

## BACKGROUND ON FERDINAND T. DAY

## OBITUARY

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well; it is well with my soul.*

Ferdinand T. "Fred" Day born in Alexandria, Virginia on August 7, 1918, was the 4<sup>th</sup> child of Robert W. and Victorine A. Day.

Ferdinand was baptized at Alexandria's St. Joseph Catholic Church at an early age and was a faithful and consistent supporter of the work and activities of the church. He attributed a strong faith in God and obedience to His word to his ability to overcome the vicissitudes of life, his efforts to advocate for equality and his numerous professional and community accomplishments.

He was educated in the Alexandria City and District of Columbia Public School Systems. He wanted to continue his education after completing Parker-Gray Elementary School, but he could not. The City of Alexandria only offered formal educational opportunities for Blacks through the eighth grade. So, he journeyed to the District of Columbia and attended Armstrong Technical High School. He graduated from Armstrong in 1935 and subsequently earned a Bachelor of Science degree, with a major in geography and history from Miner Teachers College in the District of Columbia. Unable to teach in his hometown, Fred joined the Federal government, participated in the U.S. Department of State Administrative Intern Program and completed advanced management courses at the Foreign Service Institute. Ferdinand retired from the Department of State as a Foreign Service Reserve Officer in 1978.

He met the love of his life Lucille **Peatross** in **Alexandria, VA**. They were married **on April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1942**. From this union, one daughter Gwendolyn was born. His love for his wife of **61 years** and daughter "Gwennie" was immeasurable. He drew great strength from their years of unselfishness and support of his civil rights work and community activism. They were indeed the "wind beneath his wings".

Ferdinand also loved the City of Alexandria, but often lamented that it was "typical southern port city with problems prevalent in the Deep South". He believed that the collective work of blacks and whites together would affect positive changes he longed to see in Alexandria. He worked tirelessly to help affect those changes at the community and state level. He contributed his time and talents to the civil rights work of the local NAACP and Urban League. Ferdinand was appointed to the Alexandria School Board in July 1964, ten years after the landmark Brown vs. the Board of Education decision. He was the first African American elected as chairman of a public school board in Commonwealth of Virginia and spent nearly two decades in the cause of improving the Alexandria City Public School System. He later served as vice-chairman of both the Northern Virginia and the Virginia State Boards of Community Colleges. In 1985, he was selected by the Secretary of Education to assist in the further implementation of the Virginia desegregation plan for higher education.

His longtime friend, A. Melvin Miller, worked closely with him on many civil rights and school integration issues, considered him “a strong voice and the strong mover whose strong leadership and ability to work with the community contributed the successes we were able to achieve”.

Former Alexandria City Manager the late Vola Lawson said, "Fred Day provided the moral leadership that helped Alexandria reconcile its segregated past of racial injustice by appealing to the City's conscience and hopes for a better future,"... "Martin Luther King Jr. believed that to effect the change necessary in America required people who were tough-minded but tenderhearted, and that describes my dear friend of 40 years". Also known for his forthrightness, honesty and loyalty Ferdinand was a confidante and mentor to many City politicians and leaders who held his advice, guidance and wisdom in high regard.

Fred was a member of the Departmental Progressive Club and was considered the club's "honest broker" down through the years. He was also member of the Alexandria Elks Lodge. He has received the prestigious Saint Joseph Catholic Church Master Christian Inspiration Award, the Third Baptist Church Layman of the Year Award for Christian brotherhood, fellowship and love, the Veteran's Fire Engine Association's Ben Lynt Distinguish Service Award and the Living Legends Award. He has also been recognized by the Alexandria City Council, Alexandria Olympic Boys and Girls Club, Alexandria Public Schools, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Departmental Progressive Club, Elks Lodge, Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Association, Hopkins House Association, NAACP, National Society for Personnel Administration, Northern Virginia and Washington Urban Leagues, the Virginia Community College System, the U.S. Department of State, The Tall Cedars of Lebanon, Tenants and Workers United. In addition to these numerous honors, Ferdinand is an Alexandria African American Hall of Fame inductee, there is a Ferdinand Day Drive the City's west end and a Ferdinand Day Wing in Alexandria's T.C. Williams High School.

His life almost spanning a century, Fred touched the lives of many, ultimately forging strong friendships. He will undoubtedly be missed but never forgotten. Ferdinand T. Day leaves to cherished is memory, a loving and devoted daughter Gwendolyn Day Fuller; two grandchildren, William Ferdinand Fuller (**Helen Christou-Fuller**) and Shanna Lucille Ringer, great grandchildren Imani, Brianna and Chloe; sister Mary D. Stokes; brother Clarence J. Day and many nieces, nephews, and a host of other relatives. He has also left an indelible mark on many friends and admirers in the City of Alexandria. He was preceded in death by his wife Lucille and brothers Quentin, George, and Robert.

*If I walk in the pathway of duty,  
If I work to close of the day,  
I shall see the great King in His beauty,  
When I have gone the last mile of the way,  
When I have gone the last mile of the way,  
I will rest at the close of the day,  
And I know there are joys that await me,  
When I have gone the last mile of the way.*

## A Once Mighty Oak Has Fallen

There was no crash as  
it silently fell  
yet the forest knew.  
The woodland creatures lie still  
in respect, for  
the tree had sustained  
them for decades.  
For the sun-weary  
he had given them shade...  
For the hungry  
he had given them what he had...  
For the frightened  
he had given them shelter  
for his limbs meant safety from fear.  
In the rain,  
in the storms,  
all would gather  
together yet tremble not  
as the oak stood guard.  
The wisdom of ages  
were locked in those  
gnarled limbs but all  
who lingered in the branches  
took a tiny twig of  
it with them to build  
into their nest.  
'Twould be a greater  
sadness had not a few  
acorns fallen into fertile  
ground around him,  
for they rise now to take his place.

~Author Unkown~



**THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA URBAN LEAGUE GUILD  
FERDINAND T. DAY SCHOLARSHIP**

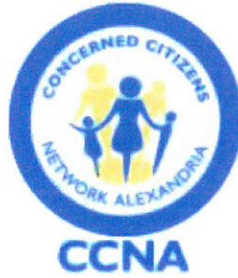
The scholarship being awarded this evening by the Northern Virginia Urban League Guild has been named in honor of a man whose life has demonstrated the very best visions and achievements of a private citizen.

Ferdinand T. Day was born August 7, 1918 in Alexandria, Virginia. The climate of the city at that time was far removed from the Alexandria City of today, an integrated school system, a city governed by an African-American mayor whose motto is "One Alexandria," an integrated City Council and a community with opportunities for its diverse population. Ferdinand attended the Parker-Gray Elementary School through the 7th grade, and then journeyed daily to Washington DC until his graduation in 1935 from Armstrong Technical High School. After having obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in geography and history from Miner Teachers' College, he was unable to teach in his hometown. He was employed by the Federal Government, participated in the Department of State Administrative Intern Program, completed advanced Management courses at the Foreign Service Institute in Washington, D.C., and later retired from the U.S. Department of State in December of 1978 as a Foreign Service Reserve Officer in the Office of the Director General of the Foreign Service.

Mr. Day throughout his life has been an instrument of change in his hometown, using every opportunity to advance the experiences of his race. He was appointed to the Alexandria City Public School Board on 1 July 1964 becoming the first African American Chairman of a public school board in the Virginia Commonwealth. He presided over the successful desegregation of the Alexandria Public Schools and the creation of the unified T.C. Williams High School. In 1985, he was selected by the State Secretary of Education to assist in the further implementation of the Virginia desegregation plan for higher education.

In the early 1970's, Mr. Day, along with others, took the necessary actions to create Northern Virginia Urban League Branch of the Washington Urban League. The evidence of the world's appreciation for Mr. Day's contribution to community service is reflected in awards from national and local organizations: U.S. Department of State, Virginia Community College System, National Society for Personnel Administration, Alexandria City Public School System, Master of Christian Inspiration Award from the St. Joseph Catholic Church, to name a few.

His life is a shining example of the value of scholarship and education.



## **Ferdinand T. Day**

Ferdinand T. Day was born in Alexandria on August 7, 1918, into what he called, in a recent interview, "a typical southern port city. I love Alexandria very dearly," he said. "Alexandria has been very good to me. I have a great many friends throughout the city, both black and white." In a speech last fall, he expanded on that thought. "In my day, however, there were admittedly many injustices and shameful wrongs to be corrected.... Most of the problems then inherent in the Deep South were prevalent here in Alexandria."

Day was nominated as a Living Legend for his role in the integration of Alexandria schools and his work in obtaining rights and opportunities for African Americans in our city by former City Manager Vola Lawson, who recalls meeting Fred Day when she and others active in the civil rights movement were picketing in Alexandria in the 1960s.

Mr. Day attended the segregated Parker-Gray Elementary School through seventh grade. There was no public high school for African American youth in Alexandria, so he made the daily trek into Washington, D.C., where he graduated from Armstrong Technical High School in 1935. Later he earned a B.S. degree, with a major in geography and history, from Minor Teachers College in D.C. Being unable to teach in his hometown, he found employment with the Federal government, participating in the Department of State Administrative Intern Program. He also completed advanced management courses at the Foreign Service Institute. Day retired from the U.S. Department of State as a Foreign Service Reserve Officer in 1978.

STILL mentally strong at 96, Mr. Day offers a ready smile and a warm handshake upon meeting. Just two years ago he addressed Mayor William Euille's Unity Breakfast and spoke at the Alexandria Education Partnership Awards Dinner last year. He reminded attendees that the date was the 53rd anniversary of the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision on Brown vs. Board of Education. In response to that decision, the Alexandria City Council eventually expanded the City's public school board from 6 to 9 members, and appointed Day as one of the three new members. The date was July 1, 1964, ten years after the Brown decision. He was the only African American on the board.

With then Superintendent John Albohm, the new board worked to achieve the integration of Alexandria's public schools, a process neither quick nor easy.

FIRST AS A MEMBER, then as vice chair and chair of the board of Alexandria Public Schools, and as vice-chairman of both the Northern Virginia and the Virginia State Boards of Community

Colleges, Day served for nearly two decades in the cause of improving local education. When he became chair of the Alexandria School Board, he was the first African American chairman of a public school board in Virginia. In 1985, he was selected by the Secretary of Education to assist in the further implementation of the Virginia desegregation plan for higher education.

Over the years, Day has received many awards for outstanding community service from groups such as the Alexandria City Council, Alexandria Olympic Boys and Girls Club, Alexandria Public Schools, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Departmental Progressive Club, Elks Lodge, Friendship Veterans Fire Engine Association, Hopkins House Association, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, National Society for Personnel Administration, Northern Virginia and Washington Urban Leagues, the Virginia Community College System and the U.S. Department of State.

Mr. Day, who is a widower, resides in Alexandria with his daughter, Gwendolyn Day-Fuller. He has two grandchildren, William Fuller and Shanna Ringer, and three great granddaughters, Imani Fuller, Chloe Fuller, and Brianna Ringer, who reside in Massachusetts.