

Dr. Carlton Goodlett: Champion of the People by Max Millard

Carlton Benjamin Goodlett, Ph.D., M.D. (1914-1997) was a physician, newspaper publisher [1], political power broker [2], and civil rights leader in San Francisco, California. [1] The owner of the Reporter Publishing Company -- which published the Sun-Reporter and other African-American weeklies [2] -- he maintained a busy medical practice in his newspaper office until his retirement from medicine in 1983. [2] But his greatest passion was political activism.

Born in Chipley, Florida, he earned a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of California at Berkeley [1] and an M.D. degree from Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee.

In 1945, Goodlett opened a medical practice in the Fillmore district of San Francisco. As president of the local branch of the NAACP from 1947-49, he emerged as an aggressive civil rights advocate. In 1948 he became co-owner of the *Reporter*, which later merged with its competitor, the *Sun*, to become the *Sun-Reporter*. In 1951 he became sole owner, writing most of the editorials and using it as a power base for political influence. He later added Oakland's *California Voice* and seven *Metro-Reporters* to his chain. He served three terms as president of the Black Press of America.

Goodlett and his close ally, Congressman Phillip Burton, helped launch the career of Willie L. Brown, Jr. With their help, Brown won a seat in the California Assembly in 1964. He served as Assembly speaker for more than 14 years, and later served eight years as San Francisco's mayor.

Black physicians in San Francisco were not allowed to practice in most hospitals. Under Goodlett's leadership, all nonwhite physicians won the right to see patients at all public hospitals in the City. [4]

He was critical of Governor Edmund G. "Pat" Brown for not moving fast enough on civil rights [5], so in 1966 Goodlett made a protest run for governor. He received 95,000 votes in the Democratic primary [15], finishing third out of six candidates.

Goodlett was the dominant figure in San Francisco's civil rights movement until the Black Panther Party emerged in the mid-1960s. He was one of the first black leaders to publicly oppose the war in Vietnam.

Like many prominent San Franciscans, Goodlett's reputation was tarnished by his association with the Reverend Jim Jones of the People's Temple. [10] He was Jones' personal physician and published the church newspaper. [19] In November 1978, Jones committed suicide in Guyana while engineering the suicide and murder of more than 900 followers. Goodlett later said, "You don't need glasses for hindsight. Everybody is running like hell away from Jim Jones now, but none of us knew at the time." [10]

In the 1980s he developed Parkinson's disease, but continued running his newspapers. He wrote many of the paper's editorials and held political meetings in the office. [5]

In June 1994 Goodlett left San Francisco to spend his last years under the care of his son Dr. Garry M. Goodlett, in Cumming, Iowa, where he died. [2] A massive memorial service was held for him in San Francisco.

On January 29, 1997, San Francisco's then Mayor Willie L. Brown, Jr., issued a statement: "It may be the single biggest loss that the black community and the progressive community has ever suffered in San Francisco. Dr. Goodlett was the pioneer on equal rights, equal opportunity, political action, entrepreneurship, and economic independence. He was truly a renaissance person." [16]

On January 18, 1999, following a unanimous vote by the City's board of supervisors, San Francisco City Hall's address was changed to 1 Carlton B. Goodlett Place. [17]

* * *

1. New York Times, February 2, 1997 <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/02/02/us/carlton-goodlett-82-doctor-and-a-campaigning-publisher.html>

2. San Francisco Chronicle, January 27, 1997 Carlton B. Goodlett, Prominent Black Publisher Stephen Schwartz <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Carlton-B-Goodlett-Prominent-Black-Publisher-2856541.php>

4. Carlton Goodlett By Yussuf J. Simmonds (Managing Editor) Los Angeles Sentinel April 23, 2011 <http://lasentinel.net/carlton-goodlett.html>

5. S.F. civil rights maverick Dr. Carlton Goodlett dies Larry D. Hatfield, OF THE EXAMINER STAFF January 27, 1997 <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/S-F-civil-rights-maverick-Dr-Carlton-Goodlett-3138653.php>

10. Goodlett's Mark on S.F. Kingmaker helped change color of city politics San Francisco Chronicle, Saturday, February 15, 1997, Page A15 Michael Taylor, Chronicle Staff Writer <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Goodlett-s-Mark-on-S-F-Kingmaker-helped-change-2855186.php>

16. Peele, Thomas Killing the Messenger: A Story of Radical Faith, Racism's Backlash, and the Assassination of a Journalist. Crown Publishers, New York, 2012

17. statement by San Francisco Mayor Willie L. Brown, Jr., January 29, 1997

18. City Hall Block To Be Renamed After Goodlett S.F. supervisors unanimously approve honor, resolve issue San Francisco Chronicle, Tuesday, March 25, 1997 John King, Chronicle Staff Writer Page A17 <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/City-Hall-Block-To-Be-Renamed-After-Goodlett-2848472.php>

19. The People's Palace: San Francisco City Hall 100 Years Documentary Film by Jim Yager
Media <https://vimeo.com/144156561>