

**Wesley Brown Memorial**  
**U.S. Naval Academy Chapel**  
**Annapolis, MD**

June 6, 2012

Crystal, Carol, Wiletta, Wesley Jr., Gary, grandkids, friends, distinguished guests and all the members of Wesley Brown's extended family...I stand before you today as a proud child of Lt. Cmdr. Wesley A. Brown's sacrifice. Kerwin Miller, thank-you for your special acts of love to Wes and Crystal through the years and the role you continue to play in preserving his great legacy.

Although I became acquainted with Wes through the years – I did not know him as well as many of you, but I am grateful for the path he blazed and the dignity he displayed as the first African American graduate of the United States Naval Academy.

Like many African American alums, he dropped into the home of Lillie Mae Chase and her mom just outside Gate 3 on

College Street – now Lillie Mae Chase Lane – where we first met. One thing was certain in those weekend meetings at Lil's – none of us was bold or foolish enough to challenge Wes for claim to the toughest Plebe Year.

While I had my own difficulties gaining admission to the Academy in 1964, Wesley Brown's 1949 graduation and the legacy he left behind, helped pave the way for me and so many others. So much had transpired in the 15 years between his leaving and my arrival; so much more progress was on the way. Think about it. Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier in baseball while Wes was a Midshipman here.

President Truman integrated the military one year before Wes' graduation.

By the time I got here in the summer of 1964, the civil rights movement had begun to end segregation in our schools; the March on Washington had awakened the conscience of the

nation; and through the leadership of Dr. King and many others, America was in a mighty struggle to shed the racial burdens of the past.

The most powerful weapon in that struggle was the confident dignity, and grace under fire that was the hallmark of Wesley Brown's life. Wesley never denied that he faced isolation, discrimination, and hardship during his time here, but he never abandoned his faith in God or his fellow man. He did not see himself as a prophet or hero; he simply chose to plant his feet on the solid rock of faith. In the book of Genesis 50:20, scripture tells us: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people."

You see, Wesley Brown was a man too busy saving lives to hate. He spent most of his career in the Navy building, repairing and making life better for people here in America and around the world. He built houses in Hawaii...roads in Liberia...and after he

left military service, he spent many years building young minds and new facilities at Howard University. As a builder, he was especially moved by the construction of the Wesley Brown Field House here at the Naval Academy. He called the 2006 groundbreaking one of the three special days of his life, behind the day of his marriage and starting this beautiful family and the day he graduated from the Naval Academy in 1949.

Wesley Brown showed us, through the power of his example, what it means to be a real American hero. His life of service to others...his commitment to building up, not tearing down...and his unconditional love have enriched this nation and touched us all.

May his legacy live on and may God rest his soul!