

## **For Immediate Release**

### **THE FATHER OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH JOINS THE ANCESTORS**

2/15/2021

Kent State Professor Emeritus, Dr. Edward W. Crosby left this earthly plane on 2/10/2021. He celebrated his 88th birthday on November 4, 2020. An important chapter in the history of Black Education is complete. Some people called him an “educational entrepreneur,” as a way of disparaging him, but he had a way of taking disparaging remarks and recasting them in a positive light. He was known far and wide for his endeavors to legitimize what was a brand new field of study, in 1969.

#### **FROM CORLETT TO KOREA**

Born and raised on the Eastside of Cleveland, Edward Warren Crosby was the 4th child of Frederick Douglass and Marion G. Crosby on November 4, 1932. They were a working class family trying to make ends meet, during the hard-scrabble Depression years. After spending his early life in the projects on Outhwaite him and his 5 siblings were finally able to move into the up and coming Mount Pleasant neighborhood

He went to a number of schools, including St. Edward's, Alexander Hamilton Junior High and finally graduated from John Adams in 1951. It was around this time that he first came to Kent, on a lark. A friend of his was enrolling and he went along for the ride. Little did he know he'd spend most of his life in this small college town.

When he graduated from John Adams, he wore a prophetic mortarboard with the words, “From Corlett to Korea, the Frozen Chosen” emblazoned on the top. The first part of that prophecy would come true when he flunked out of Kent and ended up in the U.S. Army Airborne Division. In spite of the fact that he had been an inveterate truant in high school one thing he learned would come in very handy, during his days in the military, typing. Not only had he learned the secretarial art, he also met his future wife in his high school typing class.

#### **MARRIAGE**

Shirley, the love of his life, would stand by his side for nearly 75 years, first as his girlfriend, then as his wife and mother of their three children. Until the day he died he continued to profess his love for Shirley. They married on St. Patrick's Day 1956. Not long after Shirley graduated from Ohio University with a degree in Social Work. They ended up living in Youngstown in a small walk-up apartment, while Edward returned to Kent State to finish what he started. Just 2 years later they were blessed with their 1st son, Eduard Michael. From this point on Edward became the breadwinner, as he continued pursuing his studies of Medieval German and history.

#### **THE POLYGLOT**

His interest in German had begun way back at St. Edwards, with Father Lochtefeld. The good Father did not engage in direct instruction of German, but he would use it in class. It was

Edward's natural curiosity that drove him to get, not one but, three degrees in German, while also becoming fluent in Spanish, teaching himself French, Russian, Kiswahili and Html. Even though he spent his entire time in the service in England, the closest he ever got to Germany was Paris, France.

## **TEACHING CAREER**

He began his teaching career as a graduate student, at Kent. His first full time position was at Hiram College, where he taught German and Spanish. Before everything was said and done he would teach at a number of far flung and storied institutions, including Tuskegee Institute and the University of Washington, but Kent State is where he had the biggest impact.

After completing the longest dissertation ever written at the University of Kansas he returned to the idyllic campus of Hiram College, here in NE Ohio. Even though he stayed there for 4 years, he found it was a little too idyllic. His next stop was Tuskegee where he continued teaching German & Spanish. By 1964 much had changed on college campuses and wanted to be part of that change, which led him to Southern Illinois University's "Experiment in Higher Education."

Finally, he could break some new ground as a curriculum specialist for a fledgling program designed for young people who did not fit the mold of your average college student. His job was to make sure they got prepared. He worked at EHE for 4 years with a core group of people who all had connections to NE Ohio, including Don Henderson, Willie Robinson, Paul Welcher, Henry Dumas, Shelby Steele and Billie Davis. The program was a resounding success with many graduates going on to college, where they received undergraduate and graduate degrees.

In the Spring of 1969 Dr. Crosby returned to Kent to do a classroom lecture and received more than he bargained for, when he reconnected with a childhood friend, Dean Milton E. Wilson, who had him return for a job interview as the director of a newly created Black Studies Department, AKA the Institute of African American Affairs.. This was just the beginning of what turned out to be his life's work.

Over the next 24 years he focused on the students and their welfare. For much of that time Shirley worked with him hand in hand. She did cultural programming and he focused on the academic unit. They were more than just a power couple, they were mother and father to all who entered their domain.

## **THE FATHER OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH**

A number of things he started took on a life of their own. One, in particular stands out, Black History Month. A full fledged history of Black History Month has yet to be written. What I've seen online is not even accurate enough to be part of a serious discussion. The most common opinion is that Negro History Week evolved into Black History Month, with no explanation of why that happened or documentation to back up the specious claims. In fact, Black History Month, like many of the Black frats, was first celebrated on February 2nd 1970, at Kent State University. It took a group effort to pull it off, with the involvement of Black United Students, the Center for Human Relations and Crosby's Institute for African American Affairs. The entire affair was documented in the book edited by Dean Milton E. Wilson, Jr., "Involvement 2 Years Later."

The month-long slate of activities included poetry sessions and workshops by former U.S. poet laureates Quincy Troupe and Gwendolyn Brooks, as well as the Poet Laureate of East St. Louis, Eugene Redmond. Student activist and co-founder of the 1st Black Student Union, Jimmy Garrett, spoke at the grand opening of Kent State's newly minted Black Cultural Center.

Don Henderson, former provost of the University of Pittsburgh, Chief Fela Sowande, Halim El Dabh and “the Apostle of Africulture,” Nigerian musician Babatunde Olatunji played an important role in educating the students over the years, because they were videotaped for later use in the classrooms.

With a list of luminaries like this performing and lecturing over a period of a month you would think it would be hard to repeat the following year. As it turned out Dr. Crosby’s connections within the Black community were broad and deep. For the next 23 years Black History Month at Kent State brought all kinds of luminaries from community activists, like Reverend Bevel to religious leaders like Minister Farakhan and Olatunji, at least once/year. This kind of activity was unheard of on major college campuses, much less a medium size, predominantly White, midwestern university.

Black History Month was just one of a number of annual events that made the Institute the hub of Black student activity at Kent and spread its reputation all across Ohio. Dr. Crosby’s focus on providing a holistic education encouraged students to apply what they learned in class to real life situations.

Today those students are involved in running all types of organizations from city governments to universities; from arts organizations to PG&E; from late night talk shows to local news media. To list them all would be a major task, but those who have been willing to go on record about their experiences at Kent give a lot of credit to Dr. Edward W. Crosby.

We’ll miss him dearly, but at the same time we know that his legacy is not written in stone, brick or mortar, but in the works his students have engaged in over the years.

For more information visit [Blakfacts Educational Research, Inc.](#) For interviews call 330-842-6773 or 330-673-9271.

###