

February 10, 1989

Ronald H. Brown, attorney and political leader, was elected chairman of the Democratic National Committee on this day, becoming the first Black to be elected head of a major national political party. Brown went on to be appointed U.S. Commerce secretary in the Clinton administration, the first Black in that post as well. Born August 1, 1941, in Washington, D.C., Brown graduated from Middlebury College in Vermont and earned a law degree from St. John's University in New York. He built a successful career in the 1980s as a lawyer and lobbyist. Prior to that, he served the National Urban League for 11 years. As Commerce Secretary, Brown was one of the foremost spokesmen for the administration's economic and trade policies, helping U.S. firms win contracts in developing, newly industrialized nations. He was killed on April 3, 1996, in a Croatian mountainside plane crash during a trade mission to Bosnia.

February 15, 1968-

Henry Lewis

became the first Black to head a major U.S. symphony orchestra when he was named director of the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra on this day. Lewis changed his repertory to suit the audience, expanded the company's exposure by playing from New Jersey's ghettos to its middle-class communities to Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center and the United Nations. He attended the University of Southern California in his native Los Angeles, and first broke racial barriers in classical music when he became the first Black instrumentalist to play with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, in 1948. He died in 1996 of a heart attack in New York at age 63.