



**National
Urban League**

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Remembering Cuomo, Brooke and Scott**

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"Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities...because it is the quality which guarantees all others." – Winston Churchill

Just as we welcomed in the New Year with various renditions of Auld Lang Syne and well-wishing cheers, we also met 2015 with solemn reverence as we mourned the loss of three great Americans - former New York Governor Mario Cuomo, former United States Senator Edward Brooke III and ESPN sportscaster Stuart Scott. Each of these men charted a new course and left an indelible mark on America with their passion, pioneering spirit and principled approach to leaving our nation a better place than they found it.

Mario Cuomo, who passed on New Year's Day at 82 years old, was lionized as a great voice for liberalism, the New Deal and the Great Society from the 1970s through the 1990s, particularly during the Reagan years. Governor of New York from 1983 through 1994, Cuomo, the son of immigrants whose deep commitment to values was shaped by his Italian American upbringing in Queens, NY, was widely celebrated for his stirring speeches and oratorical skills. I had the fortune to be in San Francisco at the Moscone Center during the 1984 Democratic National Convention as a young delegate for Jesse Jackson when Mario Cuomo gave his now very famous speech on the haves and the have-nots – a speech that has as much relevance today as it did 30 years ago. At the time, it moved us, and at present, it is required reading for anyone serious about the future of America.

But as his son – current NY Governor Andrew Cuomo – reminded us at his funeral services, Mario Cuomo was above all a man of principle. It is legend that many, including me, wanted him to run for president of the United States in 1988 and 1992, believing that he would bring a sense of principled passion to the office. He obviously declined – citing his unwavering commitment to the voters and people of NY. Mario Cuomo will forever have my deepest admiration and respect for representing something very different than many of today's elected and appointed officials – and that was his steadfast commitment to pragmatism, while at the same time basing his thinking on solid principles rather than the immediate

expediency of public polling.

While many people today may not have known Edward Brooke III – the first African-American elected as a state's Attorney General and first African American elected to the U.S. Senate by popular vote – he stands as one of the most pivotal politicians in our nation's history. I grew up knowing about Sen. Brooke from my father because, in addition to being a history-making senator from Massachusetts, Sen. Brooke was also a member of and leader in the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. I also recall the first time I had the honor to meet him. I was 14 years old and attended a graduation ceremony at Xavier University where he delivered the commencement address.

What I remember most dearly about Edward Brooke, who passed away on January 3 at 95 years old, is that he ran against the current of the times. He was a republican in an overwhelmingly democratic state. He was an African-American in the U.S. Senate when it was dominated by Dixiecrats and segregationists of the likes of Richard Russell, Strom Thurmond and others. He was also a man who navigated his position as both a historymaker and a senator in a deft and effective way – championing civil rights while at the same time honoring his commitment to the people of Massachusetts. He broke down the barriers and forged a path for many African American elected officials who followed him, including President Barack Obama, who remembered Brooke as being “at the forefront of the battle for civil rights and economic fairness” and who “sought to build consensus and understanding across partisan lines, always working towards practical solutions to our nation's challenges.”

Stuart Scott, the ESPN anchor and reporter who brought a new swagger and swerve to sportscasting, was one of my favorite sportscasters because he told it as we talked it. He explained it as we thought it. In short, he made sports very real for people in all communities across the nation. I also believe that Stuart Scott opened the doors for many other African American sportscasters at ESPN and other networks. He demonstrated, much like the late great Howard Cosell, that to be effective you need not be cut from a traditional cloth, but that you could bring the fullness of who you are, your personality and your experiences – and the audience would love it.

Stuart Scott was a stand-out among his peers, but not just for his “remix” of traditional sportscasting with cultural and memorable catch phrases. He was also a stand-out for the life he lived, the love he gave to family and friends, and the fight he fought. Scott was valiant as a young man in his fight against cancer. Passing away on January 4 at 49 years old, he left a legacy that extends far beyond his years. When he accepted the Jimmy V Award for Perseverance at the 2014 ESPY Awards in July 2014, he said “When you die, it does not mean that you lose to cancer. You beat cancer by how you live, why you live, and in the manner in which you live.” By his own definition, Stuart Scott beat cancer.

Our nation is better off for the contribution of these three men, who each, in their own way, challenged and changed our perceptions, our expectations and our futures by being courageous enough to show us a different way.

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