

February Newsletter

Volume 1 | Number 3 | 2024

Welcome to the third edition of our monthly chapter newsletter. We hope you find it interesting and informative. Our aim is for the newsletter to provide news and feature stories to complement announcements and other information that can be found on the website. We wanted to get the newsletter out before our next meeting which will be Saturday April 6, 2024 at 10 a.m. at Faith Miracle Temple of Glory Church, 326 Wilson Dr. in Mayfield. Rev. George Hurd, our branch president, is pastor at the church.

Of course, this is your newsletter. We welcome your comments on how to make it better serve the chapter. We welcome stories, news items, announcements and photos from you. Just email them to bcaig8960@gmail.com.

Thanks!

Berry

Berry Craig, editor

ANNOUNCEMENTS

April branch meeting set for April 6

The next regular monthly branch meeting is set for April 6, a Saturday, at 11 a.m. at Faith Miracle Temple of Glory Church, 1326 Wilson Dr, Mayfield, KY 42066. This is the church where our President George Hurt Jr. serves.

Derrick Parrott and Berry Craig are working on getting business cards for the branch that will include the post office box, email address and a contact telephone number. More details to follow.



Augusta Thomas (AFGE photo)

EDITOR'S NOTE: The nation observes March as Women's History Month. *During Women's History Month, we celebrate the courageous women who have helped our Nation build a fairer, more just society,* President Joe Biden proclaimed for this Women's History Month.

Throughout history, the vision and achievements of powerful women have strengthened our Nation and opened the doors of opportunity wider for all of us. Though their stories too often go untold, all of us stand on the shoulders of these sung and unsung trailblazers — from the women who took a stand as suffragists, abolitionists, and labor leaders to pioneering scientists and engineers, groundbreaking artists, proud public servants, and brave members of our Armed Forces.

'Augusta Thomas was a tireless champion, a true warrior for workers' rights, civil rights and human rights for all working people.'

By BERRY CRAIG

Alliance for Retired Americans

[Augusta Y. Thomas](#) practiced what she preached as a civil rights and labor activist: "Do for those who cannot do for themselves."

In 1960, she traveled from Louisville, her hometown, to join the historic [lunch counter sit-ins](#) in Greensboro, North Carolina. Angry whites spit on her and shoved her off a stool. Police twice arrested her.

Six years later, Thomas joined the [American Federation of Government Employees](#) on the day she went to work as a nursing assistant at [Louisville's Veterans Hospital](#). She spent 52 years in the union, capping her career as AFGE's Washington-based national vice president for women and fair practices.

"Ms. Thomas is revered as AFGE's most iconic civil, human and workers' rights leader," remembered Jeremy Lannan, her successor.

Thomas's union brothers and sisters said she embodied what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. [wrote in 1962](#): "The coalition that can have the greatest impact in the struggle for human dignity here in America is that of the Negro and the forces of labor, because their fortunes are so closely intertwined."

Thomas heard the gunshot that killed King on April 4, 1968.

I last saw her in February, 2018, eight months before she died at age 86. She was a featured speaker for the [Working People's Day of Action](#) rally at the [United Auto Workers Local 862](#) hall on Fern Valley Road in Louisville.

The crowd of union members and union supporters, including politicians, kept interrupting her with cheers and loud applause.

Her address was a short sketch of her life. She told about the time she and two of her teenage friends wanted to play a game that required a quartet. A third teen, "Little Martin," balked.

When he went to the basement to fuel the furnace with coal, Thomas locked the door behind him. After about 30 minutes, he relented and she let him out. "But let me tell you what," Thomas said, grinning. "I got punished when I got home."

Her "prisoner" was 17-year-old Martin Luther King Jr.

Thomas, 13, had gone to Atlanta to live with her aunt and uncle. Her uncle was a Methodist minister and colleague of the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr., a Baptist. "The pastors would meet at 'Little Martin's house,'" Thomas told me after her speech.

King and Thomas went to the same school before she returned to Louisville and graduated from [Central High School](#). Thomas also went to [Clark Atlanta University](#) and the [Homer G. Phillips School of Nursing](#) in St. Louis.

Thomas was a 27-year-old veteran of Louisville sit-ins when she traveled to Jim Crow Greensboro. Fearing for her safety, her husband and her father begged her to stay home.

"If I don't go and the next person doesn't go and the next person doesn't go, who's going to be there to help?" Thomas explained when she earned a "Sit-In Participant" award from the [Greensboro International Civil Rights Center and Museum](#).

She and "Little Martin" crossed paths again in Memphis in April, 1968. He was in the city supporting striking African American sanitation workers who had signed up with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

King did not live to see the strikers triumph. He was assassinated on April 4.

Thomas and five other women from different Louisville unions were in Memphis in solidarity with the strikers. They were in first floor rooms at the [Lorraine Motel](#); King was on the second floor.

The women were in their rooms when James Earl Ray, a racist white man, murdered King with a rifle shot. King was standing on a second-floor balcony. (The motel is part of the National Civil Rights Museum.)

"We thought it was firecrackers, and we just ignored it," she said, adding that when she heard King was dead, "all I could think about was that my friend was gone."

The night before, Thomas and the other union women were in the crowd and heard King's immortal "[I've Been to the Mountaintop](#)" speech. "I had chills running down me," Thomas also told me. "But I didn't get to talk to him."

Thomas was no fan of then-President Donald Trump and his Republican party. She urged the crowd: "We've got to get to the mountaintop. We have got to work together. We've got to get rid of '45' and some of those folks up on that hill in Washington, D.C."

Thomas warned, "The future of working people hangs in the balance right now... We must stand until we are all equals, no matter our race, no matter our gender, no matter our class."

Thomas died on Oct. 10, 2018. A year later, her union and the Kentucky State AFL-CIO — she was a longtime member of the executive board — proclaimed Oct. 14 Augusta Y. Thomas Day, "a day dedicated to community service and reflection of the life of a leader that inspires us all to fight for those who cannot fight for themselves."

"Augusta Thomas was a tireless champion, a true warrior for workers' rights, civil rights and human rights for all working people," said Bill Londrigan when he was state AFL-CIO president. "I still miss her."

NAACP mission statement

Our mission is to achieve equity, political rights, and social inclusion by advancing policies and practices that expand human and civil rights, eliminate discrimination, and accelerate the well-being, education, and economic security of Black people and all persons of color.

**REMEMBERING MLK:
THE MAN. THE MOVEMENT. THE MOMENT.**

**APRIL 4, 2024 • 4:30 PM CENTRAL
MUSEUM COURTYARD • 4:00 PM MUSICAL PRELUDE**

The National Civil Rights Museum presents a hybrid commemoration in honor of Dr. King's life and legacy on the anniversary of his death. Guests are welcome to join us in paying tribute to Dr. King in the museum courtyard or via live stream.

Each year, the Museum remembers the tragic event that occurred on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in 1968 as we ask the perpetual question, "Where do we go from here?" This year's event features a keynote speaker, special performances, fraternal tributes, and the changing of the balcony wreath with a moment of silence at 6:01 pm Central when Dr. King was slain. A musical prelude begins at 4:00 pm Central.



REMEMBERING MLK:

THE MAN. THE MOVEMENT. THE MOMENT.

**APRIL 4, 2024 • 4:30 PM CENTRAL
MUSEUM COURTYARD • 4:00 PM MUSICAL PRELUDE**

The National Civil Rights Museum presents a hybrid commemoration in honor of Dr. King's life and legacy on the anniversary of his death. Guests are welcome to join us in paying tribute to Dr. King in the museum courtyard or via live stream.

Each year, the Museum remembers the tragic event that occurred on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in 1968 as we ask the perpetual question, "Where do we go from here?" This year's event features a keynote speaker, special performances, fraternal tributes, and the changing of the balcony wreath with a moment of silence at 6:01 pm Central when Dr. King was slain. A musical prelude begins at 4:00 pm Central.

The museum is housed in the former motel at 450 Mulberry Street, Memphis, TN 38103. The phone number is (901) 521-9699.

