

HONORING THE CONTRIBUTION OF
BLACK PIONEER ALTHEA GIBSON

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 2, 2007

Mr. RANGEL. Madam Speaker, I rise today to introduce a story from the New York CARIB News of September 18, 2007 entitled, "Black Pioneer Althea Gibson".

This article highlights the accomplishments of Althea Gibson, the admirable tennis player who in spite of adversity reached great success, leaving a great legacy to the sport. Ms. Gibson became the first African American—male or female—to win the U.S. National Championships, which until then was a segregated tournament and she made history by not only breaking the color barriers but by winning the Grand Slam.

Ms. Gibson continued to leave her mark in tennis by winning the 1956 French Open, again, becoming the first black woman to win the Grand Slam event. Following those enormous achievements she continued to excel in important international tennis tournaments such as Wimbledon and the U.S. Championships.

In recognition of her incredible contribution to the sport of tennis and to society, the U.S. Tennis Association hosted a tribute to her life at the U.S. Open in New York in late August. The champion died in 2003 but continues to be admired and to be an inspiration to women throughout the world.

I applaud Ms. Althea Gibson for her great contribution to the sport of tennis and for the undeniable strength she endured to excel in a time when she was denied opportunity because of the color of her skin.

BLACK PIONEER ALTHEA GIBSON

(By Roy S. Johnson)

Fifty years ago, in the late summer of 1957, Althea Gibson made history as she captured the U.S. National Championships title on the grass courts of Forest Hills. With that win, the 30-year-old Gibson became the first African American—male or female—to win that most prestigious Grand Slam tennis tournament crown.

Just three years after the great Jackie Robinson had broken the color barrier in baseball, Gibson broke tennis' color barrier when she played in the 1950 U.S. Championships. Until then, tennis had been a segregated sport, with Blacks playing on their own tour—similar to the Negro Baseball Leagues—under the auspices of the American Tennis Association. Her participation at Forest Hills that year was facilitated, in part, by Alice Marble, one of the top players of that era, who wrote an editorial in a national magazine calling for the sport to allow her to compete.

That she did. Tall and lean, Gibson's look and her game resembled that of the elder Williams sister.

"Very graceful, very smooth," says former tennis star, now U.S. Fed Cup captain Zina Garrison, who befriended Gibson in the legend's later years and became a confidante. "She glided around the court. When you look at Venus [Williams], Althea was very much like her."

Six years after her Grand Slam debut, well before the tide of civil rights began to rise throughout America, Gibson made history once again—this time in magnificent fashion—by winning the 1956 French Open to become the first Black to win a Grand Slam

event. The next year, she won Wimbledon and the U.S. Championships, then successfully defended both titles the following year. Gibson teamed with Angela Buxton, a Jewish player from Briton, to win the 1956 doubles championships at the French and Wimbledon. Both women experienced discrimination by their fellow players, but after their triumph at the All-England tennis club, a British newspaper touted: "Minorities win."

All told, Gibson, the daughter of South Carolina sharecroppers, won five Grand Slam singles titles and six Grand Slam doubles crowns, but her impact on tennis—and society—cannot be measured in mere trophy counts. She was a trailblazer of remarkable heart and courage, marking a path for those who would follow her, carrying herself with that special grace and dignity known only to true champions.

"Althea made tennis a better place, by opening doors and opening minds," said USTA president and chairman Jane Brown Grimes. "For that, all of us owe Althea Gibson a debt of gratitude."

In recognition of Gibson's myriad contributions to the sport of tennis and to society at large, the U.S. Tennis Association this year hosted a very special tribute to the late champion, who passed away in 2003 following a long illness. On an extraordinary evening of history and emotion, African-American women who are pioneers in their own fields, and the elite from the world of tennis, gathered to honor and celebrate one of their own. Call her tennis's own Jackie Robinson.

The event, entitled "Breaking Barriers," was held on the opening night, Aug. 27 of the 2007 U.S. Open at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in Queens, NY. It commemorated the 50th anniversary of Gibson's pioneering triumph at the 1957 U.S. National Championships (now known as the U.S. Open), and also provided a stage for Gibson's induction into the prestigious U.S. Open Court of Champions. But the evening proved to be so much more—an acknowledgement of the over-sight of having never before recognized Gibson as a barrier-breaking pioneer, and a unique first-time celebration of the historic firsts achieved by other prominent African-American women.

Nearly two dozen Black women pioneers attended the tribute, including Olympians Jackie Joyner-Kersey (first Black to win back-to-back Olympic gold medals in the Heptathlon) and Dr. Debi Thomas (first Black Winter Olympics medal winner), astronaut Dr. Mae Jemison (the first Black female astronaut), gospel singer Yolanda Adams (first Black female to win the Contemporary/Inspirational Artist award at American Music Awards) and Ambassador Carol Moseley-Braun (first Black female U.S. Senator).

Billie Jean King, whose own pioneering efforts on behalf of female athletes were celebrated at this venue last year, was part of the tribute, as was New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Rachel Robinson, Jackie Robinson's widow. Aretha Franklin, the first Black woman inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, performed at the tribute.

Other trailblazing Black women attending were former poet laureate Nikki Giovanni (the first Black woman to receive the Rosa Parks Woman of Courage award), former Washington, D.C., mayor Sharon Pratt (first to be elected mayor of a major U.S. city), actress Phylicia Rashad (first to win a Tony for best performance in a play), Essence chairwoman Susan L. Taylor (first recipient of the Henry Johnson Fisher award), and businesswoman Sheila Crump Johnson (first to have a stake in three professional sports franchises).

"Althea Gibson dreamed the impossible and made it possible," said Johnson, who

was a BET founder. "She was one of the first African-American women in sports to say, 'Why not me?' She empowered generations [of Black women] to believe in themselves, emboldened us to achieve and attain the unattainable. Her drive, spirit and passion continue to set an example for us today."

"I will always be grateful to her for having the strength and the courage to triumph in extreme adversity," said Venus Williams, a six-time Grand Slam singles champion, who also participated in the tribute. "Her accomplishments set the stage for my success, and through players like me, Serena and many others to come, her legacy will live on."

REMEMBRANCE OF WALT
CROWLEY

HON. JIM McDERMOTT

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 2, 2007

Mr. McDERMOTT. Madam Speaker, Seattle recently lost a prominent and much loved citizen, Walt Crowley. I would like to insert in the RECORD a statement on his passing from HistoryLink, an impressive organization Walt helped to found.

REMEMBERING WALT

Walt Crowley, visionary cofounder of HistoryLink.org, passed away on September 21, 2007. Looking back at the rich tapestry of his life and work, one sees that it would take an encyclopedia to document how much of an effect he had upon the city of Seattle and on the state of Washington. Fortunately—and thanks to his efforts—we can do that here at HistoryLink.org, the Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History.

Walt moved to Seattle at the age of 14, when Boeing hired his father. Many of the friends and colleagues who knew him the longest probably met him during his days at the Helix, Seattle's first underground newspaper, for which Walt wrote, cartooned, edited, and even sold copies of out on the street. Whether it was at a social gathering, during a street march, on the campaign trail, or even in the midst of riots, Walt touched the lives of many people, and made numerous friendships that lasted for decades.

Walt's passion for civic activism led to a career in city politics. During a sit-in protest at Seattle City Hall, Mayor Wes Uhlman was so impressed with the young man's wit and political savvy that he hired him. Over the next few years, Walt worked in various city departments, most notably as deputy director of the Office of Policy and Planning, where he often advocated for historic preservation. His love for Seattle grew, based on his awareness of its past.

THE WRITE STUFF

His skills as a writer opened up new vistas in his career when he formed Crowley Associates Inc. along with Marie McCaffrey, whom he would later marry. The two collaborated on books about the Seattle Aquarium and Pioneer Square, and provided writing and advertising services to numerous political campaigns, voter initiatives, and labor unions. Walt also wrote articles for the Seattle Weekly and was brought further into the public eye when he was hired to conduct bi-weekly "Point-Counterpoint" debates with conservative activist John Carlson on KIRO-TV News.

But it was the history muse that inspired Walt's greatest creative output. His introduction to historical research came when he was hired to write a history of the Rainier Club. He followed this with books about Seattle University, Metro Transit, and Group