



HISTORY AND MISSION OF THE METUCHEN-EDISON AREA BRANCH

In 1942, when the United States was focusing its efforts on struggles abroad brought on by World War II, the Black residents of Metuchen and Edison were focusing on a different struggle: racial equality in their communities. As a result, on October 13, 1942, the charter for the Metuchen-Edison Area Branch of the NAACP was received.

During the tumultuous Civil Rights Movement era of the '50s and '60s, members of the Metuchen-Edison Area Branch were instrumental in bringing about changes relating to discriminatory housing practices and segregation in schools.

One notable housing incident involved the initial refusal of White residents in an area of Metuchen to accept a Black engineer with a wife and two children moving into their neighborhood. "Anti-Negro" signs were put on neighborhood lawns, but because of dogged determination and perseverance on the part of Metuchen-Edison Area Branch members, including then Branch President Roosevelt Moses, and other community groups, the Black family eventually moved in, and were able to live in a peaceful co-existence with their White neighbors.

In the '70s and '80s, although the Civil Rights Movement was no longer at its peak, the Metuchen-Edison Area Branch was no less active, turning its attention on employment opportunities for Blacks in the areas of law enforcement and local government. The Branch also continued the fight for fair housing and against hate groups like the Klu Klux Klan and the Skinheads.

Because of the efforts of then Branch President, Perry Letsinger and other community activists, in 1970 Metuchen hired its first Black police officer; a few years later, the first Black was on the city council. In 1973, the Branch demonstrated and sat-in for two weeks at the Edison Housing Authority office to put pressure on the Housing Authority to hire a developer. In 1982, the Branch held a meeting conducted on a state level to combat Klu Klux Klan-related problems, with the then Speaker of the New Jersey State Assembly, and the then mayor and Council President of Edison as speakers.

In the '90s, the Metuchen-Edison Area Branch was at the frontline of the battle against racial profiling, spearheading several investigations into local incidences of racial profiling. The branch participated in a rally on the New Jersey Turnpike to protest New Jersey State Troopers shooting four young unarmed men—three Black, one Hispanic—as well as a rally protesting the killing of unarmed West African immigrant Amadou Diallo in a hail of 41 bullets by four New York City police officers. Also during the '90s, the branch focused on the health concerns of under-served minority communities by hosting an annual Family Health and Cultural Fair, promoting health awareness and preventative care by offering health screenings and tests free of charge. Additionally, the cultural diversity of various communities was celebrated by way of entertainment, food and vendors.

In 1992, the Branch stopped Denny's Restaurants from selling racially-offensive coffee mugs depicting negative Black caricatures. Denny's paid a settlement, and the money was given to the United Negro College Fund. In 1995, Branch representatives met with then Middlesex County (NJ) Republican Committee Chair Sam Thompson and Middlesex County Democratic Committee Chair Bob Smith regarding the lack of Black judges in Middlesex County. The Branch's efforts resulted in the selection of Travis Francis, Esq., as the first Black Middlesex County Superior Court Judge. Further efforts by the Branch led to Lorraine Pullen becoming Middlesex County's first female Black Superior Court judge in 1999. Also in 1999, the Branch began sponsoring First-Time Home Buyers seminars to facilitate increasing minority home ownership.

In the beginning years of the new millennium, a few of the Branch's more noteworthy accomplishments were sponsoring a juvenile justice conference to find solutions to the overpopulation of African-American and Latino youth in the criminal justice system; registering over 400 first-time voters during a voter-registration drive as part of our Political Action Committee activities; developing a county-wide (Middlesex) expungement program; being instrumental in Rutgers University's hiring of their first African-American law enforcement supervisor.

Today, the NAACP Metuchen-Edison Area Branch continues the fight to achieve equality in all facets of life for African-Americans and other minorities with the same fervor it has had since its inception. We are the voice of people who for far too long have been ignored. And with a membership roster of dedicated and supportive individuals and organizations, the NAACP Metuchen-Edison Area Branch will be heard loud and clear.