grocery store where he had his first experience as an organizer. It was the early thirties when he helped organize the “Don’t Spend Your Money Where You Can’t Work” campaign, which led to the formation of the Negro Retail Clerks Union. In the 1940s, he was an active organizer of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) which worked to desegregate Chicago department stores and public accommodations.

Black served in the U.S. Army during World War II and was awarded four battle stars and a *Croix de Guerre*, the highest military honor accorded by France to non-citizens. After the war, he received a Bachelor’s Degree from Roosevelt University and later pursued a Master’s Degree from the University of Chicago.

In 1955, after seeing Dr. Martin Luther King on television, Black was motivated to abandon his doctoral studies at the University of Chicago to become an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement. Immersing himself in civil rights work, Tim went on to serve as the Chicago Chair of the historic 1963 March on Washington.

A pioneer in the independent black political movement, Black was one of the first African Americans in Chicago to challenge the “Regular Democratic Organization” and coined the phrase “Plantation Politics.” He has run for public office several times and was a leader in the

massive voter registration campaign which resulted in the election of Mayor Harold Washington.

Two volumes of Black's three-volume work, "Bridges of Memory: Chicago's First Wave of Great Migration," have been published, and the third volume is in the works. These books chronicle the history of black Chicago from the 1920s to the present.

In 2000, Black served as the lead plaintiff in *Black v. McGuffage*, a lawsuit which charged the Illinois voting system with systemic discrimination against minorities. For his work he was honored by the American Civil Liberties Union as Civil Libertarian of the Year.

In 2008, Timuel Black received an honorary Doctoral Degree from his alma mater, Roosevelt University. In 2010, and again in 2015, Black traveled to the Netherlands and The Hague to be honored and lecture at the annual Dr. Martin Luther King Day Dinner of the United States Embassy.

In January of 2012, the Timuel D. Black Archive was officially inaugurated and opened to researchers. The massive archive of Black's documents, letters and memorabilia is housed in the Vivian Harsh Collection at the Carter G. Woodson Regional Library in Chicago.

In June of 2012, half a century after he withdrew from the University of Chicago in order to join Dr. King, Timuel Black was awarded the 2012 Benton Medal for Distinguished Public Service from the University of Chicago. He was the first person of color ever to receive this award.

In 2013, the City of Chicago honored Black with the inaugural Chicago Champion of Freedom medal, in recognition of his work in the civil rights movement both locally and nationally. At his centenary celebration in 2018, he was Knighted by the French government, when he received the French Medal of Honor, the highest honor given by the French.

Timuel Black's memoir, "Sacred Ground," focusing heavily on his lifelong home, Chicago's South Side, was recently published by Northwestern University Press.