

Family Matters

February 2016

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Official Newsletter of the Gillyard-Johnson-Mahoney Family Reunions

A Special Edition Celebrating Black History Month



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Black History and Voting

By: Bettie Griggs

At our 2012 family reunion, we called upon our family to **Get Out and Vote**.

Last year August 10th, marked the 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. This Act made it easier for southern blacks, including many of our family members to register to vote. Literacy tests, poll taxes, and other such requirements that were used to restrict black voting were made illegal.

I still have a vivid memory of my mother Lucille Gillyard, receiving in the mail her first voter registration card. It was 1965, and I was a little girl of 12 years old, growing up in Mansfield, LA. Seeing mama hold that card in her hand remains indelibly etched in my memory. After receiving her card, I don't believe

she ever missed walking to Billingsley corner store to exercise her right to vote.

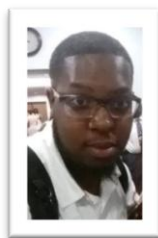
I'm sure I didn't know what it all meant or why she had those tears in her eyes. What I do know however is this; I am engaged in following issues and making it a point to vote in local, state and national elections, because of my memory of mama voting. When I vote, I honor her and all other blacks who faced persistent discrimination and were denied their right to vote.

Two of our family members, one in her eighties, and one in his nineties share their early memories of voting and how they felt being able to vote for the first black President, President Barack Obama (See page 2)

As we honor the past of a people brought here in bondage, let us also take time and encourage our younger generation to listen to our elders when

Family Spotlight

(Continue on page 4)



Joh'Shun Griffin



This edition of Family Matters shines the spotlight on Joh'Shun Griffin. Joh'Shun is the son of Johnnie and Cassandra Mitchell Griffin, grandson of Jamie and Lureener Mitchell, and the great grandson of the late Robert and Estella Gillyard. He is the youngest family member to be spotlighted in Family Matters.

Joh'Shun is one of our talented gospel musicians. He wowed our reunion attendees on drums for the debut of our 2010 GJM Family Reunion Choir. He currently plays drums at the Potter's House in Dallas, Texas, and is a musician with Undignified Praise.

He is featured on their 2012 Redeemed album.

Joh'Shun is now heading to Las Vegas, NV, where he will be a part of the Stellar Awards. The awards take place, February 17-20, 2016. He will play drums for three-time Grammy Award winning gospel singer Dorinda Clark-Cole.

His mother, Cassandra says "we are so grateful to God for opening doors for him as well as keeping his hands on him." Cassandra added that Joh'Shun received a prophecy a couple of years ago during a church service. It was prophesized that Joh'Shun would be known worldwide.

Joh'Shun attended college at Eastland College in Mesquite, Texas. To Joh'Shun, we say, **Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise (Psalm 33:3) NIV**

Upcoming Events

Sept 12, 2015
2016 Reunion Fundraiser
Gardena, CA

April 2, 2016
Los Angeles, CA

Check our website and
your email frequently for
all the latest information
on the 2016 Family
Reunion

"Lift Every Voice and Sing" — often referred to as the "Black American National Anthem"— is a song written as a poem by James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) in 1899 and set to music by his brother John Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954). It was publicly performed first as a poem by 500 school children at the segregated Stanton School as part of a celebration of Abraham Lincoln's birthday on February 12, 1900. The school's principal, James Weldon Johnson, wrote the words to introduce its honored guest Booker T. Washington. In 1919, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) dubbed it "The Negro National Anthem" for its power in voicing the cry for liberation and affirmation for African American people. On January 20, 2009, the Rev. Joseph Lowery, former president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, used a near-verbatim recitation of the song's third stanza to begin his benediction at the inauguration ceremony for President Barack Obama.

Lift every voice and sin
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise,
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling
sea. Sing a song full of the faith
that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the
present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day
begun, Let us march on till victory
is won.

Stony the road we trod, Bitter the
chastening rod, Felt in the days
when hope unborn had died; Yet
with a steady beat, Have not our
weary feet Come to the place for
which our forefathers sighed? We
have come over a way that with
tears has been watered, We have
come treading our path through the
blood of the slaughtered, Out from
the gloomy past, till now we stand
at last Where the white gleam of
our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years, God of our
silent tears, thou who hast brought
us thus far on the way; Thou who
has by Thy might Led us into the
light, Keep us forever in the path,
we pray. Lest our feet stray from
the places, our God, where we met
Thee, Lest our hearts, drunk with
the wine of the world, we forget
Thee, Shadowed beneath thy hand,
may we forever stand, True to our
God, true to our native land.

Voting History



Lula Mae Dixon



Roy Mahoney

Lula Mae Gilyard Dixon and Roy Mahoney participated in the Gillyard Johnson Mahoney Family Research team's Voting Project. We are thankful for the time they spent sharing their voting history with us. During this month set aside to share and honor Black History, we are pleased to share their answers to the following questions.

FM: Do you remember when you were not able to vote? If so, can you describe how that made you feel?

Lula Mae: Yes, I remember clearly not being able to vote. I never really connected my feelings to it until I was asked by the personnel office of my job, "Are you a registered voter?"

My first feeling was one of embarrassment. I felt ashamed to say no.

Roy: I didn't like the fact that I couldn't vote although light skinned blacks could.

FM: Do you remember when you were first able to register to vote and what year it was? If so, how old were you and who or what did you vote for?

Lula Mae: I think it was 1959, and I was in my early twenties. The first time I went to vote, I stood in line for 5 hours. I don't remember what we were voting for, but I do remember people giving us water and food as we waited.

Roy: Don't remember voting in Louisiana, but first voted for Earl K. Long in the 50s.

FM: Do you have a copy of the first voter registration card you received? If so, can you provide us a copy of it?

Lula Mae: No.

Roy: No.

FM: Can you provide us with a copy of your current voter registration card.

Lula Mae: Yes. *

Roy: No, I'm unable to provide a copy of my current card.

FM: Did you vote for President Barack Obama in 2008 or in 2012? If so, please describe how that made you feel to be able to vote for and see a black man hold the office of President of the United States of America

Lula Mae: Yes, I voted for President Obama. I thought that was something I would never have lived to see. I was so excited and happy. It felt so good to press that button by his name. It took me back (Continue on page 3)

(Continue on page 3)

It was April 1915 when Dr. Booker T. Washington dispatched a letter to the leading African American newspapers, proposing the observance of National Negro Health Week. Health was the key to progress and equality in all things he argued. He called on schools, churches, businesses, professional associations and the most influential organizations in the African American community to “pull together” and “unite” in one great National Health Movement. That movement grew into what is today a month long initiative to advance health equality across the county, **National Minority Health Month.**

In our last issue, we discussed specific disparities that exist between African Americans and other ethnic groups. This month

we provide **Five Steps** that we can do in our family and in our communities:

1. Increase Awareness about health Disparities by blogging, tweeting or sharing information via facebook.
2. Become a Leader by educating others and share stories about programs with family, organizations and community leaders.
3. Support Healthy and Safe Behaviors by serving nutritious foods at family functions and at work and join the First Lady’s Let’s Move initiative.
4. Improve Access to Health Care. Encourage other family members and friends to participate in

our Family Health Fairs and partner with local care health care providers and offer free health screenings at your place of worship.

5. Create Healthy Neighborhoods-advocate for more sidewalks, bike lanes and recreation facilities and ask your supermarkets to provide fresh fruit and vegetables to food banks and ask local restaurants to provide healthy menu options.



Article summarized from hhs.gov website

Voting History (cont’d from page 2)

to when we could not vote and actually brought tears to my eyes. Do not get me wrong, they were tears of joy.

Roy: I did vote for President Obama and was very happy when he was elected. I never thought I would live to see a black President.

FM: Is there anything else that you would like to share with us about the right to vote?

Lula Mae: I want all our young people to appreciate the rights we have been given by many who died so we could have them. Go and register to vote as soon as you reach voting age. Most importantly, once you register, exercise your right. Vote.

Roy: Nothing to add.

*Lula Mae provided a copy of her current voter registration card for our historical archives.

Family News

July 2015

July 5-9th - Destiny Davis traveled to the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) conference in Washington DC. She competed in STAR (Students Taking Action with Recognition) and received a gold medal for the Recycle and Redesign competition where she created a dress and necklace from old magazines and newspapers.

June 2015

June 19th - Ostell Griggs received Certificate of Recognition from Assemblymember Mike Gipson and the California Assembly for outstanding achievements and contributions to the community.

May 2015

I’mUnique Devoin Bryant - received Associate of Science degree from Bossier Parish Community College. She is currently enrolled at LSU-Shreveport.

In Memoriam

February 7, 2016 Darryl Boatright, son of the late Charlie Boatright and Earline Guion Boatright.

October 19, 2015 Dorothy Clinton Phelps, daughter of the late Roger Clinton, Sr. and Celeste Gillyard Clinton.

September 22, 2015-Freddy Sanders, son of the late Johnnie B. and Fannie White Sanders.

June 5, 2015-Earline Guion Boatright-daughter of the late William Guion and granddaughter of the late Florida Mahoney Guion

Other News

You can now follow us on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/gjmfamily

Submit news to gjmfamilyreunion@gmail.com

Family Historian
bettiegillyard@aol.com

Family Reunions
Mission:

To focus on the things that shape us rather than the circumstances that divide us; to strengthen and preserve family as God orders our steps. We value God's Plan, Family, Tradition, and Service.

We're on the Web!
gillyard-johnson-mahoney.com

Email Us:
gjmfamilyreunion@gmail.com

You are Cordially Invited to The 7th GJM Family Reunion Faith, Family, and Fellowship July 29-31, 2016

(details at www.gillyard-johnson-mahoney.com)

Black History and Voting (Cont'd from page 1)

they share their experiences and struggles growing up.

This month, Family Spotlight (page 1) shines on one of the gifted musicians in the GJM family. Joh'Shun is making his mark in the music industry. Finally, don't miss part 2 of Important Health Disparities and catch up on our Family News (page 3).

The GJM family history team is currently interviewing family members and friends regarding voting and the Voting Rights Acts of 1965. If you have

a memory to share, please contact the team at gjmfamilyreunion@gmail.com

We hope that the team will hear from many of you regarding your feelings about voting, voting for President Obama or the Voting Rights Act. We are documenting our history; not just this month, but everyday. Be included!

Enjoy Your Blessings!

Bettie

