



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ted O'Brien

Black History Month and Rochester's special significance

TED O'BRIEN February 4, 2013

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As February begins and the United States observes Black History Month, Sen. O'Brien encourages the people of his district of all races to take some time to reflect on the rich history of African-Americans in the United States and in his district in particular.

"Black history is American history," O'Brien said. "I encourage everyone to take some time to look at Rochester's importance to the African-American community, from its early role as the longtime home of abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass to the civil rights struggle of the 1950s and '60s that continues today."

"It's often challenging to talk about race, both our past and current struggles," O'Brien said. "Sometimes, it involves opening up old wounds. But we certainly don't do anyone a service by sweeping our history under the rug. Our city was the site of a major riot in 1964, that some have called a "rebellion," that left four people dead and left economic wounds to parts of the city that remain today."

"Yet a decade later, the federal government was sending representatives here to model national programs after our local minority business outreach programs," he continued.

"Rochester's history of race relations parallels that of our country. We've certainly made incredible strides, but there's still so much that needs to be accomplished."

“Malcolm X came to Rochester in 1965 and spoke at the Corn Hill Methodist Church about how race problems were not an American issue, but a global issue. In part, he said, ‘We don’t judge a man because of the color of his skin... We judge you because of what you do and what you practice. And as long as you practice evil, we’re against you. And for us, the most — the worst form of evil is the evil that’s based upon judging a man because of the color of his skin.’”

For more information about the African-American experience in Rochester, the University of Rochester’s “Black Freedom Struggle Online Project” brings together a variety of resources, including transcriptions of a series of interviews with leading figures of the local civil rights movement. It is available online at <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?page=572>.

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Sen. O’Brien represents the 55th district in the Senate, which is made up of the eastern half of Monroe County and the western half of Ontario County, including much of the city of Rochester.

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