



Black History Month Celebration

February 15, 2026

Antioch Baptist Church, Madison, Virginia

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Remarks by Dr. Mesha Jones, President Madison County African American Historical Association

First, I want to thank Pastor Lewis for welcoming the Madison County African American Historical Association into this space. Thank you for your hospitality, your steady leadership, and your continued commitment to ensuring that our history is honored within our faith community. Your willingness to open these doors reflects vision, service, and responsibility—and we do not take that lightly.

I also want to acknowledge leaders in the room who continue the work of justice and equity in our community Kaleb, President of our local NAACP chapter, and Jason, Vice President. Thank you for your leadership, your advocacy, and your willingness to stand in spaces that require courage and consistency. Partnerships like this matter. Collective leadership matters.

For those who may not know me, my name is Dr. Mesha Jones, and I have the privilege of serving as president of the Madison County African American Historical Association. I am also a nurse, educator, mentor, and health equity advocate but in this moment, I stand before you as a steward of our shared history and a voice committed to preserving and activating the legacy of those who came before us.

Tonight, I want to begin with the impact of our *Hometown Histories*.

The stories we preserve through the Madison County African American Historical Association are not simply reflections of the past. They are structural. They create a framework in this community structure in faith, in family, in education, in land ownership, in craftsmanship, and in courage. The men and women highlighted in our Hometown Histories did not just live here. They built here.

They created a foundation we now stand on.

Dr. Carter G. Woodson said, “*If a race has no history, it has no worthwhile tradition.*” Our history is not only worthwhile it is foundational. It teaches us what resilience looks like. It teaches us what disciplined belief looks like. It teaches us what it means to build under pressure.

Consider Astorie Turner Acty, born in Achsah in 1935, the fifth child in a large family. Her story reflects perseverance, commitment to family, and steady presence. She represents quiet strength—the kind that stabilizes generations.

Edward Snyder “Skip” Gordon, born in Tanners in 1939, is remembered for his pride, identity, and deep connection to community. His life reminds us that rootedness matters.

Lillian Turner Holly, a Madison native and educator, built influence through the classroom while raising her family. She demonstrates that education is not simply employment—it is empowerment.

William Lee Frye, Sr., a lifelong resident of the Shelby area, is known for his craftsmanship and work ethic. His legacy reinforces the dignity of skilled labor and disciplined effort.

Mary Blakey Jones (Mary Elizabeth Blakey Jones) carried the painful history of family displacement from Shenandoah National Park. Yet her life reflects endurance and continued presence. She embodies resilience in the face of systemic disruption.

These individuals did not seek headlines. They sought stability. They sought opportunity. They sought dignity. And in doing so, they created structure.

To the younger generation: you are not beneficiaries of luck. You are beneficiaries of legacy.

Our board continues that work with intention and purpose.

Dorren Brown—educator and healthcare executive—embodies the strategic use of knowledge to influence systems.

Tina Gordon—a visionary, director, and innovator—models disciplined imagination and forward movement.

Paul Williams—a man of faith and financial steward—demonstrates that legacy requires integrity and wise stewardship.

Shana Clements—educator and published author at sixteen—proves that impact is not age-dependent. Excellence does not wait.

Dr. Patricia Frye—a pediatrician and international speaker—represents the power of expertise combined with global influence, demonstrating how local roots can carry impact far beyond county lines.

Dorothy Arrington—a retired nurse—reflects a lifetime of service, compassion, and commitment to caring for families across generations in this community.

Cindy Taylor—a writer and advocate—uses the power of words to inform, challenge, and inspire, ensuring our narratives are told with clarity and strength.

Charles—a lawyer and advocate—brings legal expertise and a steadfast commitment to justice, reinforcing that advocacy must be both principled and strategic.

Nancy, our founder and the first to integrate schools in Madison, represents courage under pressure. Integration was not symbolic—it required strength, composure, and resolve.

Now let me speak plainly.

There will be seasons when you want to give up. There will be moments when the weight feels heavy, when progress seems slow, when systems appear resistant, and when it feels easier to accept things as they are. But you cannot stand in the mindset that stagnation is unstoppable. Because what you repeatedly believe is what you repeatedly build. If you convince yourself that nothing will change, you will unconsciously construct limitations. If you believe barriers are permanent, you will design small futures. But if you believe growth is possible—if you believe your voice matters, your effort counts, and your future can expand—then you begin building something different. You begin building momentum. You begin building access. You begin building transformation.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. reminded us, *“If you can’t fly then run, if you can’t run then walk, if you can’t walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward.”*

Movement is required.

History is not behind you.

It is within you.

And the next chapter, the next breakthrough, the next structure is yours to create.

So my call to action for you is this:

Choose growth over excuses.

Choose discipline over distraction.

Choose courage over comfort.

Commit to your education. Protect your mindset. Surround yourself with people who stretch you, not shrink you. Refuse to repeat narratives that say you cannot win, cannot lead, cannot succeed.

Honor the structure that was built for you by building something stronger for those who will come after you.

Do not wait for permission.

Do not wait for perfect timing.

Do not wait until you feel fully ready.

Start where you are.

Use what you have.

Build what you can.

Because legacy is not extended by accident.

It is extended by action.

Thank you for honoring our history.

Thank you for protecting our legacy.

And thank you for choosing to build what comes next.

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