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## Adult Chapter Meetings

Monthly, 3rd Thursday, 6PM  
Virtual Meeting  
(except in December)

## Youth Council Meetings

At Lincoln High School

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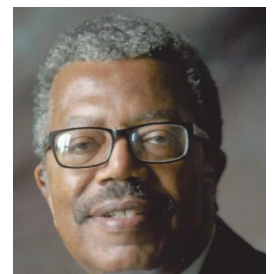
## Message from the President

Election years are busy for the Lincoln Branch, so we find ourselves busier than ever. The focus is **VOTE, VOTE, AND VOTE**. Our/your Get Out the Vote Plan should be in full force by now. We should be using our social media to the max to remind our contacts to not just vote ourselves, but take our friends along with us to the polls and to make the special effort to take distant friends as well. Yes, it's just that important. This may be the most consequential election for a number of years. So Vote! Vote! Vote!

Having said that, please don't forget our annual Freedom Fund Banquet that is coming up October 26, 2024 at Innovative Campus, 2021 Transformation Drive, Lincoln, Nebraska. This is our main fund raiser for the year. It supports scholarships, and other activities of the unit such as: 1) the Nebraska Summit on Justice and Disparities, 2) a major city-wide Get Out the Vote effort, 3) organization of a candidate forum supported by 17 other organizations, 4) canvassing July 27th in the Belmont neighborhood, 5) community support by participating in more than 25 festivals, School and Community activities. We are still a major contributor in the "Roots of Justice Project" that is providing state-wide information on the History of Race and Racism in Nebraska. These are some of the activities that our branch is involved with. Your support and donations help us to meet the needs of people in our community and in greater Nebraska. Remember, we are volunteers serving our community. If you would like to help, please contact us at [lincnbranchnaacp@gmail.com](mailto:lincnbranchnaacp@gmail.com).

After two years of excellent leadership of our Newsletter staff, Frank Edler is stepping down. We are grateful and thankful for his contributions in providing quality and timely articles that we are proud of. **Thank you, Frank.** We are looking for someone(s) to step up and fill this position. Please let us know if you are interested and can help.

It is time for us to review our strategic plan and budget so that we can get a head start on our activities for 2025 and beyond. Committees please develop your action plans. Thank you to the greatest volunteers in Nebraska and for all you do for Lincoln Branch NAACP.



Dewayne Mays, PhD  
President

**Dewayne Mays**  
**President, Lincoln Branch NAACP**

## Lincoln and Omaha NAACP Branches Oppose the Closing of Diversity and Inclusion Offices on UN Campuses

*Editor's Note: On August 27, 2024, the Lincoln and Omaha Branches of the NAACP issued a joint press release after the University of Nebraska closed the Diversity and Inclusion Offices at both Lincoln and Omaha campuses.*

The shuttering of diversity and inclusion offices on the Lincoln and Omaha campuses of the University of Nebraska is a disappointing stain on the university and the state. However, it does not come as a surprise given the political discourse in our society and the fact that there is no Black and no Latino representation on the NU Board of Regents. Also, there has never been a Black permanent head coach in any sport at Nebraska.

At the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the chancellor has announced that the Office of Diversity and Inclusion will be closed and the position of Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion will be eliminated. At University of Nebraska at Omaha, the Office of Multicultural Affairs was eliminated last fall and the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center was closed this summer. These decisions take our university and our state backwards.

For many good-hearted citizens of Nebraska, this is an embarrassment. We all know that stoking racial division and resentment among some of our white citizens and pandering to their misguided fears and resentment of Black people and people of other disenfranchised groups has long been used as a politically expedient tool. But we can do better in Nebraska. We must display the courage to do the right thing even when it is unpopular with some people whose fear, anger and resentment are misplaced.

Closing these offices, administrative positions, and centers sends a clear message. It is a confirmation to current and prospective students of color and their parents that too many of the people of Nebraska are only interested in young Black men's and women's abilities to make jump shots, score touchdowns or run fast sprints for the university. Nebraska is sending a clear message that the emotional and physical well-being of Black, Brown, LGBTQIA+ students, their parents, and university faculty and staff are of no concern to the NU Board of Regents, of no concern to Governor Jim Pillen, of no concern to state Senator Dave Murman and other like-minded elected leaders of the university and the state.

**We urge the citizens of Nebraska to stand with us by taking a few minutes to email their NU regents, their state senators and Governor Jim Pillen to express displeasure with disbanding the two offices at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.**

Nebraska is letting disenfranchised and underrepresented groups know that their attendance or employment at the University of Nebraska may be met by state-sanctioned resentment and workplace hostility towards them.

Closing these offices moves our state further away from truth telling, reconciliation and racial solidarity even though most citizens of Nebraska want our state and nation to be "indivisible

with liberty and justice for all." It is likely that most university employees believe in the importance of a diverse and inclusive educational experience. The educational experience that enhances diversity and inclusiveness better prepares students for the future and trains faculty and staff for success in this increasingly diverse society and for successful interactions with the rest of the world.

We find that Nebraska's words and actions are not consistent with its own principles. UNL's written core values and beliefs include this statement: "We value equity, inclusion, and dignity for all." The UNO core values state: "We create an environment that is welcoming, open, and diverse." However, you've now shut down key diversity and inclusion offices at UNL and UNO and eliminated Dr. Marco Barker's position as UNL Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion. So, your words ring hollow, and that's putting it nicely.

Evaluating these closings from an athletic perspective, Nebraskans should be reminded that competitive recruiting and the transfer portal are real things. Black athletes and their parents are watching. UNL is now the only Big Ten education institution without a DEI office. Yes, it's true that NIL money will entice some athletes to play for and stay at the University of Nebraska. However, if the money being offered to prospective and current athletes by other schools is close to what is offered by Nebraska, then the scaling back of Nebraska's commitment in support of underrepresented groups could play into the decisions of Black athletes as to where to play and whether to transfer to a university that is more compassionate and more inclusive for all students.

It seems shortsighted to eliminate the Office of Diversity and Inclusion when Nebraska ranks last in the Big Ten for undergraduate diversity and is the only member of that athletic conference that does not belong to the prestigious Association of American Universities. Nebraska's diversity is measured 17.7 percent for undergraduates while the conference median was 24.7 percent, according to a September 8, 2021, Forbes Magazine article titled "Diversity Gains at Big Ten Universities Don't Include Black Students." The elimination of UNL's Office of Diversity and Inclusion could affect the decisions of athletes, and also of prospective and current highly sought-after educators, graduate students and researchers as to whether the university is a preferred landing spot for their time, their talents and their families. Further, it's conceivable that scaling back the commitment to diversity and inclusion could ultimately impact our value and continued welcome in the Big Ten and result in a sizable revenue decrease.

These egregious decisions to disband diversity and inclusion offices are obviously the result of political pressure to turn back the hands of time on all of us. We believe that UNL Chancellor Rodney Bennett is acting on the wishes of Governor Pillen and other like-minded state senators and university regents. These actions are inconsistent with the University's stated beliefs. They violate the trust of many parents and students. They fail to protect and improve the well-being of all students, including Black and Brown students, women, LGBTQIA+ students, persons with disabilities and the faculty and staff at the University of Nebraska. While the Lincoln and Omaha Branches of the NAACP continue to value our relationship with the university, we will also be vigilant. We feel it is imperative that initiatives be urgently developed and implemented that will right these wrongs.

We urge the citizens of Nebraska to stand with us by taking a few minutes to email their NU regents, their state senators and Governor Jim Pillen to express displeasure with disbanding the two offices at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

# Association of Students for the University of Nebraska Strongly Oppose the Closing of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion

*Editor's Note: Leaders of the Association of Students for the University of Nebraska released a letter on Instagram on August 21 after UNL Chancellor Rodney Bennett announced he was closing the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI). He stated that "a centralized approach to this work [of supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives] is no longer right for this institution." The University of Nebraska is now the only Big Ten institution without a DEI office.*



As elected leaders of the student body and executives of the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska (ASUN), we strongly oppose the recent decision to dissolve the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This decision to decentralize DEI efforts raises serious concerns about the accessibility of essential student support. It undermines the future of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at our university—elements that are crucial to student life and educational success. We raise similar concerns that this decision may be driven by politically motivated pressures against DEI, which have gained momentum both locally and nationally in recent years. These initiatives have historically aimed to challenge fundamental values of critical thinking and freedom of expression at the University of Nebraska.

We extend our deepest gratitude to ODI for its invaluable contributions over the past five years on UNL's campus. Research has indicated the importance of DEI in higher education and its role in increasing student retention, student belonging, and effectively preparing students for an increasingly diverse and globalized workforce. The elimination of ODI will hinder these objectives.

Since this decision's announcement, we have received numerous concerns from students. At the start of the upcoming semester, we will initiate discussions with students, staff, and faculty to determine next steps. We hear your concerns and share them. ASUN remains dedicated to advocating for an inclusive campus that represents and welcomes all students.

In advocacy,

Elizabeth Herbin, Student Body President and Student Regent ([eherbin2@unl.edu](mailto:eherbin2@unl.edu))

Zein Saleh, Internal Vice President ([zsaleh4@unl.edu](mailto:zsaleh4@unl.edu))

Luke McDermott, External Vice President ([lmcdermott4@unl.edu](mailto:lmcdermott4@unl.edu))

Reem Ahmed, Chief of Staff ([rahmed6@unl.edu](mailto:rahmed6@unl.edu))

Renata Cadena, Speaker of the Senate ([rcadena2@unl.edu](mailto:rcadena2@unl.edu))

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## Aaron Douglas at the Sheldon Museum of Art

Aaron Douglas, a leader of the Harlem Renaissance, earned a BFA from the University of Nebraska in 1922. Three years later, in correspondence with writer Langston Hughes, Douglas was confident of the potential impact of the burgeoning cultural movement:

“Let’s bare our arms and plunge them deep through laughter, through pain, through sorrow, through hope, through disappointment, into the very depths of the souls of our people and drag forth material crude, rough, neglected. Then let’s sing it, dance it, write it, paint it. Let’s do the impossible. Let’s create something transcendently material, mystically objective. Earthy. Spiritually earthy. Dynamic.”

Douglas’s painting *Window Cleaning* is currently on view in the Collection Galleries, where thematic installations of some of the museum’s most important and best known objects emphasize human ingenuity, imagination, and our interconnectedness with one another and our surroundings.

*Window Cleaning* by Aaron Douglas; Topeka, KS 1899–Nashville TN 1979; Oil on canvas, 1935; 29 1/2 × 23 3/4 inches; Nebraska Art Association; N-40.1936; permission by the Sheldon Museum of Art.



### NAACP Holds First Nebraska Summit on Justice and Disparities

*Linda Kuku*

*President of the NAACP Chapter at UNL*

On August 9, 2024, the Lincoln and Omaha Branches of the NAACP partnered with a number of advocacy groups and criminal justice initiatives to host the first Nebraska Summit on Justice and Disparities at Creighton University. The Summit was wonderfully organized by Iowa-Nebraska State Conference President Betty Andrews.

Sponsors included the Omaha Police Department, Douglas County Sheriff’s Office, Nebraska Criminal Defense Attorneys Association, Creighton University, ACLU Nebraska, Nebraska Appleseed, Nebraska State Bar Association and the NAACP Iowa-Nebraska State Conference.

For all participants this was a day of much needed reflection and discussion considering Nebraska ranks among the top ten states in the country for disproportionality in incarceration.

The day began with the Omaha Police Department Chief of 12 years, Todd Schmaderer, presenting data on the different trends in the Omaha Police Department (OPD). Schmaderer is the second longest serving chief of the Omaha Police Department and has served at OPD for 28 years. The data presented shows a steady rise in diversity in Omaha police officers since 2019. Schmaderer also made it a point to mention that police departments are down 10-15% of their staff and he is hoping to hire 150 more staff members in the next year rather than their usual 30-50. He sees this as an opportunity to diversify their staff beyond population numbers.



Dr. Dewayne Mays, President of the Lincoln Branch NAACP speaks at the Nebraska Summit. (Photo by Linda Kuku)

Another data point that deserves mentioning is the decline of gun assaults in the city of Omaha. 2020 saw the most recent peak at 111 incidents and 135 victims, in 2023 it was down to 65 incidents and 84 victims. Schmaderer attributed this decline to better policing.

We also had the opportunity to hear from Rob Jeffreys, the Director of the Nebraska Department of Corrections (NCDS). He had a clear message about the state of the Nebraska State Penitentiary, “We are overpopulated.” **cont’d on page 5**

## Summit on Justice and Disparities con't.



Dr. Yusef Salaam, Keynote Speaker at the Nebraska Summit on Justice

He talked about the plan to TRANSFORM Nebraska and our state's participation in "Reentry 2030, a national initiative uniting leaders across the country to improve reentry success for people with criminal records." (NCDS, 2024).

This plan consists of a 5-key model for reentry and well-being development. These five keys are as follows: Positive Relationships, Positive Social Engagement, Meaningful Work Trajectories,

Effective Coping Strategies, and Healthy Thinking Patterns. The idea is to create a department of corrections that functions as a place to restore personhood, rather than focus on punishment. The NCDS strategic plan outlines changes to the people, programs, physical plant, and policies. "People" refers to the training of staff and focus on the wellbeing of the workforce. "Programs" refers to the introduction and implementation of various education and workforce training programs, although Jeffreys didn't share many of the specifics. Changes to the "physical plant" were the main conversation, considering the groundbreaking ceremony for the new prison happened just a few weeks after the summit. Regarding changes to "policies," transparency is the goal, having everything written down creates space for accountability.

Jeffreys discussed the importance of creating inviting spaces that are conducive to learning and growth with features like large open windows and classroom settings throughout the new prison. In the session Jeffreys led, advocates from Nebraska Appleseed asked pressing questions about the impact this will have on the juvenile justice system but received unclear answers. Jeffreys repeated his commitment to the five key model and their mission to keep people safe.

The Summit also hosted a Power Panel with Shakur Abdullah, Jason Whitmer, Tom Riley and Rob Jeffreys. The panelists discussed significant barriers to incarcerated people being able to leave the facility and restart their life while avoiding reentry. Riley, former Douglas County Public Defender, talked about the absurdly long sentences that are handed out and how in Nebraska the Board of Pardons is the only entity that can reduce sentences.

Abdullah, a reentry specialist who was formerly incarcerated for 41 years, spoke about his own experiences with peers in prison

that helped to mentor and guide him. One quote of his in particular stood out to me. "Jail is an abnormal environment but people after being released are expected to act normal." This highlights an important factor when we discuss reducing reentry rates, and why we must hold the NCDS and Jeffreys accountable to their commitment to TRANSFORM Nebraska in the coming years.

The keynote speaker for the day was Dr. Yusef Salaam, a member of the exonerated Central Park Five. At 15 years old, before the wrongful arrest and conviction, his aspirations were simply to be a child. To learn how to do skateboard tricks and ride BMX like the other kids around him. After being placed in prison these aspirations were replaced with the words of his mother, "Do not participate, they need you to participate in whatever it is they are trying to do."

Dr. Salaam explained this did not mean to struggle with the authorities head on but rather refusing to become a participant in our own destruction. He explained how all the attendees of the Justice Summit were attempting to participate in something he called righteous collaboration. Our unity is our most powerful tool, the power of organizers cannot be overstated especially now in this election year. Dr. Salaam went as far as to say, "Our unity is more powerful than an atomic bomb," and I can't help but agree.

The Summit consisted of various other breakout sessions from the ACLU Nebraska, Nebraska Appleseed, Creighton University Juvenile Justice Legal Clinic and more. These sessions focused on hot topics in Nebraska's fight for civil liberties, discussions on restorative justice programs in Omaha, as well as deeper dives into data presented by the NCDS and OPD.

Every speaker in every breakout session came back to these two themes: *Community and Accountability*. How can we as a community support our incarcerated brothers and sisters both while they are in the system and after they leave? What structures do we have in place to hold our justice systems accountable? Although the Nebraska Summit on Justice and Disparities was the perfect place for us to convene and have these important conversations, it is now up to us to continue doing the work to make progress in these areas.

A special thank you to Betty Andrews for organizing this event, it was productive and inspiring.



Betty Andrews, President of the Iowa-Nebraska NAACP

## Chadron State College Honored Dr. Jake Kirkland Jr. with Distinguished Alumni Award

Chadron State College has given its Distinguished Alumni Award this year to Dr. Jake Kirkland Jr., longtime member of the Lincoln Branch of the NAACP. Kirkland, who earned a bachelor's degree in education from Chadron State College in 1973, was honored on October 19 during Chadron State College's Homecoming. Chadron State College made the following announcement on October 3.

"Kirkland earned a bachelor's degree in education in 1973 and a master's degree in Educational/Counseling Psychology from the University of Nebraska—Lincoln in 1981. His dissertation studied college students' perceptions of classroom experiences and environments as related to Diversity and Multiculturalism. Kirkland

earned a doctorate in Adult Education with an emphasis in Community and Human Resources from UNL in 2002.

"He began his career in the Office of Career Services at the University of Nebraska-Omaha as a Career Counselor from 1981 to 1986. From 1986 to 1987, Kirkland was an advisor and counselor where he provided academic advising for undergraduate students and personal, social, career, and mental health counseling for undergraduates, graduates, and staff.

"At UNL's Counseling Center from 1986 to 1992, he helped students with academic, personal, social, and career-related issues and concerns. He became the center's coordinator from 1991 to 1992. He was also a counselor with UNL's Career Planning and Placement Services from 1992 to 1993.

"After serving as the Assistant Director of Career Services from 1992 to 2014, Kirkland became the Interim Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs

**cont'd on page 6**

## Dr. Jake Kirkland Jr. con't.

from 2015 to 2016. During this time, he also served as the Interim Director of the Jackie Gaughan Multicultural Center and Office of Academic Success and Intercultural Services.

"Kirkland's professional affiliations include the Nebraska Counseling Association. He was a member from 1977 to 2016 and chaired the Human Rights Committee from 1994 to 2015. He has been a member of several other state and national associations affiliated with career and academic counseling.

"He has received more than 30 honors and awards related to his professional and volunteer work. Kirkland's scholarly contributions include articles about job seeking and resume advice for high school seniors.

"Additionally, Kirkland has assisted in planning and organizing conferences related to multicultural counseling, academic success, diversity, career exploration, and institutional team building.

"In his community, Kirkland has been a member of the Lincoln Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored

People from 1988 to the present and served on the Voter Registration Outreach Committee from 2019 to the present. He has assisted with the annual Reverend Dr. Martin Luther Youth Rally for nearly 20 years. He has also been a volunteer with Cornhusker State Games and Big Brothers and Sisters."



Dr. Jake Kirkland Jr.

## LB2 makes budget changes that could leave families vulnerable

Kieran Kissler  
Nebraska Appleseed

*Editor's Note: The Legislature's focus was on property taxes when it met in special session this summer. Less attention was paid to state budget changes that could affect services for children and families. During the special session, senators passed a modest package that fell far short of the sweeping tax cuts envisioned by Gov. Jim Pillen. In the midst of a contentious session, less attention was paid to the midyear budget cuts and fund lapses that could leave children and families vulnerable. The Department of Health and Human Services has proposed for 2025-26 to eliminate optional Medicaid services such as dental and vision care and prescriptions.*

### Summary of the original bill:

To help pay for the widespread property tax relief he wanted, Gov. Jim Pillen asked for a bill in the special session to reduce the state budget. As originally introduced by Sen. Robert Clements of Elwood at Pillen's request, LB2 would have reduced carryover funds -- funds allocated but not yet spent -- from the general budget by \$116.7 million, highlighted by a \$42 million lapse in funding to the Department of Health and Human Services.

Additionally proposed were budget cuts of \$38 million to DHHS and \$10 million to the Department of Correctional Services in the 2025 fiscal year.

### Appropriations Committee amendment:

After deliberation, the committee approved an amendment to the bill and advanced it out of committee on a 7-1-1 vote with Senators Clements, Dorn, Armendariz, McDonnell, Lippincott, Dover and Erdman voting in support, Senator Vargas voting in opposition, and Senator Wishart signaling that she was present, not voting.

The committee amendment proposed \$15 million in department administrative costs as well as \$25 million in carryover funding. The proposed \$10 million cut to the Department of Correctional Services remained.

### Amendments proposed by the full Legislature:

During the first round of debate, Senator Dungan filed an amendment that would have removed the proposed DHHS budget cuts. Senator Dungan argued that without a clear understanding of where the cuts would be allocated from, it could negatively affect services such as developmental disabilities, child welfare and juvenile justice. Several senators expressed support for Senator

Dungan's amendment, including Appropriations Committee members Senators Vargas and Wishart. Dungan's amendment failed on a 13-32 vote that largely reflected party lines.

Senator Machaela Cavanaugh attempted to filibuster the bill, but it ultimately prevailed on a 34-10-2 vote that once again fell along partisan lines. The proposed \$15 million in budget cuts to DHHS, as well as the \$25 million in budget lapses, advanced with the bill. Overall, \$40 million in cuts to DHHS was supported by 34 senators.

In the second round of debate, Senator McKinney proposed an amendment that would have removed the \$10 million in cuts to the Department of Corrections, with the charge that the money be used to complete maintenance repairs to the water system infrastructure at the Nebraska State Penitentiary. Incarcerated people, Senator McKinney argued, were living in substandard conditions due to a longtime water main leak in the facilities. Despite a robust debate, McKinney's amendment failed on a 15-28-4 vote that again represented party lines.

Without any additional filibusters, the bill advanced to the final round of debate with a 32-8-5 vote.

### Final passage:

At the final round of voting, the bill was advanced to the Governor's desk with a 33-11-2 vote. LB2, featuring \$40 million in budget reductions to DHHS and \$10 million in cuts to the Department of Correctional Services, was signed into law on August 20th and took effect October 1st.

### Impact:

As the administrative budget cuts were not allocated to any singular agency within DHHS, the exact impacts of LB2 are yet to be seen. Cuts at the administrative level could impact staffing levels as well as efficacy, further complicating Nebraskans' access to critical services such as SNAP, behavioral health and child care subsidies.

In September, DHHS released its budget proposal for the next two-year budget. It included a proposed cut of more than \$120 million, with an ultimate charge from the Governor's office of reducing the agency budget by \$200 million. This was highlighted by the proposed elimination of optional services through Medicaid, including dental care, access to prescription medications, vision care, hearing screenings for infants and children, and more. Child and Family Services also saw a proposed 10% reduction in its rates, which would jeopardize federal funding and grant matching.

Without details as to how DHHS will navigate maintaining services in the midst of the budget cuts, many children and families will be left vulnerable to the new state budget.

## Black History: the Incomparable Lutie Lytle Cowan

Frank H. W. Edler

Even before the U. S. federal government withdrew its troops from the South in 1877, many Black men and women in Tennessee felt they had no other choice but to leave the racist state. Kansas, known for its history as a free state, was an attractive destination.

As early as 1875, African Americans held a convention in Nashville to decide the momentous question of whether they “should make Tennessee their home, or go somewhere else, and when and how” (*The Tennessean*, May 20, 1875). The convention felt it was incumbent upon them “to recommend that the entire colored population take steps looking to the early emigration from the state” (*Republican Banner*, May 21, 1875).

In the Resolutions produced at the convention, the delegates concluded that “to the white people, and to them alone, is due the ills borne by the colored people of the State.” Instances like the lynching of David Jones in front of the police station in Nashville; the murder of a school teacher, Julia Hayden, in her own home; and the burning of Black schools and churches were some of the reasons cited for leaving Tennessee (Ibid).

I mention Tennessee not only because Lutie Ann Lytle was born there in 1875 but also because her father, John R. Lytle (sometimes spelled Lyttle), and mother, Mary Ann “Mollie” Nelson Lytle, left the state in 1882 as the “Great Exodus” of African Americans from southern states to Kansas was winding down. They might have left sooner, but “Mollie” was pregnant with Charles who was born on March 30, 1881 (*Topeka Messenger*, November 5, 1969). Many Blacks preceded them. As Richard Edwards and Jacob K. Friefeld state in *The First Migrants*, “[t]en to fifteen thousand Exodusters arrived in Kansas in 1878 and 1879. Most arrived destitute, illiterate, and without knowledge of where to go or how they could earn a living in Kansas” (*The First Migrants*, p. 62). It is also a testa-



Lutie A. Lytle

ment to the urgency that African Americans felt in the need to find safety from white racism.

After arriving in Topeka, Kansas, John and Mollie Lytle, their children Lutie and baby brother Charles, as well as Mollie’s mother, Lucy Cheseboro (also spelled Cheeseborough), moved into the third ward called Tennessee Town because so many of the African Americans in that area were from Tennessee (“The Lytles of Tennessee Town,” Michelle Stottlemire, <https://tscpl.org/articles/the-lytles-of-tennessee-town>). Over time, John Lytle established his own barbershop and served as a policeman, at least in 1893. He was politically active and drawn to the Populist Party especially William Jennings Bryan’s position on free silver. In 1896 he organized a “colored free silver league” in Topeka with 20 members (*Topeka State Journal*, August 25, 1896). When the Bryan Free Silver Club was established in Topeka with one thousand people in attendance, “J. R. Lytle was made an additional vice president to represent the colored faction” (*Topeka Daily Capital*, August 28, 1896).

Lutie Lytle, the oldest of four siblings, attended Topeka High School where she excelled academically. After graduating, she demonstrated a clear interest in writing and became secretary of the Pleasant Hour Literary Circle (*The Blackman*, May 11, 1894).

She also began working as a compositor (typesetter) for Black newspapers in Topeka. More importantly, she was then hired as “one of the editors of the *Kansas Blackman*” that was established and published by W. D. Driver in April of 1894. She also worked “for numerous other papers devoted to the interests of her race.” The article in the *Leavenworth Times* went on to say that she was “responsible for many of the bright, pungent paragraphs credited to the papers published by the negroes” (*Leavenworth Times*, May 24, 1894).

It was while she was working in a printing office that she decided to study law. The *Topeka Daily Capital* in 1897 quoted from a letter that Lytle published in the *New York Sunday Journal* where she stated that “I read the newspaper exchanges a great deal and became impressed with the knowledge of the fact that my own people especially were the victims of legal ignorance” (*Topeka Daily Capital*, September 23, 1897). After serving as assistant enrolling clerk for the Kansas legislature (*Clafin Leader*, January 11, 1895), she moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee, where she taught school to earn enough money to attend the law school at Central Tennessee College for African Americans in Nashville.

While Lytle was teaching in Chattanooga and beginning law school, her future husband, Alfred C. Cowan who was one of the most respected Black lawyers in Brooklyn and New York, was fighting the Jamaica board of education’s segregation policy in Queens County, New York. Cowan, a graduate of Boston University Law School who also studied law at New York University (*New York Age*, September 11, 1913), argued that Black children were entitled to attend white schools and took the case, known as the “Jamaica school war,” to Supreme Court Judge Garretson. Unfortunately, Judge Garretson in 1897 denied Cowan’s petition to compel the board of education to admit the children in part because “petitioners cannot act for their children” (*Times Union*, February 15, 1897).

That same year, Lytle graduated from the law school at Central Tennessee College. As valedictorian of her class, she gave a speech on “Marriage and Divorce” (*Topeka State Journal*, May 28, 1897). Although she applied to the Tennessee bar, she was rejected a number of times “because she was a woman” (Russell Fowler, “A Woman of Many Firsts,” Tennessee Bar Association, *Tennessee Law Blog*, Vol. 54, No. 10, September 27, 2018). Nevertheless, she persisted, and with the help of two prominent African American attorneys, Josiah T. Settle and A. B. Sandler, she was brought before Judge Lansford P. Cooper in Memphis. As Russell Fowler states, “Judge Cooper boldly brushed aside the ban on female lawyers and administered the oral exam, deemed her **cont’d on page 6**

## Lutie Lytle Cowan con't.

qualified and granted the motion" (Ibid). She was the first African American woman to be admitted to the Tennessee bar.

Lytle returned to Topeka with the intention of opening her own law office. When she took the bar exam, she was first African American woman to be a member of the Kansas bar. Topeka, however, could not keep her. Central Tennessee College offered her a position to teach law in 1898-1899 (*Capper's Weekly*, October 28, 1898), and this put Lytle in a rather special category. As Paul Finkelman has pointed out, Lytle "was the first woman law professor – black or white – in the United States and probably in the Anglo-American world" (Paul Finkelman, "Not Only the Judges' Robes Were Black: African American Lawyers as Social Engineers," *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (November 1994), 164).

On Christmas Day, 1900, the *Topeka State Journal* announced that "Miss Lutie Lytle will be married to Mr. A. C. Cowan of Pittsburg, Pa., on Wednesday [December 26] morning at 7 o'clock," and that they would "immediately go to Mr. Cowan's home in New York" (*Topeka State Journal*, December 25, 1900). Their marriage license, according to the *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*, was issued on Wednesday, January 2, 1901 (*Pittsburg Post-Gazette*, January 3, 1901). They were an exceptionally good match and practiced law together.

In the latter part of the 1800s as southern states moved to re-establish white supremacy by holding conventions that revised state constitutions for the purpose of disenfranchising African Americans, it became apparent that Blacks needed a national organization to protect their rights. The National Afro-American Council (NAAC), established in Chicago in 1898 from an earlier organization called the Afro-American League, was such a national organization. However, because T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the *New York Age* and a confidant of Booker T. Washington, had been made president of the NAAC in a rigged election in 1902, it was unclear how active a role the NAAC would take against disenfranchisement (Paul Nelson, "National Afro-American Council Meeting, 1902," MNOPEIDIA, 2014).

Lutie and Alfred Cowan were deeply concerned not only



**HON. ALFRED C. COWAN,**  
Attorney and Councillor-at-Law  
of New York City, who has won  
a high position in his fraternity  
as well as one of Topeka's  
most brilliant young ladies.

(*Topeka Plainsdealer*,  
March 21, 1901)

at Louisville, Kentucky, on July 1" (*Brooklyn Citizen*, June 4, 1903). William M. Trotter, founder of the *Boston Guardian* and head of the

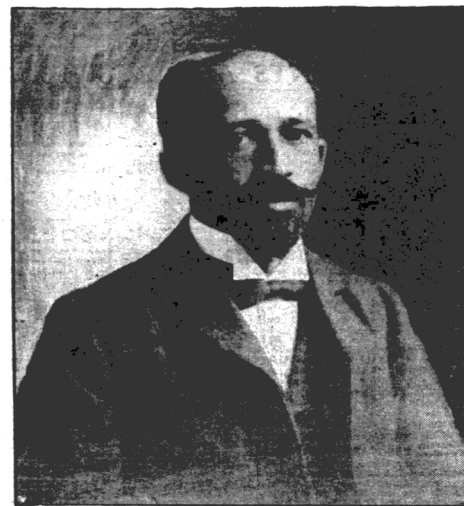
delegates from the New England states, who was vehemently opposed "to the racially conciliatory policies advocated by Booker T. Washington" ("William Monroe Trotter" by Herbert G. Ruffin II, *Black Past*, African American History), attended the meeting. The NNSL chose to meet in Louisville because the National Afro-American Council was holding its sixth annual meeting there at the same time (July 1-3).

However, when members of the NNSL wanted to attend the NAAC meeting in Louisville, they were asked to pay five dollars which they refused to do. They then adjourned to the True Reformers' Hall on Walnut Street, adopted a constitution, and elected officers. During this process, Lutie and Alfred Cowan gave speeches clarifying the purpose of the NNSL: "J. E. Bruce, of Yonkers, N.Y. ... also spoke on the object of the organization, and he was followed by Alfred C. Cowan and Lutie L. Cowan, of Brooklyn" (*Courier-Journal*, July 2, 1903). After agreeing to a one dollar fee, the NNSL members joined the Council meeting. Tension between the pro-Washington and anti-Washington forces was high. This was the first occasion for public criticism to be voiced against Booker T. Washington. It's important to remember that two months before the meeting, W. E. B. Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folk* whose third chapter "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" was, according to Jacqueline M. Moore, "a devastating critique of Washington's philosophy and leadership" (Jacqueline M. Moore, *Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for Racial Uplift*, Volume I, 2003, p. 71; see also Paul Nelson, "National Afro-American Council Meeting of 1902," MNOPEIDIA, 2014).

At the end of the NAAC conference, resolutions were passed that did not advocate for any kind of protest. Although the resolutions acknowledged that the movement to disenfranchise Blacks had "broadened and strengthened," the remedy proposed was deeply disappointing: "[w]e make no objection to the disfranchisement of the ignorant negro, provided the same class of the other race are similarly dealt with" (*Sioux City Journal*, July 4, 1903). Less than a month later, the conflict between pro- and anti-Washington factions boiled over into a near riot at the Zion Church in Boston where Washington was speaking (*Bangor Daily News*, July 31, 1903).

In 1913, Alfred Cowan died suddenly in Norfolk, Virginia, while he and Lutie were vacationing. Lutie was devastated; nevertheless, she took up her husband's legal proceedings in Foster vs. Bucknall Steamship Company and won the case. On March 30, 1914, "a jury in the United States Circuit Court awarded a verdict for \$9,000" (*New York Age*, April 2, 1914).

Although Lytle was married again in 1916 to Rev. Stephen Alexander McNeill and lived in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, for a period of time, she spent the latter part of her life in Brooklyn where she worked for the Kings County Colored Democratic Association headed by Wesley L. Young and was president of the Ever Ready Club (*Brooklyn Citizen*, August 15, 1928). She also reverted back to the name of Lutie Lytle Cowan. She died on November 12, 1955.



PROFESSOR WILLIAM E. BURGHARDT DU BOIS.  
(Author of "The Souls of Black Folk." A. C. McClurg & Co., Chicago.)

Image from *The Inter Ocean* (Chicago),  
April 13, 1903