

Overview of Civil Rights Accomplishments of Dr. John Y. Odom

- The first Affirmative Action officer for the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD).
- The second Director of the Department of Human Relations for MMSD. As Director, he: initiated the first minority achievement program in the district; initiated statewide Human Relations programs for high school students; supervised Title IX, ESL/Bilingual, Individual Differences, Native American and Hmong Programs, and Conflict Resolution Programs.
- As a principal, he motivated many students to achieve to their highest potential.
- Helped diversify the theatre in Madison by starring as: The Preacher in Finian's Rainbow, the King in The King & 1, Joseph in Joseph & the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, the Wiz in The Wiz, El Gallo in The Fantasticks and the father in The Tap Dance Kid.
- Was founder and first President of Madison's graduate Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.
- Served as President of the Madison Branch of the NAACP. When Dr. Odom became President, the Branch was down to its last \$400. Within two years, the branch had \$23,000. Dr. Odom has also served as first and second Vice Presidents of the Branch. Under his leadership he instituted Career Day for high school students and, through the Health Committee, the NAACP profoundly reduced sexually transmitted diseases among Madison's youth of color.
- He has served on many boards, including: Big Brothers and Sisters of Dane County, the Urban League, Edgewood High School, Children Theatre of Madison, Schools of Hope.
- Successfully lobbied the state legislature to prevent "high stakes" graduation testing from becoming law.

WITHIN THE LAST YEAR ALONE, DR. ODOM:

- In his role as Chair of the NAACP Education Committee, developed a strategy for closing the academic gap between Black & White students. Dr. Odom's strategy has been adopted as policy by the Madison schools.
- Served on the Strategic Education Task Force for the national NAACP.
- Published a widely recognized book, "*Saving Black America: An Economic Plan for Civil Rights*", to re-energize and redirect the civil rights movement.
- Founded the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute, a think tank devoted to implement the ideas presented in his book.
- Publicly and successfully challenged the anti-Affirmative Action positions of Regent Fred Mohs.
- Successfully lobbied the Madison schools to restore minority student achievement funds. Due to work of Dr. Odom and others, of the \$1.3 million proposed for cuts, \$833,000.00 were restored.

- Encouraged Rep. Tammy Baldwin to introduce a congressional bill to place the image of Prof Charles Hamilton Houston on a national Black History Month stamp. Rep. Baldwin has drafted and introduced that bill.

Mentor to many, Dr. Odom has helped Madisonians to resolve racial conflicts, to get justice, to get jobs, to enter college and to complete degrees. Affectionately known as “Godfather” among civil rights advocates, we know, in the name of civil rights, that: if plans need to be made; if a letter needs writing; a petition needs developing; a stand needs to be taken, Dr. Odom is our man. Whether through speeches, letters, poetry, acting, or song, Dr. Odom, a civil rights warrior, has been a “stand up” brother in Madison for almost 30 years.

It is because of these aforementioned accomplishments of Dr. John Y. Odom that we honor him as this year’s recipient of the Reverend James C. Wright Human Rights Award.

Nominees for the Rev. James C. Wright Human Rights Award were also recognized. They are Lucille Badger, Bill Keys, Sol Levin (posthumously), Bruce Newton, and Jerry E. Smith, Jr. Each of these nominees has demonstrated a commitment to civil and human rights through their service to this community by way of their employment, volunteerism and other grassroots efforts. They have provided leadership, trail blazed and worked to ensure that individuals are treated with dignity and respect in the areas of health care, juvenile and criminal justice, as well as social, political and community organization.

Past recipients of the Wright Award which began in 1995, include Jacqueline Wright, Dr. Richard H. Harris, Wisconsin Supreme Court Justice Shirley S. Abrahamson, Helen Vukelich, Anthony “Nino” Amato, and John A. Noreika, Sr.