

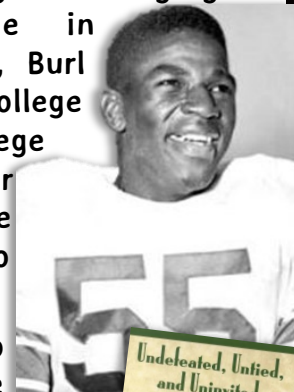
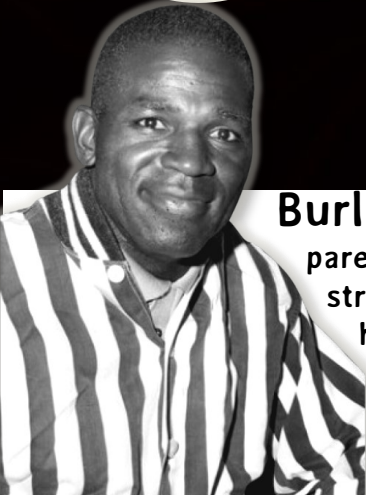
The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry
Clerk of Superior Court
DeKalb County

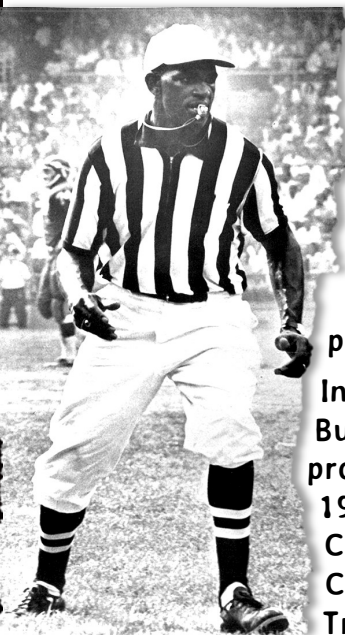
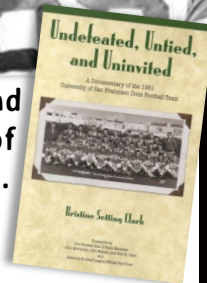


Burl Abron Toler, Sr.
(May 9, 1928 – August 16, 2009)
"First Black NFL Official"

Burl Abron Toler, Sr. was born on May 9, 1928 in Memphis, Tennessee to parents, A.W. Toler, a Pullman porter and Annie King Toler, an educator. His parents stressed education throughout his childhood and upon graduating from a segregated high school, Burl enrolled in Lemoyne College in Memphis, Tennessee. At the encouragement of his uncle, Burl moved to San Francisco, California and enrolled in the City College of San Francisco (CCSF) in 1948. There he played on the college football team and was named All-American player in the Junior College division. The 1948 CCSF team finished 12-0, winning a national junior college title. This honor afforded Burl the opportunity to receive a full four-year scholarship to play football at the University of San Francisco.



At the University of San Francisco, Burl played for the legendary 1951 San Francisco Dons football team. After a perfect 9-0 season, the team was ensured a trip to the Orange Bowl; however, their invitation inferred that the two black players, (Burl Toler and Ollie Matson), would have to sit the game out. Burl's team members, including future hall of famers Gino Marchetti and Bob St. Clair, unanimously refused the invitation, without regret. Their story is recounted in the book, *Undefeated, Untied and Uninvited*.



Burl graduated with a degree in Education, and in 1952, and was drafted into the National Football League (NFL) by the Cleveland Browns (later traded to the Chicago Cardinals). Unfortunately, a permanent knee injury during an all-star game ended his opportunity to play professional football. He married his wife, Melvia Woolfolk in 1953. Shortly thereafter, he began teaching, coaching, and counseling at Benjamin Franklin Middle School in San Francisco. There, he became the first black junior high school vice-principal and some years later, was promoted to principal. He also officiated college games in the San Francisco area.

In 1965, with the encouragement of NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle, the NFL hired Burl A. Toler as a head linesman — making him the first black official in any major professional sports league. Burl officiated for 25 years, from 1965–1989, including Super Bowl XIV in 1980 and the 1982 AFC Championship game. Burl served as San Francisco Police Department Commissioner from 1978 to 1986 and served on the Board of Trustees at the University of San Francisco from 1987 to 1998.

In 2006, Benjamin Franklin Middle School was renamed the Burl A. Toler Campus in honor of his service and contributions to the San Francisco community. Burl's son and grandson, Burl Jr and Burl III respectively, both shared his love for football. Burl Jr. played college ball and Burl III, played in the NFL. Burl Abron Toler, Sr., died of a sudden illness on August 16, 2009, in his Castro Valley, California home. He was 81 years old.

