

Extract from

DIAMONDS OF DELAWARE AND MARYLAND'S EASTERN SHORE: SEVEN
BLACK MEN OF DISTINCTION

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Herman Holloway, Sr. (1922-1994)

Dean of Delaware's Black Politicians

Herman Holloway Sr. has come to be known as the "Dean of Black Politicians in Delaware." It is an appropriate title for a man who spent more than 30 years as a public servant in the State Legislature, having served as a State Representative and a State Senator.

Herman Holloway, Sr., a Democrat, championed the poor and the downtrodden. An effective orator, his skills of persuasion served him well. His legacy of leadership in the area of social services for Delawareans is unparalleled.

On February 4, 1922, Herman M. Holloway, Sr. was born to William and Hennie Holloway. Young Holloway grew up in Wilmington attending parochial and public schools. As an athlete, he excelled in basketball and football at the all black Howard High School, the only black secondary school in Delaware at the time. Following graduation from high school, he attended Hampton Institute for one year.

Like many young men, Holloway embarked on many different jobs before settling on his chosen path. Known for his political savvy and ability to handle himself (in his earlier years, he was known as "Knockout" for his boxing prowess and "Cool" for his basketball handling skills), Holloway worked his way through a number of occupations: bar and grill operator; school district maintenance supervisor; Wilmington police officer; Boy Scout coordinator; and aide in the General Assembly. Unsatisfied with the several jobs he undertook, Holloway decided to try his hand at politics. At age 23, in 1945, Holloway was defeated for a seat on the Wilmington City Council. In 1963, he was elected to serve out the unexpired term of Paul Livingston in the Delaware House of Representatives. One year later, in 1964, Holloway became the first black elected to Delaware's State Senate from the Second District of New Castle County. Since 1964, Holloway has been returned to office at every election. (In 1996, Margaret Rose Henry became the first African American woman to be elected to Delaware's State Senate.)

Although elected to the Senate with the help of the Democratic Party, Senator Holloway established himself as an "independent" legislator. During his 29 years in the legislature, Holloway often went against his party on racial and civil rights issues and even supported Republicans for office. Although some of these actions placed him in what he called "hell catching" positions, many observers understood that Holloway was an astute politician. Accomplished at the art of "wheeling and dealing" in back rooms, he knew how to use the leverage he had as an "independent." These skills and his ability to articulate his position placed Holloway in the center of many legislative battles.

One of the hallmarks of Senator Holloway's legislative career occurred in 1965 when he introduced Senate Bill 128 (an Open Housing Bill) and later supported Senate Bill 358, which called for open transactions on all housing sales. Holloway stirred the public conscience on opening housing and supported the bill with rigorous debate. Although it was defeated, the December 9, 1965 *News Journal* reported that Holloway, "held the spectators spellbound with a plea for passage of Senate Bill 358." His words were a reminder to the Senate: "While there is discrimination in housing against Negroes in Delaware, the military cemeteries and foxholes in Vietnam are fully integrated with Negro and White soldiers." Eventually, an open housing bill was passed in 1968.

Holloway managed, through longevity and negotiation, to become a major player in Delaware's political circles. By 1988, he was the most tenured legislator in the Delaware Assembly. No other legislator elected in the nation (at any level of government) had more continuous service than Senator Herman Holloway, Sr. of Delaware.

In the area of social legislation Holloway has no peer. Over his 31 years as Delaware's legislator, Holloway served on numerous committees: Adult and Juvenile Corrections; Children, Youth, and Family; Joint Finance Committee; Labor and Industrial Relations; and Revenue and Taxation to list a few.

Holloway's service was exhaustive. He was chairperson on the Senate Committee on Health, Social Services, and Aging for 16 years. He was a member of Delaware's Interstate Cooperative Commission, the Human Resource Task Force, and the Eastern Region of the National Legislator Conference.

Senator Holloway's biggest victories were in the form of his socially progressive legislation. The Public Accommodations Act was passed in 1963, barring racial discrimination in public accommodations. In his belief that he was "the representative for all the people," Holloway's legislation provided for the broadest range of human and social services--disabilities, medical and educational programs, opportunities and

benefits for women, adult protective services, effective child support collection, opportunities for the disadvantaged and poor, child protective services, and a host of other human needs.

"The Senator," as he was oftentimes endearingly referred to, did not, as many observed, limit his compassion to the legislation. Several stories attest to his personal sacrifice and concern for fellow citizens. Holloway never lost his touch with the common folk.

One story reveals that Holloway was late to his own swearing-in ceremony because he was busy helping a lady get her money back from a grocery store owner who had sold her some tainted pork chops. Another episode found Holloway in the hospital being treated for lung cancer and demanding a limousine come get him to cast his vote on a desegregation agreement that was one vote short. Such actions earned him great respect.

While Holloway had his critics throughout his legislative career, his accomplishments, in the long run, outweighed any limitations. Delaware State College (now Delaware State University) awarded him an Honorary Doctor of Law degree in 1969. In 1972, the Georgetown Branch of Delaware Technical and Community College awarded him an Honorary Associates Degree of Applied Science. The Delaware Chapter of the National Caucus and Center for Black Aged honored him for Outstanding Service in 1990. And, numerous other agencies have lauded Holloway for his contributions for making a difference in the lives of all Delawareans.

Senator Holloway was also active in civic affairs. He was a member of Mount Joy United Methodist Church; a Past Worshipful Master of Union Lodge #21 Prince Hall Masonic Order; member of the Board of Managers of the Walnut Street YMCA; member of the historic Monday Club, Inc. of Wilmington; and founder and President of the Citizens Political Issue League of Delaware.

A strong family man, Holloway was married to the former Miss Ethel Johnson of Wilmington. The marriage produced five children--three daughters and two sons. Herman M. Holloway, Jr. developed his father's knack for politics and was first elected to the State House in 1978 and was re-elected in 1980 and 1982.

On March 14, 1995, Herman M. Holloway, Sr. died of lung cancer at the age of 72. He will be remembered for the pivotal role he played in the state's passage of Civil Rights legislation and his efforts to bring Delaware's human service into the modern age. The State Health and Social Services Building on DuPont Highway has been named in his honor. A portrait of the Senator by African American artist, Simmie Knox, now hangs in Legislative Hall in Dover. Senator Herman M. Holloway, Sr. in

his pioneering efforts has increased black participation in the mainstream. As we move toward the year 2000, it would bode Delawareans well to follow the example Senator Holloway--a man whose leadership enhanced the life of the entire citizenry of Delaware.