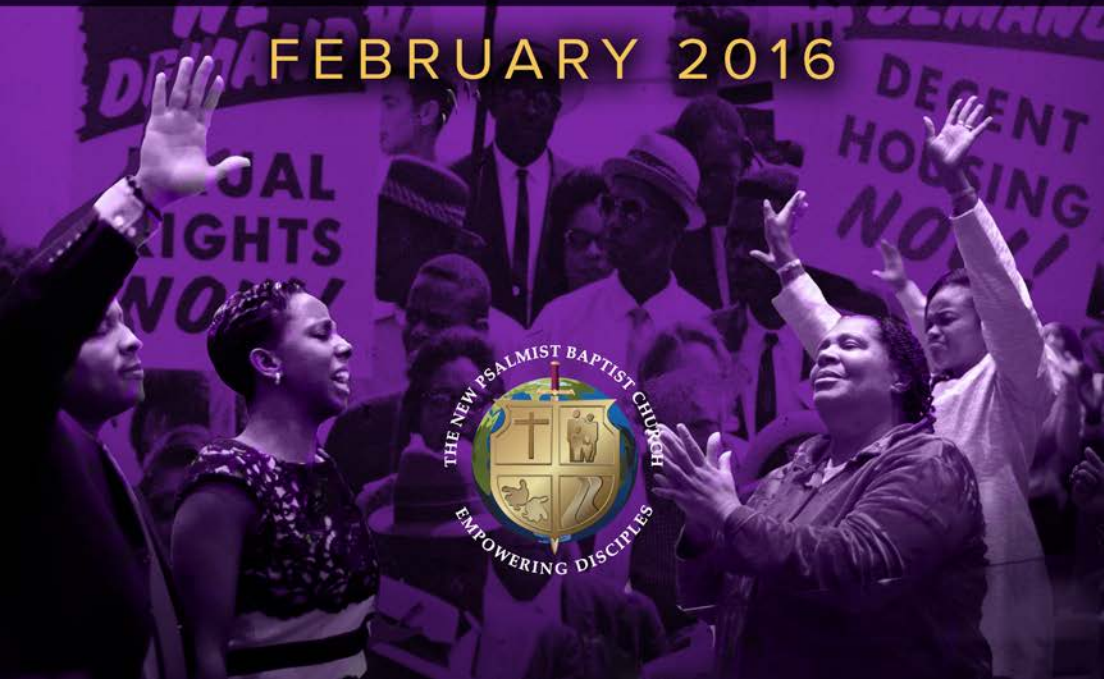


A Resource To Accompany  
The February Sermon Series by Bishop Walter S. Thomas, Sr.  
“We Are Overcomers”



# 29 AFRICAN AMERICAN TRAILBLAZERS

FEBRUARY 2016



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**LIVES  
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SEGREGATION  
**NEVER**

INTEGRATION  
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**FOR  
THE  
POWER**

**TO DIE**



# 29

## AFRICAN AMERICAN TRAILBLAZERS

**S**haw University is the first college for African-Americans established in the Southern United States, and the oldest HBCU in the region. It is also one of the nation's oldest learning institutions.

Shaw, which is located in Raleigh, N.C. was founded by Baptist minister Henry Martin Tupper, who worked with the American Baptist Home Mission Society. The school began holding bible and literacy classes in December 1865, with aims to assist African-Americans in the area at the conclusion of the American Civil War.

In 1871, the school was renamed the Shaw Collegiate Institute after major donor Elijah Shaw. The school's first building is named after the benefactor. Four years later, the school was renamed Shaw University for the final time.

The university has spawned the indirect founding of several North Carolina learning institutions. The founding presidents of North Carolina Central University, Elizabeth City State University, and Fayetteville State University all attended Shaw. In addition, the institution that eventually became North Carolina A&T was located on Shaw's campus for the first year of its existence.

Notable Shaw alumni include iconic civil rights leader Ella Baker, former New York congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr., R&B legend Gladys Knight, and gospel singer extraordinaire Shirley Caesar.

Today, the school boasts over 2,100 students and cover a variety of disciplines and coursework paths that include divinity, early childhood education, teacher education and much more.

The school's 18th president is Dr. Tashni-Ann Dubroy, herself an alumnus.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>





**G**loria Richardson was a civil rights leader in Maryland who led a series of protests in the Eastern Shore region. The Cambridge Movement was one of the more violent protests of the '60's, ignited by economic and racial inequality.

The future activist was born Gloria St. Clair Hayes on May 6, 1922 in Baltimore. Her family relocated to the city of Cambridge where they owned a successful hardware store and held positions on the City Council board. At 16, Richardson entered Howard University graduating with a degree in sociology in 1942.

Cambridge city officials refused to hire Black social workers, so Richardson, who was married at the time, focused on raising her children and being a housewife. Her foray into activism happened after her teenage daughter, Donna, joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Richardson began organizing with the SNCC, forming the Cambridge Nonviolent Action Committee and becoming the Cambridge Movement's leader. According to some accounts, the CNAC was the only adult-led SNCC group at the height of the civil rights movement.

Based on her own struggles, Richardson strongly empathized with those struggling to find employment. She also fought for equality across the board for the city's poor Black population. Although Richardson initially embraced the tenets of non-violence, her feelings changed just ahead of her retirement from the movement. Because of this, clashes with Cambridge Movement protesters and police routinely became violent. In 1963, the Maryland National Guard was called in to quell the situation.

Richardson's final protest occurred in May 1964 when racist Alabama Gov. George Wallace visited the town. Two months later, the National Guard finally ended their occupation of Cambridge, the same month the Civil Rights Act went into effect.

Richardson, who had remarried and became Gloria Richardson Dandridge, left the movement that year and relocated to New York. She has largely kept out of the public spotlight, although she has granted some interviews in recent times.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



**J**anet Collins was best known as the exquisitely beautiful dancer who was the first black artist to perform at the Metropolitan, four years before Marian Anderson sang there. Collins, prima ballerina of the Metropolitan Opera House in the early 1950's, is one of a very few black women to become prominent in American classical ballet. Ms. Collins taught dance, choreographed and performed on Broadway and in film, and appeared frequently on television.

Ms. Collins made her New York debut in 1949, dancing in her own choreography on a shared program at the 92nd Street Y. John Martin, dance critic of *The New York Times*, described her as "the most exciting young dancer who has flashed across the current scene in a long time," calling her style an eclectic mix of modern dance and ballet.

Ms. Collins's next triumph came the following year on Broadway in the Cole Porter musical "Out of This World." Playing the role of Night, she danced an airborne solo created for her by Hanya Holm. She went from there to the Metropolitan, where she appeared as a principal dancer.

She performed lead roles in "Aida," "Carmen," the Dance of the Hours in "La Gioconda" and the Bacchanale in "Samson and Delilah." It was not until two decades after she left the Met, however, that she was to receive major attention again in New York when, in 1974, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater paid homage to her and Pearl Primus as pioneering black women in dance. Born in New Orleans, Ms. Collins moved with her family to Los Angeles at age 4.

She received her first dance training at a Catholic community center and went on to study primarily with Carmelita Maracci, one of the few ballet teachers who accepted black students, and with Lester Horton and Adolph Bolm.

She auditioned in Los Angeles for the Ballet Russe but said she had been told that she would either have to have special roles created for her or dance in white face. "I said no," she told Anna Kisselgoff in a 1974 interview in *The Times*. But the rejection spurred her, she said, to work even harder, hard enough to be an exception.

Ms. Collins danced with Katherine Dunham and performed with the Dunham company in the 1943 film musical "Stormy Weather." Ms. Collins was most active during the 1950's, when she toured with her own dance group throughout the United States and Canada and taught at academies including the School of American Ballet, affiliated with the New York City Ballet; Harkness House; and the San Francisco Ballet School.

Ms. Collins died May 28, 2003 and is survived by a brother, Earnest, of Fort Worth, and a sister, Betty Wilkerson of Pasadena, California.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/31/arts/janet-collins-86-ballerina-was-first-black-artist-at-met-opera.html>



**T**he National Black Independent Political Party (NBIPP) was

formed in November 1980 as

a response to the growing concerns of the African-American community and their place in the political ecosystem. To date, the NBIPP remains as perhaps the most prominent example of Blacks breaking with the major two-party system of Democrats and Republicans.

The NBIPP was formed on the heels of a three-day convention held in Philadelphia, Pa. at Benjamin Franklin High School between November 21-23. Over 1,500 delegates consisted of leaders from the Black Power Movement and other related progressive groups gathered to officially form the party. The gathering was held just after the 150th anniversary of the first Black political convention of September 1830, which was also in Philadelphia.

Keeping true to its overall mission, the national charter expressed its concerns and aims in pointed fashion.

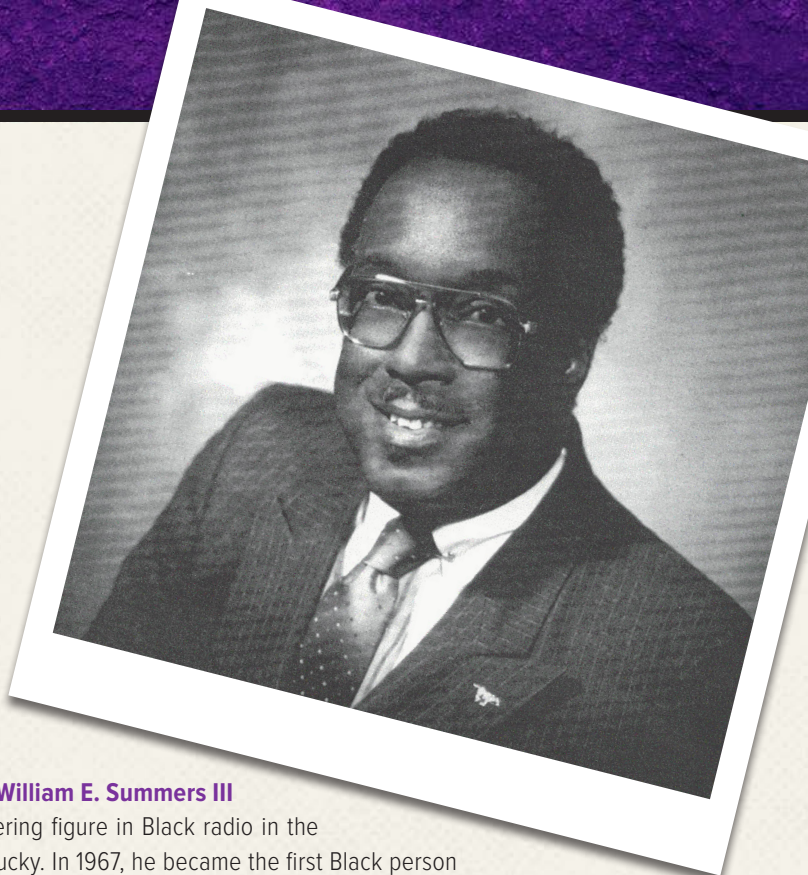
“The National Black Independent Political Party aims to attain power to radically transform the present socio-economic order. That is, to achieve self-determination and social and political freedom for the masses of Black people. Therefore, our party will actively oppose racism, imperialism, sexual oppression, and capitalist exploitation,” the charter stated.

Much of the NBIPP’s language was taken from the same concepts enacted by the aforementioned Black Power Movement and Pan-Africanist leaders. The group has been studied as an example of how the fight for equal rights among Blacks has evolved over the decades.

The NBIPP disbanded after just six years with little in the way of explanation. Although several books have since been written about the rise and fall of the NBIPP, few outside documents point to the machinations behind the party’s end.

The late scholar Manning Marable was a notable leader of the party.

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**T**he late **Rev. William E. Summers III** was a pioneering figure in Black radio in the state of Kentucky. In 1967, he became the first Black person to manage a radio station in the United States, and in 1971 he was the first Black person in Kentucky to own a station.

Born in 1918, Rev. Summers worked for WLOU as a part-time sports announcer. The station, which made its debut on this day in 1948, switched its format to cater to African-American listeners in 1951. Summers, who was an ordained A.M.E. minister and Army veteran, joined the station that year and rose to the executive ranks. WLOU was one of five original R&B stations in Kentucky and enjoyed strong ratings despite its AM location.

Summers purchased the station in 1971 and ran WLOU until selling the station to the Johnson Publishing Company in 1982. He remained a management consultant there until 1988. Summers also helped co-found the Clothe-A-Child, Inc. nonprofit in 1977, which provided clothing for Louisville's poor youth.

Summers died in June 1996 and was survived by his wife, Feren, his son, William IV, two daughters, and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

William IV caught the leadership bug from his father, as he served as deputy mayor of Louisville and Chief Administrative Officer for the Louisville Metro Government, retiring in 2012. The 72-year-old was named to the Board of Trustees for the University of Louisville.

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The title of the longest-running Black-owned company in the U.S. goes to E.E. Ward Moving & Storage, based in Columbus, Ohio. The roots of the multi-million dollar company were established during the U.S. Civil War and it remains one of the Arch City's most-reliable companies.

**John T. Ward**, a Richmond, Va. native, moved to Ohio in 1836 and married Catherine Ross. The couple owned a farm which became a stop along the Underground Railroad. Ward would hide escaped slaves to help them achieve freedom. Ward began learning the trade of hauling goods in 1859 eventually securing government contracts to ship items.

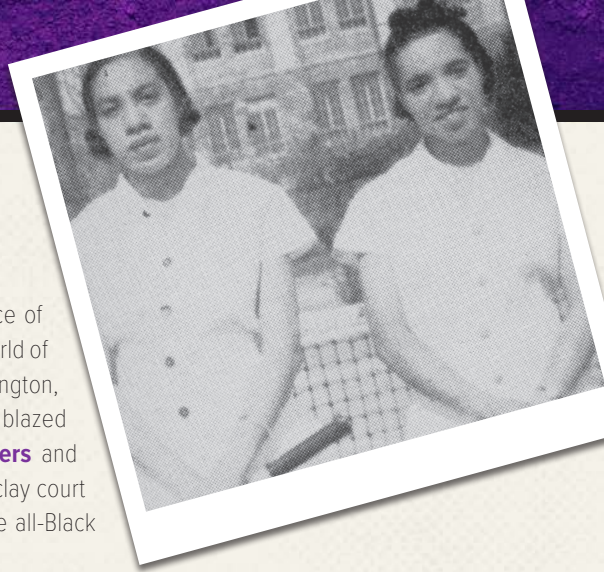
Ward was joined by his son, William S. Ward, a mover for an already established company. The father and son joined forces to create the Ward Transfer Lines in 1881. The operation was truly family-owned, with the elder and younger Ward using horses and the help of other family members to move goods for their customers.

In 2001, the last member of the family to have ownership of the company, Eldon Ward, was set to retire and sold the company to childhood friends Brian Brooks and Otto Beatty. Brooks, who is now the company's president and co-owner, is Ward's godson.

In the past 14 years, Brooks and Beatty have turned around the company's fortunes and have evolved E.E. Ward Moving & Storage into one of the top-rated businesses in the state of Ohio.

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Long before the dominating presence of Venus and Serena Williams in the world of tennis, a pair of sisters from Washington, D.C. and Tuskegee University graduates blazed a mighty trail in the sport. **Margaret Peters** and **Matilda Roumania Peters-Walker** were clay court legends in their hometown and stars of the all-Black American Tennis Association.

Margaret, born in 1915, and Roumania, born in 1917, grew up in Washington's Georgetown neighborhood. They discovered tennis at Rose Park near their home, and became a fearsome opponent of anyone across the net. Their playing prowess was so exceptional that they drew the attention of the ATA, which invited them to play in the league in 1936. Roumania made it to the finals that year before losing to three-time champion, Lulu Ballard.

Tuskegee University tennis coach Cleve Abbott offered the sisters four-year scholarships to play for the school. In a show of their closeness with each other, Margaret waited a full year to accept while Roumania finished high school and they entered the school in 1937, and graduated in 1941 with degrees in physical education.

Roumania was the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference tennis champion, and both sisters starred on the school's basketball team. They continued to play in amateur and national ATA tournaments, but never faced white competitors as the game was still segregated in their heyday. The sisters won an impressive 14 ATA doubles titles, and Roumania won the ATA singles title in 1944 and 1946. Roumania is the only Black woman to have defeated future tennis legend Althea Gibson after winning her second title.

Margaret, who never married, moved to New York and earned a master's in physical education from New York University. She returned to Washington as a special education teacher and earned a master's degree in special education from Baltimore's Coppin State University.

Roumania also earned a master's in physical education from New York University. In 1957 she married James Walker, a Tuskegee University math professor who saw her photo in a newspaper. The pair had one son, James George, and one daughter, Frances Della. Roumania was a Washington school teacher and taught tennis to poor children in the city. The sisters were inducted into the Tuskegee Hall of Fame in 1977. On Oct. 24 of this year, Rose Park was officially renamed the Margaret Peters and Roumania Peters Walker Tennis Courts.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



**D**orothy Gilliam overcame a major barrier at The Washington Post newspaper by becoming the popular publication's first Black female reporter. Ms. Gilliam continues to advocate for balance in journalism in her post-retirement career and is a living legend of her field.

Gilliam was born November 24, 1936 in Memphis, Tenn. She discovered her love of journalism while a student at Ursuline University in Ohio. She then transferred to Lincoln University in Missouri and obtained her bachelor's degree in journalism. For a short time, Gilliam worked as an associate editor for Jet magazine before entering Tuskegee University and then getting accepted to Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism.

The Washington Post assigned Gilliam to its City Desk section in 1961, one of three Black reporters among the hundreds that worked for the Post. While Gilliam understands the significance of her accomplishment now, she's shared in several interviews that her job was painful and alienating early on due to the racist politics of the city and the newsroom at the time.

Despite this, Gilliam preserved and became a fixture at the paper. For over three decades, she worked as a reporter and columnist for the Post and was a staunch advocate for racial equality in her field. One of her most notable actions as a so-called journalism activist was staging protests at the New York Daily News after it fired a large number of its Black staff writers.

After retirement, Gilliam created a program for aspiring young Black journalists and was a fellow for the George Washington University School of Media and Public Affairs. She also served as the National Association of Black Journalists president from 1993 to 1995. In 2010, The Washington Press Club gave Gilliam its Lifetime Achievement Award.

Today, Gilliam serves as a public speaker that still champions the need for diversity in the news. Dorothy was once married to acclaimed artist Sam Gilliam, with whom she has three daughters.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>

**B**aroness Valerie Amos has achieved two significant marks in the United Kingdom. She is the first Black woman to serve on the British Cabinet, and the first Black woman to become a director at a university in Great Britain.

Born March 13, 1954, Amos was born in Guyana, which was a former British colony. After graduating from the University of Warwick in England in 1976, Amos worked in local London government positions and was named the chief of the city's Equal Opportunities Commission between 1989-94. Amos also worked as an adviser to the South African government regarding human rights and employment fairness.

In 2003, U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair selected her to serve on the Cabinet. Amos remained in the Cabinet until 2007, stepping down when Gordon Brown became Prime Minister. In 2010, she was named the Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. Amos served as the U.N.'s top humanitarian from 2010 until spring of this year.

Amos is the director of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London. In *The Guardian* U.K., Amos said that she was baffled at the lack of Black people in collegiate leadership roles.

Amos, who is single with no children, was named a "Life Peer" by Blair, thus the "baroness" title. Life Peers are members of the peerage, which is essentially a collection of noble titles that cannot be inherited.



<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



Although the film *Everest*, the fictionalized version of the 1996 Everest season that resulted in the deaths of 13 people, features leading men Jake Gyllenhaal and Josh Brolin, Hollywood producers should consider putting **Sophia Danenberg's** story on the big

screen. Danenberg is the first Black woman to climb atop Mount Everest and just the second person of African descent to conquer the world's tallest mountain.

Danenberg was born Sophia Marie Scott in 1972 and raised in Chicago's south suburb of Homewood to a Black father and Japanese mother. Although she was a track athlete while attending Homewood-Flossmoor High School, Danenberg didn't discover mountain climbing until she was a student at Harvard University. After scaling mountains in the states, Danenberg began to take the sport seriously and tackled several summits across the globe.

Danenberg set her sights on Everest in the spring of 2006 at the age of 34. With just a week to prepare for the dangerous two-month journey, Danenberg and eight others took what is known as an "unguided" climb up the Nepalese mountain. Danenberg carried her own gear, pitched her own tent, and had the help of two Sherpas. Without a guide, Danenberg relied mostly on her own wits and experience climbing smaller but still formidable mountains. On May 19, 2006, Danenberg completed the 29,000 foot climb.

Other mountains Danenberg bested include McKinley in Alaska, Mount Tasman in New Zealand, Mount Baker in Washington State, and Kilimanjaro alongside her husband, David Danenberg who joined her on some of the climbs.

It isn't all about mountains for the current Seattle resident. After leaving Harvard with a degree in environmental science and public policy, Danenberg became a Fulbright Fellow and attended Keio University in Tokyo. Danenberg then worked for United Technologies in Japan. She now lives in Seattle and works at Boeing. Black South African Sibusiso Vilane was the first person of African descent to summit Everest in 2003. He did so again in 2005 and has since climbed all the Seven Summits, the seven highest mountains in the world.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



**R**obert Smith amassed a fortune in the world of enterprise software on his way to becoming the second-richest Black person in America. Mr. Smith is second only to Oprah Winfrey and has surpassed Michael Jordan in the listing of the world's billionaires after making the 'Forbes 400' list.

Smith is the founder and CEO of Vista Equity Partners, based in Austin, Texas. The company specializes in investing in smaller companies that develop programs in the realms of data collection, organizational structure, and other tools that assist businesses of all sorts. Valued at \$2.5 billion, Smith's private equity firm has client assets valued at \$15.9 billion and he owns 50 percent of the company.

As a teenager at Denver's East High School, Smith developed a knack for computer science and learned about the transistor device. After learning that Bell Labs made the device that controlled electron flow in a computer, he made it his mission to work for the company.

For two weeks each day, Smith called to inquire about a summer internship with Bell. After a stroke of luck, Bell Labs allowed him to intern and he began working for the company while beginning his college career.

Smith holds degrees a bachelor's degree from Cornell University in chemical engineering, and a M.B.A. from Columbia Business School. According to his Forbes profile, Smith worked at Kraft Foods but quit to attend Columbia, which wasn't his parents' first choice. He then worked for the Goldman Sachs firm in New York and in Silicon Valley.

In 2000, after an IPO launched by Goldman, Smith cashed out and started Vista, slowly building the company to the powerhouse it is today. True to Smith's nature, the mogul has contributed greatly and quietly to African-American and African causes while also being a major political contributor to Hillary Clinton and some GOP interests.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



The late **Mabel Fairbanks** might not have been afforded the opportunity to chase Olympic gold as an ice skater, but she is still rightfully recognized as a pioneer of the sport. Fairbanks is the first Black woman inducted into the U.S. Figure Skating Hall of Fame, and coached many of the sport's brightest stars.

Fairbanks was born November 14, 1915 in the Florida Everglades. Little is known about her young life but birth records state she was of Black and Seminole Indian descent. Some reports state she was orphaned and found homeless on a park bench in New York by a wealthy white woman who gave her a job, but she rarely spoke of her past.

What is known is that she was hired as a babysitter by a white woman who lived near New York's Central Park. While working, she began watching the white children skate at the ice rink and wished to join them. The rink denied her entry because of the color of her skin, but she was determined to learn. Eventually, she was given opportunities to skate in local rinks and given pointers by known coaches of the time. Fairbanks also eavesdropped on lessons by instructors to white skaters and began copying the moves.

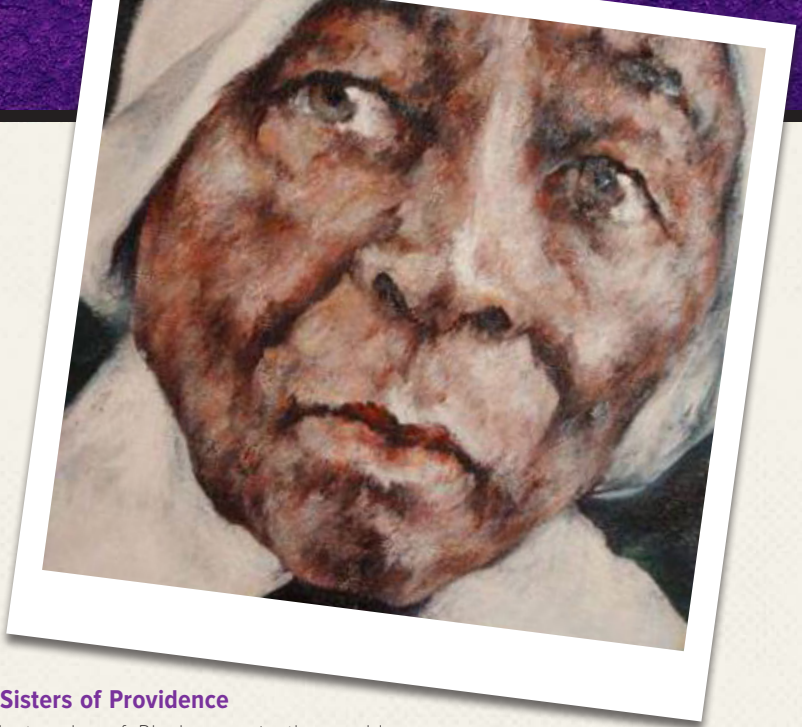
Despite her talents, the U.S. Skating Team would not admit a Black woman to its ranks. Instead, Fairbanks skated with ice shows across New York and North America. In some instances, she was the only Black ice skater many had ever seen. With her dreams of competitive skating behind her, Fairbanks traveled to Los Angeles and started a career as a coach.

While on the West Coast, Fairbanks continued performing in ice shows and befriended Hollywood stars like Sammy Davis Jr. and the rest of the Rat Pack. She was also close to Zsa Zsa Gabor and Cary Grant.

As a full-time coach, Fairbanks molded the careers of U.S. Pairs champions Tai Babilonia and Randy Gardner, Scott Hamilton, 1992 Olympic gold medalist Kristi Yamaguchi, Debi Thomas and countless other U.S. and world champions. Atoy Wilson, the first African-American to win a U.S. skating title, was coached by Fairbanks as well.

Fairbanks was a fierce champion of equality in ice skating, and was instrumental in forcing Los Angeles' Culver City skating club to admit its first Black member in 1965. Fairbanks was entered in the U.S. Figure Skating Hall of Fame in 1997. Fairbanks died in 2001 at the age of 85. In October 2001, she was posthumously entered into the International Women's Sports Hall of Fame.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



## **T**he Oblate Sisters of Providence

are the oldest order of Black nuns in the world.

Founded in 1829 by Rev. Father James Hector Joubert and Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange, (pictured) the order still exists today and continues Mother Mary's dedication of service to children and the poor.

Not much is known about Lange's early life and historians have produced several conflicting documents. What most researchers agree on is that she was born around 1784 in Santiago de Cuba and raised in the French-speaking region of the nation. Lange was also connected to a family of means and social standing.

After arriving in Baltimore in 1813, Lange encountered other Caribbean people and realized they should be educated. Though Maryland was then a slave state, Lange began teaching people for free using her own money and the home she shared with Mary Frances Balas in Fells Point.

In 1828, Father Joubert came to Lange with the idea of beginning a school for Black girls, which subsequently led Lange to pledge her life to the Catholic Church. In July 1829, Lange, Sister Balas and two other women formed the Oblate Sisters order. In 1831, the Order was officially recognized by the larger church body.

The Oblates, as they were sometimes called, recognized the trials and barriers Black people faced in America and worked tirelessly to serve the needy. Racism and gender discrimination also visited the Oblates but according to accounts, they never wavered from their godly call to serve. As Mother Superior, Lange was seen as the face of the order but all of the sisters were known contributors.

Lange lived a long life and worked until she died in February 1882.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



**B**orn in Jackson, Mississippi in 1934, **Henry Thomas Sampson, Jr.** is a prolific inventor and pioneer in the field of nuclear engineering. Sampson is also a pioneer in the technology that is used in modern cell phones, but contrary to a widely held belief, he didn't invent the cell phone.

After graduating from Lanier High School in Jackson, Mississippi in 1951, Sampson attended Morehouse College, an HBCU (Historically Black College and University) in Atlanta, Georgia for two years. He later transferred to Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana and earned a B.S. degree in chemical engineering in 1956. Sampson continued his studies and earned an M.S. degree in chemical engineering in 1961 from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). He continued his graduate studies and pursued a doctoral degree in nuclear engineering from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

In 1967, he became the first African American in the United States to earn a Ph.D. in nuclear engineering.

After completing his Ph.D. in nuclear engineering, Sampson accepted a position as a project engineer with the Aerospace Corporation in El Segundo, California. He held the post from 1967 to 1981. He was later appointed Director of Planning and Operations for the Aerospace Corporation (1981-1987) where his research team focused on the powering and launching of satellites.

Sampson is a prolific inventor who holds several U.S. patents. In 1971, he co-invented the Gamma-Electric cell with George H. Miley. The Gamma-Electric cell converts high radiation energy (gamma rays) to electricity. Due to his co-invention of the Gamma-Electric cell, Sampson is mistakenly cited as the inventor of the cell phone.

Sampson also holds several other patents focusing on the development of rocket propellants (fuels). In 1973, Sampson invented an improved process of case bonding of propellant grains within a rocket chamber. Dr. Sampson is married to Dr. Laura Howzell Young-Sampson, who is an Associate Professor in the College of Education, California State University, San Bernardino, California. Dr. Sampson is now retired.

<http://www.blackpast.org/aah/sampson-henry-thomas-1934>



**J**onathan Lee Iverson is Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey's first African-American ringmaster, still thrilling audiences as the leading voice for the popular traveling circus. Iverson was also the circus' youngest-ever ringmaster, cementing his place in history twice.



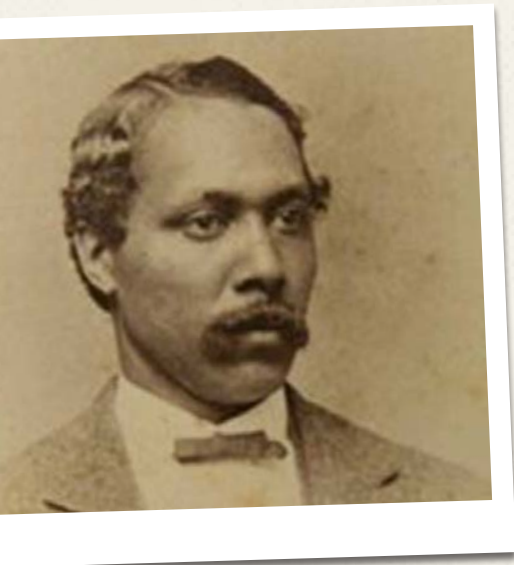
Iverson, born in 1976, is a New York native and learned early on how to grace stages both small and large as a member of the Boys Choir of Harlem. After graduating from the University of Hartford in 1998 with a degree in Voice Performance, Iverson's vocal talents attracted the attention of Ringling and they offered him the ringmaster position in 1999.

The high-profile position made Iverson a star and ultimately a husband. His wife, Priscilla Iverson, a dancer and Brazilian native, was part of the circus' Brazilian dance troupe and visited America. After working as colleagues in the circus and after several dates with Iverson, the pair solidified their bond in 2001 and are raising a son and daughter.

The Iversons left the circus for a few years, relocating back to Iverson's hometown and struggling to adapt to a normal lifestyle. Iverson was eventually asked back to Ringling and has remained one of its ringmasters ever since. His wife is now a production manager for the circus. A true circus family, the Iversons take their children on the road with them.

Since Iverson's hiring, another Black ringmaster, Andre McClain, who also met his wife in the circus, has joined the troupe and tours with Ringling Brothers as well. He is the first singing equestrian ringmaster in over a 100 years.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



**E**benezer D. Bassett was the first African-American diplomat, serving as an ambassador to Haiti shortly after the Civil War. Bassett was honored in New Haven, Conn. for the state's annual Freedom Trail celebration.

Bassett was born October 16, 1833 in the town of Derby to free parents. Bassett's parents, both free, were well known in their community and pushed for their children to embrace education as their way to prominence. Bassett was the first Black person to integrate the Connecticut Normal School, which is now known as Central Connecticut State University.

After leaving the Normal School, Bassett taught in New Haven, which is where he encountered and befriended abolitionist Fredrick Douglass. Bassett then traveled to Philadelphia to teach at an all-Black school known as the Institute for Colored Youth. It was a progressive idea at the time, and served as a base of operations for Douglass and Bassett to recruit Black soldiers for the Union Army during the height of the Civil War. The school is now known as Cheyney University.

In 1869, four years after the official end of the Civil War, President Ulysses Grant sought Black officials to fill important positions of power. On the recommendation of Douglass, Grant appointed Bassett as the Minister Resident to Haiti. The title of ambassador wasn't used in the states until 1893.

The turbulent island nation was plagued with problems, and Bassett gracefully handled the difficulties of the position. As a diplomat, Bassett was able to bring order to the nation and stave off impending clashes between the warring factions of President Michel Domingue and retired rebellion leader General Pierre Boisrond Canal.

Bassett's position ended in 1877 when Grant's presidency ended. He returned to the United States and worked as the Consul General for Haiti for the next decade. Bassett retired to Philadelphia. He lived until 1908.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



## **D**r. Mordecai Wyatt Johnson

was a son of former slaves who became Howard University's first Black president, raising the academic standards of the vaunted institution over the course of three decades. Under Dr. Johnson's leadership, Howard University became recognized as the premier African-American university.

Johnson was born December 12, 1890 in Paris, Tenn. to parents Wyatt and Carolyn, according to an earlier Howard University biography web page. Johnson's father was a preacher and mill worker, while his mother worked as a housekeeper. An excellent student and athlete, Johnson completed high school at the Atlanta Baptist College, which is now known as Morehouse University.

Johnson graduated from the college in 1911, and was added to its faculty as a teacher and also served as its dean for two years. In the summer months while working at the college, Johnson attended classes at the University of Chicago and earned a second bachelor's degree in 1913.

Between 1913 and 1916, Johnson studied at the Rochester Theological Seminary in New York. Johnson married Anna Gardner, and the couple had three sons and two daughters. For a short time, he served as pastor for the First Baptist Church of Charleston, W.V. Johnson became well-known for his speaking ability and work within the community.

Accounts vary but Johnson was recognized in 1922 by Harvard University and awarded a Master of Science in Theology. Other reports state that he studied at the institution's divinity school, but the consistent thread is that Harvard's degree was official. In four years time, he was named the 13th and first African-American president of Howard University.

For the next 34 years, Johnson guided the school to academic prominence and was able to amass funding from private donors and Congress to grow the school into a respected institution. Johnson's tenacious focus on improving the standing of the school and its facilities included reaching out and hiring some of the Black Intelligentsia's best scholars and educators to the faculty. Johnson stepped down from his post in 1960, and passed in 1976.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



**J**ane Bolin was the first African-American woman to earn a degree from the prestigious Yale Law School on her way to becoming the nation's first woman to serve as a judge. For 40 years, Judge Bolin presided over what is now known today in New York as the Family Court.

Jane Matilda Bolin was born April 11, 1908 in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Her father, lawyer Gaius Bolin, was the first Black student to attend Williams College. Her mother, Matilda Ingram Emery, was a British white woman.

As a child, Bolin was known as an excellent student but still endured racism despite her parents' privileged background. It was around this period Bolin learned about lynching and widespread racism across the Deep South. Things worsened for her personally as she attended Wellesley College. She was just one of two Black students at the time, and the experience was isolating.

Bolin admired her father's work, and wanted to follow in his footsteps. An adviser warned Bolin away from pursuing a law degree from Yale Law School due to her race and gender. Despite the racist and sexist barriers, Bolin powered her way through and earned her law degree in 1931 at just 23 years of age. The following year, Bolin aced her bar exam.

Bolin began working as an attorney with her father's practice and then married fellow attorney Ralph Mizelle in 1933. After relocating to New York and working as the first Black woman to serve as assistant corporate counsel in the city, Bolin's life would change forever on July 22, 1939.

According to accounts, Bolin was unaware that then-Mayor Fiorello La Guardia would appoint her to the judge's bench for the Domestic Relations Court at the New York's World Fair. Bolin was a tireless judge, and her appointment was renewed three times before she was forced to retire at age 70, although she wanted to keep working.

Bolin fought to integrate child services, promote diversity in the hire of probation officers, and worked diligently for children's rights. After her retirement, she worked as a reading instructor in New York public schools and served on the New York State Board of Regents. She was also a NAACP and National Urban League board member.

Bolin and her first husband had one son, Yorke Mizelle. After the death of her husband in 1943, she married Walter Offutt Jr. in 1950. Bolin passed in 2007 at the age of 98. In 2011, a biography was released titled *Daughter of the Empire State: The Life of Judge Jane Bolin* by Jacqueline A. McLeod.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>

**S**usie King Taylor landed in the history books by becoming the Army's first Black nurse, and the first and only Black woman to detail her experiences in the Civil War. Additionally, Taylor is the first Black woman to teach openly at a freedmen's school in Georgia.

Taylor was born August 6, 1848 into slavery in Liberty County, Ga. At age seven, Taylor was sent by her owner to live in Savannah with her grandmother, Dolly. Dolly secretly enrolled her granddaughter

into a pair of schools, of which one was taught by a free Black woman. Slave literacy was outlawed at the time.

Taylor's education was cut short when Dolly was arrested for singing freedom hymns. Taylor was sent back to her mother in Isle of Wight, Ga. Taylor learned as much as she could on her own, and even had the help of a pair of white youths and playmates, despite it being illegal.

In 1862, a fourteen-year-old Taylor fled to St. Simons Island with several other African-Americans, only to find the region occupied by the Union Army during the heights of the Civil War. Taylor impressed the Union Generals with her ability to read and write, so she was assigned to teach at the freedmen's school. While at the school, she met Sgt. Edward King of the 33rd Regiment of the U.S. Colored Troops.

She traveled with the troop, serving as its nurse, laundress, and teaching the soldiers reading and writing during their off time. Like many other Civil War nurses, Taylor was untrained. After the birth of she and King's first child, her husband died. She continued to teach but was forced to close her school after a free school was established in the region.

The former nurse and educator was working as a domestic servant to a wealthy Boston family when she met her second husband, Russell Taylor of Georgia. She remained in Boston for the rest of her life, only returning South for occasional visits.

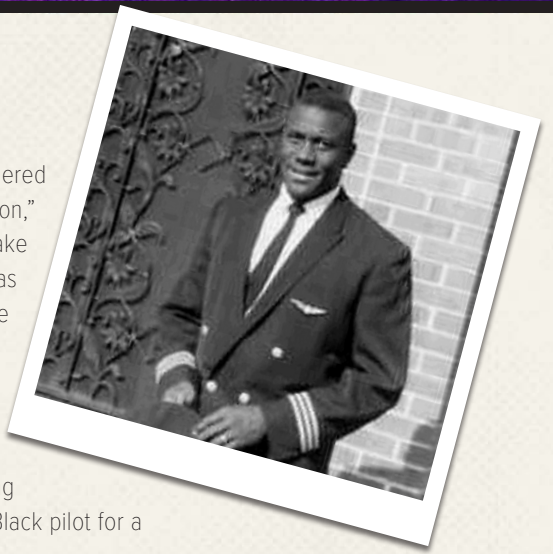
She wrote her memoir, *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp with the 33d United States Colored Troops, Late 1st S.C. Volunteers*, after visiting her dying son in the 1890's in Louisiana. The book was published privately in 1902, and featured many of the details of Taylor's life that historians and scholars refer to.

Taylor passed in October 1912 at the age of 64 in Massachusetts.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



**M**arlon D. Green has been considered the “Jackie Robinson of Aviation,” although he didn’t set out to make that distinction. The former Air Force pilot was determined to fly for a commercial airline but was denied because he was Black. Undaunted, he decided to sue for his right to fly. In 1963, the U.S. Supreme Court sided with Green and dismantled the racist hiring practices within the airline industry, leading the way for David Harris to become the first Black pilot for a major American airline.



Marlon Dewitt Green was born June 6, 1929 in El Dorado, Ark. After living in Lansing, Mich., Green joined the Air Force and logged over 3,000 flight hours via multi-engine aircraft such as B-26s. In 1957, Green was encouraged by reports that commercial airlines would be hiring Black pilots, so he began applying to the major airlines. According to varying sources, he was either rejected or denied because of his race.

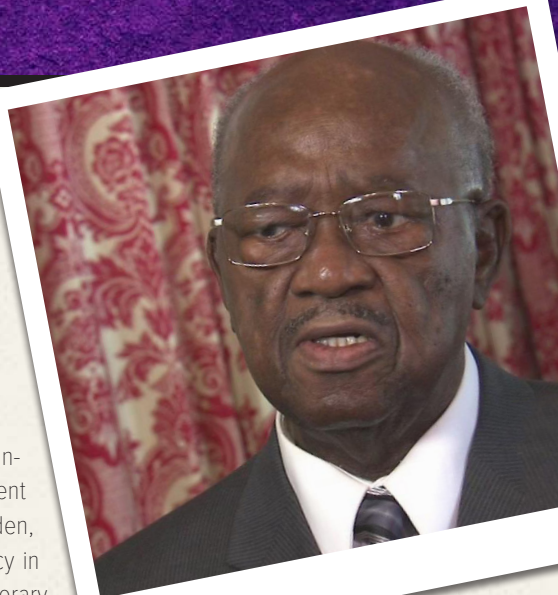
Green was finally invited for a flight test by Continental Airlines after he left the race field blank. He still wasn’t hired, despite having more experience than his white counterparts. Angered by Continental’s refusal to let him join its pilots corp, Green filed a complaint with the Colorado Anti-Discrimination Commission. Continental was based in the state, which had just passed a law barring racial discrimination during the hiring process.

The Commission used the race basis to bring the charge of discrimination, but the Green v. Continental Airlines case was couched within the unconstitutional barring of interstate commerce. Since Continental traveled state to state, the Constitution supported Green’s case and thus the airline would be sued on two counts, discrimination and the blocking of interstate travel for employment.

Green’s case ultimately made its way to the Supreme Court, which sided with him in April 1963. The following year, Harris would become the first Black pilot to fly for a major airline when he was hired by American Airlines. In 1965, after all the fuss, Continental hired Green and he flew for the airline until 1979.

Green, who died in July 2009, was survived by his ex-wife Eleanor Green, three sons, three daughters and two grandchildren, in addition to two brothers. In 2010, he was honored by Continental after they named a Boeing 737 in their fleet after the captain.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



**A**braham Bolden is the first African-American U.S. Secret Service agent assigned to a presidential detail. Bolden, an East Saint Louis, Ill. native, joined the agency in 1960 in Chicago. He was transferred to a temporary White House detail, guarding the movement and family of President John F. Kennedy. Bolden was a celebrated agent and was nationally recognized for busting two major counterfeit rings.

In 1964, Bolden was fired over accusations that he attempted to accept a \$50,000 bribe from the leader of one of the counterfeit rings he took down. Prosecutors said that Bolden was attempting to sell a government file at the same Chicago field office he worked in.

As the case developed, Joseph Spagnoli Jr., the ring's leader, later offered testimony that seemingly would have cleared Bolden's name. Further, the funds Bolden allegedly took were never discovered on his person, but the file in question was never recovered. According to reports, Bolden, who held a bachelor's degree in Music Composition, held piano recitals in and around Chicago to raise money for his legal fees.

Adding to Bolden's predicament was word from his attorneys in 1967 that he was aware of an assassination plot against President Kennedy. Kennedy was scheduled to visit Chicago at some point when Bolden was on the job and that the trip was canceled based on his tip.

Since his 1964 firing and the 39 months he served in prison, Bolden has worked to clear his name of the charges. Bolden claims that he was set up by fellow agents as he was intending to go before the Warren Commission, a group established by Lyndon B. Johnson to investigate the 1963 assassination of Kennedy, and tell of misconduct within the agency.

Bolden said that white agents resented President Kennedy over his efforts to racially integrate the agency. In his 2008 memoir, *The Echo from Dealey Plaza*, Bolden restated his position that agents were lax on the job as a result of President Kennedy's policies.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



**B**ishop **Vashti Murphy McKenzie** made history in 2000 when she was elected by the African Methodist Episcopal church as the first woman to serve as bishop. Bishop McKenzie made history once more five years later after she was named Titular Head of the A.M.E. Church as well.

McKenzie was born into a prominent Baltimore family on May 28, 1947. McKenzie's grandfather, John Henry Murphy Sr., was the publisher of the Baltimore Afro-American newspaper, better known today as the Afro-American. Her grandmother, Vashti Turly Murphy, was a founding member of Delta Theta Sigma Sorority, Inc.

McKenzie, a 1978 graduate of the University of Maryland, began her career in journalism and broadcasting before becoming ordained in the A.M.E. church in 1984. She also attended Howard University and obtained a doctorate from United Theological Seminary.

McKenzie's first major appointment began in her hometown of Baltimore when she led the Payne Memorial A.M.E. Church in 1990. In a decade's time, McKenzie was able to more than triple the church's attendance numbers, landing her on the national map.

In 2000, she was named as the 117th elected and consecrated bishop at the A.M.E.'s annual convention in Cleveland. McKenzie was also named to oversee the 18th Episcopal District, which covered Southeast Africa. McKenzie helped lead HIV/AIDS outreach across nation's in that region of the continent.

In 2005, McKenzie was named Titular Head of the church, and was the president of its Council of Bishops as well.

Today, McKenzie presides over the 10th Episcopal District, which covers the entire state of Texas. McKenzie also made headlines recently after she spoke at a prayer vigil for Sandra Bland and calling for action.

McKenzie is married to former NBA player Stan McKenzie.

McKenzie is also the author of five books, *Not Without A Struggle*, *Strength in the Struggle*, *Journey to the Well*, *Swapping Housewives*, and her latest book, *Those Sisters Can Preach!*

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



**W**illiam Grant Still was a pioneering composer and songwriter who achieved several firsts, including becoming the first African-American composer to conduct a major American symphony orchestra. Still achieved that feat on July 23, 1936.



Still was born on May 11, 1895 in Woodville, Miss., and raised primarily in Little Rock, Ark. At 15, he began violin lessons and graduated from high school the following year. Still entered Wilberforce University to study medicine per his mother's wishes, but left the school before graduating. He then started studying music at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and also studied at the New England Conservatory of Music.

Still began writing and composing band songs for notables such as Artie Shaw and W.C. Handy. Still's prodigious output as a songwriter led to him being awarded back-to-back Guggenheim Fellowships in 1934 and 1935.

Prior to the fellowships, the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra debuted Still's "Afro-American Symphony," the first time that a symphony composed by an African-American was played by a major orchestra. In 1936, Still would become the first African-American to conduct a major American orchestra after he led the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl.

Still composed several operas and musical works rooted in African music with messages that spoke to the concerns of African-Americans at the time. One of Still's celebrated ballets, "Lenox Avenue," takes place in Harlem.

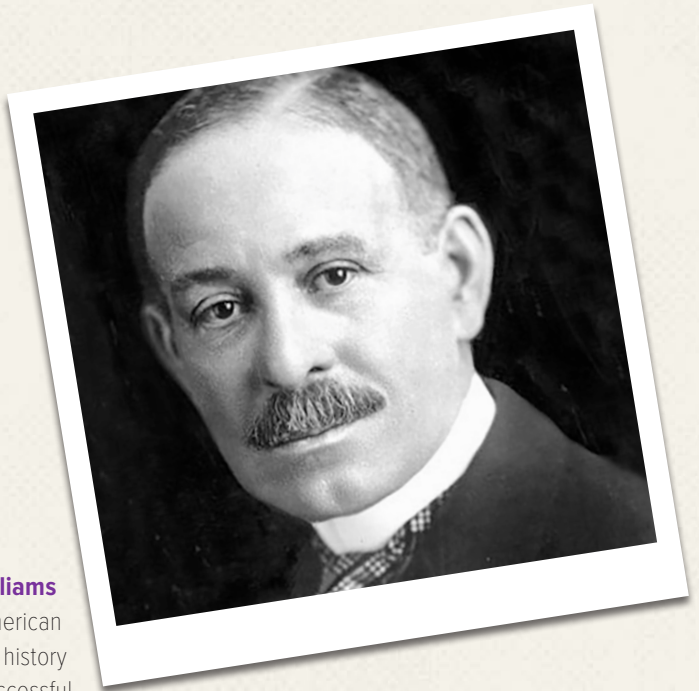
Still found more success on the West Coast after moving to Los Angeles in 1939. Ten years later, Still's opera "Troubled Island," based on the 1791 Haitian slave revolt, became the first production put on by a major opera company to be written by an African-American.

Still's long career and continued success earned him the moniker, "The Dean of African-American Composers," and his work has been performed by major orchestra across the globe.

Even in death, Still continues to make history. His opera, "A Bayou Legend," became the first to be written by an African-American to air on national television some three years after his passing.

Still was awarded several honorary degrees from various institutions, including Howard University, Pepperdine University, and Oberlin College, among others.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



**D**r. Daniel Hale Williams was an African American physician who made history by performing the first successful open heart surgery operation.

Daniel Hale Williams was born in 1856 in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania, the fifth of eight children. His father was a barber who died when Daniel was only nine. His mother was unable to provide for all the children on her own, so she moved the family to Baltimore, Maryland to stay with relatives.

An apprenticeship with a shoemaker was found for Daniel; he remained there as a shoemaker's apprentice for three years while he was still a young child. As a teenager, he learned to cut hair and became a barber, living and working with a family who owned a barber shop in Janesville, Wisconsin.

In Janesville Daniel began to attend high school. He graduated from Hare's Classical Academy in 1877. While working as a barber, he met Dr. Henry Palmer, a leading surgeon, who became the Surgeon General of Wisconsin.

Dr. Palmer took Daniel on as a medical apprentice; he had two other apprentices at the time. Dr. Palmer helped the three apprentices apply for admission to a top medical school, the Chicago Medical School, which was affiliated with Northwestern University. All three were accepted and began their studies in 1880. Dr. Daniel Hale Williams graduated with his medical degree in 1883.

<http://www.african-americaninventors.org/>



**F**rederick McKinley Jones was the first person to invent a practical, mechanical refrigeration system for trucks and railroad cars, which eliminated the risk of food spoilage during long-distance shipping trips. He invented the automatic refrigeration system for long-haul trucks in 1935 (a roof-mounted cooling device).

Frederick Jones was born in Covington, Kentucky near Cincinnati, Ohio on May 17, 1893. He was a trained mechanic, a skill he learned doing military service in France during World War I. His mastery of electronic devices was largely self-taught, through work experience and the inventing process.

Frederick McKinley Jones was granted more than 40 patents in the field of refrigeration. Frederick Jones' inspiration for the refrigeration unit came from a conversation with a truck driver who had lost a shipment of chickens because the trip took too long and the truck's storage compartment overheated. Frederick Jones also developed an air-conditioning unit for military field hospitals and a refrigerator for military field kitchens. Frederick Jones received over 60 patents during his lifetime.

<http://www.african-americaninventors.org/>

**A**lfred L. Cralle is the inventor of a practical design that is still widely used today known as the ice cream scoop!

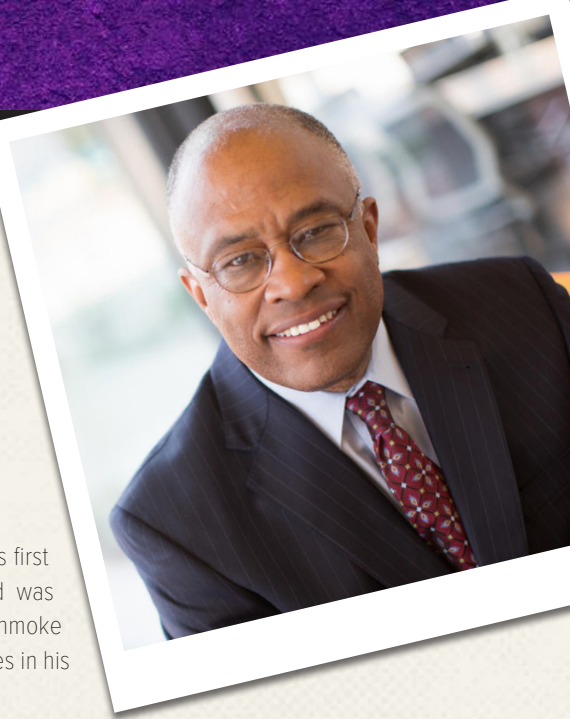
Alfred L. Cralle was born in Kenbridge, Lunenburg County, Virginia in 1866 just after the end of the American Civil War (1861–1865). He attended local schools and worked with his father in the carpentry trade as a young man, becoming interested in mechanics. He was sent to Washington, DC where he attended Wayland Seminary, one of a number of schools founded by the American Baptist Home Mission Society to help educate African Americans after the Civil War. Later, he settled in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where he first served as a porter in a drug store and at a hotel.



It was while working in Pittsburgh as a porter that Cralle noticed that ice cream, which had become a popular confection, was difficult to dispense. It tended to stick to spoons and ladles, usually requiring use of two hands and at least two implements to serve. To overcome this, he invented a mechanical device now known as the ice cream scoop and applied for a patent. On February 2, 1897, the 30-year old was granted U.S. Patent #576395.[1] Cralle's ingenious invention, originally called an "Ice Cream Mold and Disher" was designed to be able to keep ice cream and other foods from sticking, and easy to operate with one hand. Strong and durable, effective, inexpensive, it could be constructed in almost any desired shape, such as a cone or a mound, with no delicate parts that could break or malfunction.

Alfred L. Cralle went on to become a successful businessman as well. He was named assistant manager when the Afro-American Financial, Accumulating, Merchandise and Business Association in Pittsburgh was organized. Cralle did not become famous for inventing the ice cream scooper. Cralle's basic design is so efficient that the now-familiar lever-operated Italian Ice/ice cream scoop was still seen in wide use over 100 years later. Alfred Cralle was married and had three children. His wife and one of his daughters died in 1918 of a communicable disease. In 1920, Cralle's only son also died of a disease, leaving Anna Cralle, born in 1910, as his only surviving child. Later in 1920, Alfred Cralle was killed in an automobile accident. After her father's death, Anna moved in with her uncle, Joseph Cralle in Connecticut. In 1945, Anna Cralle moved to Tuskegee, Alabama to work at the U.S. Veterans Administration hospital as an accounting clerk. She was active at the Washington Chapel AME Church for 55 years. At the age of 90, she moved in 2000 to Bowie, Maryland to live with her godson, Thomas Wims. She died February 1, 2009 at the age of 98.

<http://www.african-americaninventors.org/>



**K**urt Schmoke was elected Baltimore's first Black mayor in November 1987, and was sworn in on this day of that year. Schmoke served three terms and faced several challenges in his attempt to turn Charm City around.

Kurt Lidell Schmoke was born in Baltimore on December 1, 1949 to a chemist father and social worker mother. He excelled as a football and lacrosse player in high school, and also worked with poor youth in his hometown during his senior year. Schmoke entered Yale University in 1967 and played on its football team. In 1971, Schmoke was instrumental in quieting racial tensions on the campus as a member of the Black Student Alliance and as the Secretary of the graduating class.

Schmoke studied as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University ahead of graduating from Harvard Law School in 1976. For a short while, Schmoke worked as an attorney for President Jimmy Carter before heading back to Baltimore to serve as an assistant United States Attorney in 1978.

In 1982, Schmoke was first elected to public office as Baltimore City State's Attorney. He served in the position until December 1987, when he was elevated to the mayor's office. Schmoke worked to combat Baltimore's crime and drug issues, along with attempts to revitalize many of city's crumbling schools.

He made headlines when he hired the Nation of Islam to provide security in some of the city's public housing developments, and he advocated for the decriminalization of drugs. One of Schmoke's high marks is helping to bring the NFL's Baltimore Ravens to the city.

After declining to run again after his third term ended in December 1999, Schmoke practiced law before being named the dean of the Howard University Law School in 2003. During this period, he appeared on HBO's *The Wire* in a small role that referenced many of his positions on the so-called war on drugs. Schmoke was at Howard until 2012, and is now the president of the University of Baltimore.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>



**L**ieutenant Calvin Spann was an original member of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen and military pilot who fought in missions during World War II. Lt. Spann died September 6, 2015 at the age of 90, and has been honored in both his adopted home of Texas and his home state of New Jersey.

Spann flew 26 missions as a member of the Airmen and also made history by flying the longest mission in the Air Force's 15th Expeditionary Mobility Task Force Division. Spann flew a 1,600-mile mission between Italy and Germany.

Despite this achievement, after his military service, Spann found it difficult to obtain work as a pilot. The racial climate of America at the time was not friendly despite Spann's worthy credentials and service to the country. Spann eventually settled in New Jersey, raising three children and excelling in pharmaceutical sales. He also owned a restaurant and bar along with a real estate business.

Although Spann didn't share much of his exploits with his family and rarely boasted of his achievements, he did speak at various Tuskegee Airmen conventions and other events for organizations in the town of McKinney. When Spann moved to Allen, Texas to be closer to his grandchildren in 2007, he became a fixture in the community. Spann preached the value of education in his speaking engagements, inspiring young people to dream beyond their limits.

In 2006, Spann and several of his Tuskegee Airmen comrades were honored by President George W. Bush with the Congressional Medal of Honor, which is the nation's highest civilian honor.

Spann is survived by his wife, Gwenelle, and his adult children, Gai Spann, Carla Spann-Lopez, and Calvin J. Spann Jr. and his grandchildren.

<http://blackamericaweb.com/category/little-known-black-history-facts/>

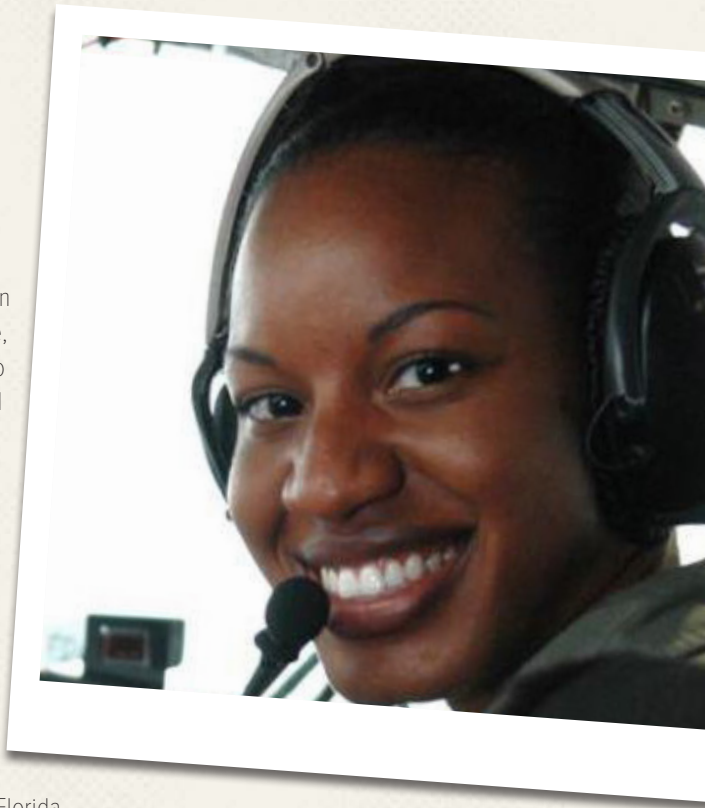
**J**eanine Menze, also known as Jeanine McIntosh-Menze, is the first Black woman to become a pilot for the United States Coast Guard military branch. Lieutenant Menze is just one of two Black women pilots in the entire Coast Guard.

Menze was born in Kingston, Jamaica and moved with her family to Canada before they finally settled in South Florida. While in the state, Menze attended high school and college, graduating from Florida International University in 2001. She entered the Coast Guard Officer Candidate School, joining the Coast Guard officially in 2003 after leaving the program.

Menze, who had been dreaming of becoming a pilot for years, was stationed at the Naval Air Station in Corpus Christi, Texas in January 2005. On June 24, 2005, Menze made her historic mark by earning her wings. Menze was assigned to fly the HC-130 Hercules plane, a large search and rescue aircraft used in several missions. Menze was also part of the rescue efforts after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.

Menze has served as a mentor to fellow Black woman pilot, La'Shanda Holmes, who became the Coast Guard's first Black woman helicopter pilot. Menze gave Holmes her wings in a 2010 ceremony.

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## **New Psalmist Baptist Church**

**Bishop Walter S. Thomas, Sr., Pastor**

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