

The Clerk's Black History Series



Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County

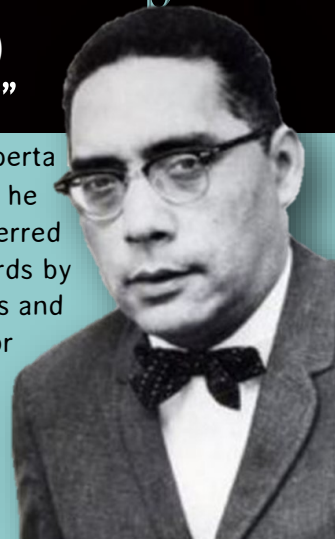


Simeon Saunders Booker, Jr.

(August 27, 1918 – December 10, 2017)

"First African-American Washington Post Journalist"

Simeon Saunders Booker Jr., was born Aug. 27, 1918, in Baltimore, Maryland, to Roberta and Simeon Saunders Booker, Sr. His father moved the family to Youngstown, Ohio, and he graduated from Youngstown high school. He enrolled at Youngstown College, but transferred to Virginia Union University when he learned that black students were being denied activity cards by the YMCA-sponsored school. He earned money by reporting on Virginia Union's sports programs and returning home in the summer, to publish articles about the Negro league baseball games, for the Youngstown Vindicator. After receiving a Bachelor's degree in English in 1942, he took his first job with a Baltimore Newspaper, the Afro American. He later returned to Ohio and worked for the Cleveland Call and Post, also an African American publication, where he received a Newspaper Guild Award for a series on slum housing. He was later fired for trying to unionize the staff. In 1950, he was offered a Nieman Journalism Fellowship at Harvard University.



After one year at Harvard, he applied for numerous newspaper jobs - but only one answered, The Washington Post. And in 1952, in segregated Washington, DC, Simeon Saunders Booker, Jr., became the first African-American staff reporter for the Washington Post. His two years with the Post were what he considered "a social experiment" since he had a separate bathroom, but ate in the same cafeteria as the white reporters - although he sat alone. In 1954, he went to work for the Johnson Publishing Company, reporting on current events in its weekly publication - Jet magazine.



But it was the 1955 murder of Emmett Till, in Mississippi, that began Simeon's lifelong reporting of the Civil Rights Movement. His dedicated coverage of the murder and subsequent trial, and courageous reporting of the 1957 integration of Central High School, kept the black community connected. But his unyielding reputation as a committed journalist, kept him in the face and in the crosshairs of numerous assassins, including the Ku Klux Klan. At one point in his career, he escaped a dangerous mob, by hiding out in a hearse. When the buses were fire-bombed in Alabama, Simeon arranged the evacuation of the Freedom Riders with U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.



In the 1960's, Simeon toured Vietnam and interviewed General Westmoreland for Jet magazine, and in 1964, he published his first book, *Black Man's America*. In 1982, he received one of the most prestigious awards in journalism, the National Press Club's Fourth Estate Award.

Simeon Booker remained with the Johnson Publishing company until his retirement, in 2007, close to his 90th birthday. In 2013, he received an honorary Doctor of Letters degree, from Youngstown State University and published his last book, *Shocking The Conscience, A Reporter's Account of the Civil Rights Movement*, with his wife, Carol McCabe Booker.

On December 10, 2017, Simeon Saunders Booker, Jr., died. He was 99 years old. On Monday, February 25, 2019, a bipartisan legislation was introduced to posthumously award the Congressional Gold Medal to Simeon Booker in recognition of his achievements in journalism and commitment to civil rights.

