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Leaders of Afro-American Nashville

EVA LOWERY BOWMAN
1899-1984



Eva Lowery Bowman, a humanitarian, businessperson, civic leader, and community organizer, actively participated in the representative process to make the community and state more responsive to the needs of the African-American populace. The first African-American beauty inspector and examiner of cosmetology for Tennessee, she served in the administrations of Governors William Prentice Cooper (1939-1945), Jim Nance McCord (1945-1949), and Gordon Weaver Browning (1937-1939 and 1949-1953). In 1960, according to reports, Bowman became the "first Negro woman in the South to run for public office." A guiding beacon in the world that American blacks made for themselves, Eva L. Bowman illuminated the access road so that others could correspondingly ingress the thoroughfare to opportunity.

One of eight children, Eva Lowery was born on April 25, 1899, to William and Alice Lowery in Nashville, Tennessee. She received her education in the city's public schools, including Pearl High. Lowery furthered her education by attending Walden University and Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State Normal College (now Tennessee State University). Subsequently, in 1929, she studied cosmetology at Madam C.J. Walker's Lelia College in Indianapolis, Indiana. She continued her cosmetology training at the Institute of Cosmetology in Jersey City. Lowery married Dr. Leonard Cardell and later married Dr. L.A. Bowman.

Bowman established, owned, and operated Bowman Beauty and Barber College, Alice's Beauty Shoppe and Beauty School, Physio-Therapy Institute, and Bowman Art School. An innovator in the beauty culture business, in 1946 she introduced the "cooler curl—a curl without hot irons of grease." She helped to organize and became president of the Nashville Chapter of Beauty Culture. Serving for twelve years, Bowman organized approximately 7,000 beauticians across the state. During the administration of Governor William Prentice Cooper, she became Tennessee's first African-American beauty inspector and examiner of cosmetology. Bowman maintained her position for eight years and continued serving under the administrations of Governors Jim Nance McCord and Gordon Weaver Browning. Through her lobbying efforts and others, during Browning's administration, in 1951 the Tennessee General Assembly passed legislation stating "that there shall be a Negro Chief Inspector and Examiner to the Board of Cosmetology."

As an advocate for those attending the Tennessee Vocational School for Colored Girls, she asked the state to expand the school's curriculum and include cosmetology as a course of study. The request was granted under Cooper's administration. Bowman also requested and received permission to establish a Cosmetology Institute to assist African-American cosmetologists stay abreast of the changes, rules, and regulations governing the Cosmetology Board. Held at Tennessee A & I during the summers, beauty school owners and licensed

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beauticians attended the institute.

Bowman's interests extended beyond the sphere of beauty culture. In 1951, at her expense, she escorted Tennessee A. & I. State University's Jean Patton (1949 and 1950 Women's 100 Meters Champion) to the first Pan-American Games held in Buenos Aires, Argentina. As a humanitarian, she often used her resources to help those in need, especially at risk and troubled youth. On numerous occasions, she opened her home to troubled children. Often, Bowman worked with the juvenile court on behalf of youth.

In 1956, after conducting a survey of the city's recreational facilities for African Americans, she concluded that more parks were needed. After organizing and becoming president of the South Nashville Civic League, Bowman demonstrated the need to the Nashville Board of Parks. As a result of her survey, the Nashville City Council passed a bond for the E.S. Rose Park and Easley Community Center. Additionally, the Frederick Douglass Community Center, Napier Park Recreation Center, Watkins Park Bath House, Hadley's Park gymnasium, and Dudley Park were opened. Under her leadership, the Southwest Nashville Civic League Committee, the Metropolitan Council of Nashville and Davidson County allotted \$600,000 to keep the city's swimming pools open all summer.

When blacks in America moved the structural support for civil rights and human dignity beyond the courts to massive resistance by ordinary people to demolish the wall of segregation, Bowman became an assertive participant. Between the years of 1959 and 1960 when many of the state's African-American citizens in West Tennessee began crusading for their civil and political rights, she made many trips to Fayette County's "Tent City." Not only did she convey food and clothing to Somerville's terrorized community of tent dwellers, Bowman secured the necessary means to bring twenty persons to Nashville for a program to benefit Tent City's cause. In January of 1960, as

president of the United League and interested in improving the economic and social conditions of Nashville blacks, Bowman sought to establish a branch of the Urban League. Under the auspices of the United League, she contacted the Urban League's executive director, Lester B. Grange, in New York. After working with concerned citizens, business and community leaders, the Nashville Urban League, Incorporated, was established eight years later. Later, in 1960, Bowman entered the political arena and announced her candidacy for a seat in the Tennessee House of Representatives. The first African-American woman to seek legislative office in Tennessee, she was defeated in the August Democratic Primary.

Bowman served on the boards of the South Street Center and Grace Eaton Day Home and was a volunteer panelist on WVOL's "What Do you Think?" She was a member of the Business Women's League, City Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, the Tennessee Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, the National Council of Negro Women, the Washington Garden Club, and the Imperial Coterie. A steadfast member of the Spruce Street Baptist Church, she was an active participant in the choir, the Christian Women's Auxiliary, and as a member of the church's Scholarship Committee. As inspector for the City Beautiful Commission, in 1971 the Nashville Housing Authority cited Bowman for "exceptional service toward the betterment of the Edgehill Community."

To the end, Bowman followed her creed "to make the pathway smooth where other feet must tread." The life of Eva Lowery Bowman, a noted humanitarian, businessperson, civic leader, and community organizer in Nashville, ended at St. Thomas Hospital on September 13, 1984. Funeral services were held three days later at Spruce Street Baptist Church. The following morning her remains were interred in Greenwood Cemetery.

-Linda T. Wynn
