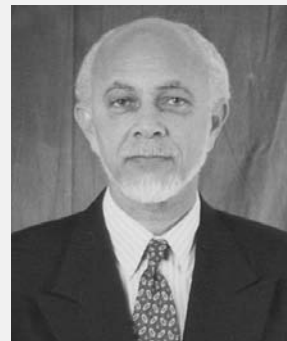




**Denise Rolark
Barnes**



**Reverend Douglas
B. Sands, Sr.**

2009 PARREN J. MITCHELL VANGUARD FOR JUSTICE AWARD

From 1971 to 1987, Parren J. Mitchell, Maryland's first African American legislator and a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus, belonged to a chorus of civil rights activists lifting their voices against racism and social injustice. But when it came to promoting minority business development and economic justice for African American entrepreneurs, nobody sang lead like Congressman Mitchell.

Mitchell, who represented Maryland's 7th Congressional District for eight consecutive terms between 1971 and 1987, is widely acknowledged as the father of minority business development, a champion for small businesses and the leading voice for black economic empowerment in the U.S. This well-timed martyr, who died May 28th, stepped up during a period when women and minorities faced high hurdles to business ownership and the good ole boy network had a firm grip on procurement awards.

Today, many of the thriving minority and women owned businesses in this country – including those being honored tonight – owe their benefits and protections to the legislative initiatives of a man who retired from Congress in 1986 with more than 3,000 awards and 14 honorary degrees.

Since he died at age 85 on May 28, 2007, many say there will never be another Parren Mitchell. But we can honor his protégés, people who cherished his counsel and captured his passion for minority business development. Denise Rolark Barnes and Reverend Douglas Sands are the 2009 recipients of the Parren J. Mitchell Vanguard for Justice Award.

Denise Rolark Barnes



Denise Rolark Barnes' proudest professional moment came the day after her father's funeral, when her newspaper, the *The Washington Informer Newspaper*, issued its largest edition without a single hitch.

"Everyone assumed that since my Father was still listed on the masthead as publisher, the paper would fold after his death. The truth is, I had been running the newspaper myself since I graduated law school. The day I walked in to the paper as a full time employee was the day my father walked out to pursue his philanthropic interests."

This year *The Washington Informer* is celebrating its 45th anniversary. The National Black Chamber of Commerce named the newspaper the Most Outstanding Newspaper in America.

Rolark Barnes was born and raised in the District, attending Calvin Coolidge High School. Her parents were divorced when she was two, and she lived with her mother. She did, however, spend weekends with her father, a noted civil-rights activist, and her step-mother Wilhelmina Rolark, an attorney and a D.C. councilwoman. Her first experience as a journalist came when she was nine years old, when her father began the newspaper and asked her to write a youth column which she continued all through middle and high school.

However, Rolark Barnes had no intention of staying in the newspaper biz. She wanted to be an attorney, so after she graduated the Hampton Institute, she immediately entered Howard University Law School.

"I interned as a law student at the FCC and did a stint as a domestic mediator", she said. "But I was also editor of the law school newspaper. I soon realized I enjoyed my work on the newspaper more than I enjoyed my law studies. My heroes became Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells."

The Washington Informer is a weekly newspaper Rolark Barnes publishes for and about the Black community. *The Informer* has become a Washington institution, printing news to inform, educate and empower the community.

"When I decided to make the newspaper my career, it had only been using press releases and stock photos to fill its pages." Rolark Barnes remembers, "My father was too busy making the news to actually cover it. I was determined to make the paper more relevant and to have reporters to send out to various event and briefings. I recruited several friends from school and they helped out a great deal. In those early days, I managed to pay myself a salary of about \$125 every two weeks."

It is interesting to note that *the Informer* has never printed a crime story.

"Crime in our community is covered by the other media", Rolark Barnes states, "We try to cover the more positive side of our community, printing articles educating people about what's going on in the world and how it affects us. When covering issues related to crime, the focus is usually on ways in which the community has managed to create solutions that help to improve the quality of life for all Washington area residents."

The Washington Informer Newspaper Co. Inc. was founded in 1964, and continues to serve metropolitan Washington DC. They now reach over 50,000 readers each week through their award winning newspaper print edition; a weekly average of 20,500 unique visitors through their award winning website; 7,500 weekly subscribers through their weekly email newsletter, and potentially 300,000 viewers through the Washington Informer TV Show.

Rolark Barnes has used her influence and the voice of her paper to help mitigate many of the issues facing African American community, including the impact of HIV/AIDS. She is committed to increasing HIV/AIDS awareness among African American adults, providing media training to local community-based organizations, and increasing media coverage of public policy.

The Informer has a philanthropic arm too. They sponsor of the annual citywide Spelling Bee, an elementary school newspaper, internships, scholarships and are strong proponents of adult literacy. Rolark Barnes herself serves on many boards. She chairs the board of the Historical Society of Washington D.C., is the D.C. President of the AARP, is involved in Leadership Greater Washington, and sings in her church choir.

The *Informer* has not been immune to the impact the economy and the internet has had on print media. In fact Rolark Barnes was the only woman, and the only Black, to testify before a congressional subcommittee which was gathering information on this issue.

"My intent", she said, "is to continue to give voice to the African American community in whatever medium that exists. Although advertising has dropped, I am lucky to have an advertising executive that is creative and understands the value of relationship. Interestingly enough, in a city crammed with Federal agencies, the Federal government is our smallest advertiser."

Now Rolark Barnes operates with a full-time staff of eight, as well as free-lance reporters and photographers. One of her employees is her eldest son, who is the paper's assistant photographer. Her youngest son seems to have newsprint in his blood too. He is a communications major at Morgan State. She has been married to Lafayette Barnes, Director of the Office of Partnerships and Grants Development in the office of the D.C. Mayor, for 25 years.

Rolark Barnes always assumed she would retire at age 55, but now that she's close to that age, she is reconsidering.

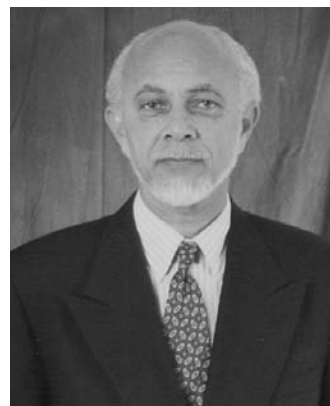
"I love the creative side of publishing, trying to figure out what we can do to make each issue better than the last issue."

She is however, hoping to start classes next fall to get her Ph.D. in communications in preparation for teaching classes in journalism, and perhaps writing a book about her own experiences as a journalist/publisher.

Although Rolark Barnes has travelled extensively, including trips to Cuba and South America, Barnes loves living in D.C.

"D.C. has so much to offer. It is culturally diverse; I can go to museums, book readings, just about anywhere. Now though, when I attend these events, I always go with the eyes of a reporter. When I retire, it will be nice to be able to just go out and enjoy myself without worrying about covering it."

Reverend Douglas B. Sands, Sr.



Reverend Douglas Sands answered the call to be a servant leader. He's led the charge to develop Black's businesses and to save Black's souls.

The Rev. Douglas Bruce Sands Sr. can best be described as a leader with a servant's heart. For decades Sands paved the way for equality and justice. Born of humble beginnings in Cooksville, Maryland, he grew up—one of seven children—living in a log cabin, converted, by his father, from a sheep's shed.

In 1952 Douglas Sands began his freshman year at Morgan State College. Morgan is where Sands received his first calling as he discovered a passion for justice and equality. These were discriminatory and challenging times for Blacks in America. In 1953, Sands, along with a group of students from Morgan State, successfully desegregated Northwood's Kresge's department store. Encouraged by that success, Sands, along with other students and Morgan State's administrators and faculty, continued to protest and boycott segregated local stores and shopping centers. As a result of his role as an acknowledged leader of the student protests, Sands was elected president of Morgan's Student Government Association. After graduating magna cum laude from Morgan State, Sands served his country as an officer in the United States Army.

In 1960, Sands was appointed Secretary of the *Maryland Commission on Interracial Problems and Relations*. In this position, Sands continued to work with student protesters, in partnership with the *NAACP*, *Urban League*, *Ministerial Alliance*, and other proponents of civil rights. Sands' public service eventually led to an appointment to President John F. Kennedy's task force for the Integration of Places of Public Accommodations. He then became the Deputy Director for Equal Opportunity in the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Sands went on to serve the public in various other appointments including field representative for the *U.S. Commission on Civil Rights*, and Southern and Mid-Western Field Director for the *U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Services*. His work in civil rights also led to a position as President of the Howard County Branch of the *NAACP*.

"I really favor saying Black business rather than minority business," said Sands.

The Department of Commerce is where Douglas Sands began focusing on his fight for Minority Businesses. This is where he met Dave Venable, the *Office of Minority Business Enterprise's* first Director. Venable wanted Sands to be his deputy, but Sands' plan, as he states it, was "to pursue minority business enterprise personally for my own self, and to find ways in which I could help to make it affect large numbers of Black people."

Sands became driven to help the Black community in creating jobs. This led him as far south as Mississippi where he worked as a part of the Southern Christian Leadership Council and the Farmer's Cooperative. Risking his life for the greater good, his missions took him as far north as Alaska, where in 1974 he was summoned by Congressman Parren J. Mitchell to organize Black contractors working on the Alaskan pipeline. From Mississippi to Alaska, as Sands adjusted to the dramatic weather changes, he helped Black Contractors organize to get a fair share of the pipeline opportunities. Also seeing the plight of the Native Americans in Alaska, Sands hired some of them to work alongside the Black contractors. Later, Sands helped these Native Americans organize and form their own company.

This experience provided Sands with new insights. Sands knew the construction industry produced more jobs than any other industry. So, Sands returned to Maryland and sought to recreate the successful Alaskan model. One of the state's largest construction projects presented the right

segue way. Sands saw the development of the Baltimore Subway as a once in a lifetime opportunity to put Blacks to work. The minority participation goal was almost non-existent. Although state agencies proposed 2%, the black contractors demanded 10%. In order to make their voices heard, Black Contractors had to be organized on a broader scale.

Again answering the call, Sands founded and became president of the Maryland Minority Contracting Association (MMCA). In 1976, Sands led 110 black contractors to Annapolis and had them usurp the seats of the state legislators when they were absent during their lunch break. Thus began the battles of the *Maryland Minority Contractor Association*. Sands took on similar battles throughout the 70s and early 80s. When asked what he most wanted accomplish during those years he said his goal was, "to actually be able to get minority participation in the major contracts, and get some small businesses to grow." He fondly remembers his peers, Bob Clay MMCA Chairman and Robert DeShields, MMCA General Counsel. Through their joint efforts, many protests were staged, and job sites shut down, traffic hindered by dump trucks

During the next election cycle, Sands decided to run for state delegate in the 42nd district. When the election was over, (Sands lost the election by a narrow margin.) the newly elected Governor Hughes, who knew Sands from his civil rights work on the Eastern Shore, asked to meet with him. Hughes offered Sands a position to lead the state's minority businesses, then a division within the state's Economic Development Department. Sands agreed, and he convinced Hughes to create a separate Office of Minority Affairs (OMA) and to make the new office part of the Governor's Office. Sands knew that locating OMA within the Governor's office, minority business would receive the visibility and the attention it needed, as well as allow the Governor to become better informed about the issues facing the MBE community.

During his seven year tenure in state government, Sands' mission continued to be ensuring that the minority business participation goals were enforced. Sands sought to hold the state agencies accountable for increasing their participation. One of his most significant actions was to solicit the Attorney General's involvement. Sands' team met regularly with AG staff to ensure each contract had an MBE goal.

Despite all of the time required to succeed in his role as public servant, Sands found time to serve in a spiritual way, becoming licensed as a local preacher in 1979. In 1985, Sands earned a master's degree at Howard University's School of Divinity. He served as pastors of *St. Johns United Methodist Church* and *Simpson-Hamline United Methodist Church* in D.C. Sands officially retired from the ministry in 2004, but continues to preach the gospel every Sunday morning. Sands formed a ministry called, "Save the Little Black Church." His ministry seeks churches that are in trouble and looking for a pastor. Once he finds those churches he assumes their pastoral duties until the church finds a full-time pastor.

Rev. Sands and wife of 36 years, Rev. Barbara Sands, live in Mt. Airy, Maryland where they share the love of four children and six grandchildren.

The MBE Top 100 would like to congratulate the Reverend Douglas B. Sands, Sr. for his relentless service and dedication to civil rights and equal opportunity for minority businesses.