

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Vertner Woodson Tandy

architect, activist

“We must fight till hell freezes over and then fight on the ice.”

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Background Information

Born: May 17, 1885

Death: November 7, 1949

Vertner Woodson Tandy was born in Lexington Kentucky to Henry and Emma Tandy. He attended school in Lexington at the Candler school. While he attended school, Tandy decided he wanted to become an architect. During his childhood, he watched and learned from his father, who built homes. Tandy began his college career at the Tuskegee Institute, a Historically Black College (HBCU) in Tuskegee, Alabama. There, he was a stellar student and became recognized for his talent. Tandy left the college after a single year and transferred to Cornell University to continue his education.¹

Tandy's Resistance

While at Cornell, Tandy and six fellow Black, male college students founded Alpha Phi Alpha in 1906. The organization would become the first African American fraternity.¹ A few years after graduating from Cornell, Tandy opened his architectural practice in New York City. Tandy became the first African American to become a registered architect in the state of New York. Tandy helped design many buildings in Harlem, notably the St. Phillips Protestant Episcopal Church, and the Ivey-Delph Apartments. One of his most recognized works is the thirty-four-bedroom mansion he created for Black entrepreneur, Madam C.J. Walker.²

Achievements

As an early African American architect, Tandy paved the way for African Americans to enter the field and succeed. Tandy became the first African American to pass the military commissioning examination in World War I, making him a lieutenant of New York National State Guard.¹ Since the founding of Alpha Phi Alpha, prominent members have gone on to include W.E.B DuBois, Martin Luther King Jr., Thurgood Marshall, etc.³

¹ Okocha, V. (2007, March 15) *Vertner Woodson Tandy (1885-1949)*. Retrieved from <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/tandy-vertner-woodson-1885-1949/>

² *Jewel Vertner Woodson Tandy*. (2013, November 14). Eastern Region of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. <https://www.alphaeast.com/history-of-alpha-phi-alpha/jewel-vertner-woodson-tandy/>

³ *Honoring African-American Architects*. (2019, October 26). IA Interior Architects. <https://interiorarchitects.com/honoring-african-american-architects/>

