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LUCINDA GORDON

1915–2017

City: Milwaukee

County: Milwaukee

Lucinda Gordon was a civil rights activist who founded an alternative school for teen mothers and advocated for Black art in Milwaukee.

Lucinda Gordon was born Lucinda Jacobs on November 7, 1915, in Chester, Pennsylvania. When she was fifteen years old – around 1930 – she joined the NAACP, a grassroots organization that has fought for racial equality in America since it was founded in 1909. This was the beginning of her career as a civil rights activist. She graduated from a teacher's college in Pennsylvania, then got her master's degree in social work from Smith College in Massachusetts. To earn her master's degree, she had to do field work (get hands-on experience outside the classroom), which brought her to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1942.

Gordon's husband, Grant, was the first Black principal in the Milwaukee public school system, and they were both strong advocates for Black students and teachers in Milwaukee during the 1960s. Their children were the first Black students at their elementary school. Lucinda was an active member of both the Milwaukee NAACP and the Urban League (an organization that works to improve the lives of Black Americans). She was head of the Urban League's community relations department, and, in a leadership role with the NAACP, she once brought Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to speak in Milwaukee.

In 1968, Gordon founded a school for teen mothers called Lady Pitts and was its first director. At that time, pregnant students were not allowed to stay in Milwaukee public schools. Gordon believed that denying these girls education would force them and their children into poverty. At Lady Pitts, her goal was to make sure the girls had access to healthcare, daycare, and counseling. She offered resources to teen fathers as well. Gordon also believed that it was important for Black art and artists to be seen and appreciated by the community. In 1990, she was part of a group that founded the African American Art Alliance, which continues to support the Milwaukee Art Museum in showing work by Black artists and reaching out to the community. In her own words, Gordon was "part of a generation that helped break down barriers for African Americans so they could reach their full potential." She was 101 years old when she died on June 19, 2017. transgender "icons" (people who are looked up to as symbols).

To learn more, visit womeninwisconsin.org/profile/lucinda-gordon