



My Newark Story



Volume 1, Issue 3

December 2017

‘Kenneth A. Gibson: Newark’s First African American Mayor’

by Tom Ankner

Summary

“Kenneth Gibson: Newark’s First African American Mayor” describes the early life, mayoral campaign, political career, and Gibson’s accomplishments after leaving political office. Gibson ran for mayor of Newark during a period of great political and social change in the United States.

The exhibit panels also give an overview of the political and cultural climate during Gibson’s youth through his career, beginning with the Great Migration when more than 6 million African Americans moved out of the rural Southern United States to seek economic opportunities in Northern cities like Newark, into the Civil Rights Movement (a mass popular movement in the 1950s through the 1960s to secure equal access and opportunities for African Americans for the basic privileges and rights of U.S. citizenship), to the Post-Civil Rights Era of the 1970s when Gibson was elected mayor of Newark.

Did You Know?

- ✓ Gibson attended the Monmouth Street School and Cleveland Junior High School. Gibson graduated from Central High School in 1950.
- ✓ Ken Gibson was the first African American mayor of a Northeastern City.
- ✓ Only three city council members in Newark were African American when Gibson became mayor in 1970. By the time Gibson retired in 1986, the majority of the City Council was of African descent.

Early Life

Like many other African Americans during the Great Migration, Ken Gibson and his family moved to Newark’s Central Ward in 1940s seeking new and better economic opportunities. Gibson was educated in Newark from grade school through college. He experienced the Civil Rights movement in Newark participating in Newark chapters of the NAACP, CORE, and the National Urban League. Gibson’s Newark education and community activism, along with the changing social climate in Newark, helped to inspire his run for the mayoral office.

A Mayor and Inspiration

When Gibson took office in 1970, the city was still recovering from the Rebellion of 1967. Through his actions as mayor, he was credited with reviving the Newark economy and paving the way for other African Americans who aspired to hold political office in Newark and throughout the United States.

FOR TEACHERS

BECOMING THE MAYOR

My Newark Story has created a Civics Lesson Plan that highlights the Ken Gibson administration in Newark to accompany the *Ken Gibson* traveling exhibit (Grades 3-8) with upper grade level extensions.



LESSON PLAN SAMPLE

Objectives:

Students will:

Use prior knowledge gained from *My Newark Story*'s Ken Gibson Exhibit to extend their depth of inquiry.

Collect and organize historical information.

Create a campaign speech representing civic understanding and events

Learn how to identify the different levels of government, the role of the mayor, and civic responsibility.

Essential Questions:

Who are our elected leaders?

What do elected leaders do?

What Else?

The lesson includes activities, worksheets and internet resources.

OTHER LESSON PLANS?

My Newark Story has created various lesson plans, games, and other learning activities during the 2017 school year. All are available on our website <http://npl.org/mynewarkstory/>



Customized Lessons and Events

If you would like *My Newark Story* to create a lesson, game, or other learning activity that relates to the NPL's digital archive collections from the Charles F. Cummings New Jersey Information Center and the New Jersey Hispanic Research and Information Center or Newark history in general that you would like us to create for your class, please email Karl Schwartz: kschwartz@npl.org.

* All lessons are created by NJ certified K-12 Language Arts and Social Studies teachers.

WANT TO PLAN A SPECIAL EVENT

My Newark Story has created numerous Community History Days at our branch libraries and a series of summer lessons that can be adapted to your classroom. Please contact *My Newark Story* for more information or to book a Community History Event for your class or school.





KEN GIBSON EARLY LIFE QUESTIONS

DIRECTIONS: USE THE PANELS TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. Why did Gibson and his family move to Newark in the 1940s?
2. How do you think living in Newark from 1940 through the 1960s might have inspired a person like Ken Gibson to run for office?
3. How did Gibson's education in Newark prepare him for his role as Mayor of Newark?
4. What were some of the benefits of Gibson's term as mayor? Detriments? Explain why.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: Do you know what the Great Migration is?

A: It is a period between 1916 and 1970, when more than 6 million African Americans moved out of the rural Southern United States. African Americans were driven from their homes by poor economic opportunities and harsh segregationist laws.

Q: Can you define the Civil Rights Movement?

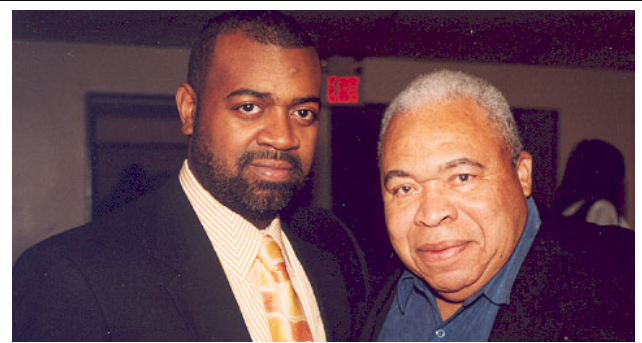
A: A struggle for social justice that took place mainly during the 1950s and 1960s for African Americans to gain equal rights under the law in the United States.

KEN GIBSON AS MAYOR QUESTIONS

DIRECTIONS: USE THE PANELS TO ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

1. How did Ken Gibson change Newark as mayor? How did he improve the city during his term of office?
2. How would you rate Gibson's time as mayor? Good? Bad? Explain your answer.
3. How did Gibson inspire other African Americans?
4. What did Ken Gibson do after he retired from public office?

What would you change in Newark if you became mayor? Do think you others would like your idea? Why?



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: Can you name 3 African American mayors of Newark who followed in the footsteps of Mayor Gibson?

A: Ras Baraka, Cory Booker, and Sharpe James.

Q: What were some of the major issues Gibson faced as Mayor of Newark?

A: Management of the Newark Schools, public housing, urban development, healthcare, and employment.