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History 380

Professor Ferrell

NAACP Spingarn Award

- 1950: (Chairman, NAACP Legal Committee)
- 1951: (Leader of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses)
- 1952: (NAACP leader, martyr in the "crusade for freedom")
- 1953: (Architect)
- 1954: (Physician, educator, philanthropist)
- 1955: (Editor, publisher, civic leader)
- 1956: (Athlete)
- 1957: (Activist and minister)
- 1958: (Desegregation activists)
- 1958: (Students of the Little Rock Nine)
- 1959: (Composer and pianist)
- 1960: (Poet and playwright)
- 1961: (Professor of Psychology at CCNY)
- 1962: (Administrator of Housing and Home Finance Agency)
- 1963: (Martyr in the civil rights movement in Mississippi)
- 1964: (Executive Director of the NAACP)
- 1965: (Metropolitan Opera star)
- 1966: (Founder and president of Johnson Publishing Company)
- 1967: (First African American to win popular election to the U.S. Senate)
- 1968: (Entertainer)
- 1969: (NAACP regional director, civil rights lobbyist)

The information above can be found at the NAACP website. The website provides the first recipient from 1915 and has been updated annually. Over the span of a century, the Spingarn medal has annually been awarded to a person of African descent and American citizenship. Judged by a board of NAACP members, these individuals have made strides and achievements in their perspective fields. The medal was created with the intention to accomplish two tasks. Firstly, to provide a method to attract attention to African American achievements. Secondly, to award the individual in their achievement and provide motivation

to the African American community. Over many years there has been an increase in fields that individuals have been awarded in. This change seems to be undoubtedly present in the nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties.

The first part of the 1950's leading up to the middle of the decade, there was a similarity in those awarded the medal. The first three awardees, from nineteen fifty to nineteen fifty-two, all have some connection to the NAACP. With the chairman of the legal committee to the latter two; whom were leaders within the NAACP.

Moving forward and finishing off the nineteen fifties the reason for winning the award does not overlap or repeat. All the way up until the nineteen sixties, the awardees focused in distinct fields or professions. With growth in civil rights activism, education, and the arts, the NAACP board took on prominent change. The nineteen fifties and nineteen sixties was the time of the Civil Rights Movement and this is clear in the list of awardees. However, the first activist awardee, outside the direct leadership of the NAACP in the nineteen fifties, was Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1957.

At the turn of the decade, rounding into the nineteen sixties, the board's appreciation for education and the arts is prevalent. The boards step away from awarding martyrs and activists had come to a standstill. With the awarding of classical composers, poets and professors the list broaden once more. After 1958 and the Little Rock Nine, the next awardee related with the Civil Rights Movement followed five years later in 1963. However, at the end of the nineteen sixties, the NAACP board cycled back around to the beginning of the nineteen fifties and awarded two more members connected to the group in the last six years.

Due to the constant change in society and the ever growing complexity of the mid-twentieth century, the NAACP changed and grew as well. From activists to educators to performers and doctors, the goal of the group continues to adapt. Awarding, inspiring, and vocalizing the achievements that the African American culture has on society is significant.

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Bibliography

"Spingarn Medal Winners: 1915 to Today." *NAACP*. N.p., n.d. Web. 09 June 2016.