



## Mrs. Corinne Reid-Owens

November 7, 1912 - November 6, 2012

NOVEMBER 7, 1912 - NOVEMBER 6, 2012

Over the nearly 100 years between her birth on November 7, 1912 in the rural community of Houston, MS until her death on November 6, 2012, Corinne Reid Owens held the distinction of being an educator, housing and community organizer and major civil rights activist.

Nevertheless, her most memorable, enduring characteristic is that as a trailblazing pioneer who ultimately became known as the "Mother of Civil Rights," and the "Rosa Parks" of Racine. She is credited as one of Racine's early pioneers in bringing equal access to blacks in education, painstakingly working to get minimum housing codes for Racine, and she even persuaded the city to hire more black police officers.

Emma Corinne was the ninth child of Rev. John Jackson Reid and Laura Ann Danner Reid. After the death of her father in 1920, her mother moved the family to Kansas City, MO where they lived for five years, returning to Mississippi when Corinne was 13 years old. At age thirteen, she joined Wesley C.M.E. Church in Houston, MS.

Corinne attended the Rob Reid Elementary School, a school named for her grandtather and the school where her mother was also a teacher. After

returning to Mississippi she attended Houston High School and graduated from Manassas High School in Memphis TN. She also attended Okolona Industrial College in Okalona, MS and College in Holly Springs, MS.

Both of her parents had been teachers, so it was not surprising that he also chose to become an educator. She taught school in Mississippi for 13 years. As a young teacher, she taught children during the day and their parents at night.

Corinne and Burse Owens were united in holy matrimony on September 19, 1937

in Houston, MS. In 1946, Burse Owens and his young wife, Corinne moved to Racine

just after World War II. They quickly discovered the difficulty of finding a place to live, because so many doors were slammed in their face during their search. Eventually they discovered the only neighborhood open to them was a black neighborhood on the south side of town. Owens recalled, " it was just deplorable housing."

The community that Corinne and Burse Owens lived was flat and without storm sewers. Heavy rain frequently caused flooding in the homes. She organized her neighbors, petitioned the Racine City Council and storm sewers were eventually installed.

Owens came to Racine expecting to teach school, however she was rejected at every turn. She took the only job she could get as a night janitor at the University of Wisconsin-Extension while she continued to fight for the right to teach in Racine.

Finally in 1969, she landed her first teaching job in Racine at Howell Elementary School with the help of her principal; Keith Mack. Mack

encouraged her to get a Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education from Dominican College, which she completed in two years.

Years later, Owens was elected to the Gateway Technical College Tri-County Board of Directors and was appointed President of the Board during the 1978-80 term, becoming the board's first black chairperson.

Housing discrimination was just the first of many civil rights struggles fought by Corinne Reid Owens. In 1953, she helped reactivate the Racine NAACP continuing to fight discrimination on every level. During her work with the NAACP she began the NAACP Freedom Baby Contest and she served as president of the Racine chapter from 1953-1954 and 1968-1988.

Hotels in Racine were not open to blacks, but Owens opened her home to other civil rights activists like Medgar Evers, the national civil rights activist assassinated by a KuKlux Klansman on June 12, 1963, in Jackson, Mississippi.

Owens also fought escalating crime in Racine's black neighborhoods. In 1972 she organized Concerned Citizens Against Crime. Racine only had two black policemen at the time, but Concerned Citizens Against Crime persuaded the city to hire 12 more black policemen.

Devoted to her community, Owens helped establish the Dr. John Bryant Neighborhood Center and was the founder of the Community Women's Club which raises money for scholarships for deserving black students going to college.

In 1952, she organized the South Lafayette Neighborhood Group, which is said to have been Racine's first self-help agency. Later, the South Lafayette Neighborhood group began a program called Operation NEAT which outlined rules for living as good neighbors. The organization also held an annual spring cleanup to remove junk, exterminate rats and other conditions that could lead to neighborhood decline.

Over a lifetime of public service, Corinne Owens has received numerous awards and recognition of her achievements. In 2008, she was honored by the Wisconsin State Assembly in Madison, WI; 2007 honored by the NAACP Freedom Fund dinner; 2005, recipient of the Benjamin L Hooks Keeper of the Flame award; 1979, the Rosa Park award at the NAACP Regional conference; 1973, "Woman of the Year" award by the Racine Civic Council; 1973, "Teacher of the Year, Citizen of the Year" by the Racine PTA Council.

Corinne Reid Owens is survived by nieces, Orien Reid Nix of Laverock, PA, Mattie Christine Moore and Annie Laura Blanchard of St. Louis, MO, and Majeeda Baheyadeen of Kansas City, MO, Maxine James, Pensacola, FL, Jennifer James, Washington, DC, Lauradell Shelton and family; godson, Burnett, Horton; devoted friends, Lorraine Brock, Columbus, OH, Christina Thonnes, Cindy Seifert; and a host of other family and friends.

For her family, her passing leaves a void shared by those whose lives she touched in so many ways. Her legacy is that as a woman with a devotion to public service, a motto, "If I can help somebody," all of which is a legacy that will live forever.

,

# Cemetery Details

## Graceland Cemetery

6401 N. 43rd St.  
Milwaukee, WI

# Previous Events

## Visitation

NOV 12. 3:00 PM - 7:00 PM (CT)

Wayman AME Church  
424 N. Memorial  
Racine, WI

## Service

NOV 13. 11:00 AM (CT)

St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church  
1120 Grand Ave.  
Racine, WI

# Tribute Wall



“ *She helped get Narcan to everyone.*

---

**Emi** - April 29, 2024 at 10:27 AM