

DETROIT FREEDOM'S SISTERS

Delores Bennett, Humanitarian and Community Activist

Delores Bennett is the founder and executive director of The North End Youth Improvement Council (“NEYIC”) which was founded more than forty years ago. Born in Tennessee, Mrs. Bennett has spent most of her life in Detroit. A concerned citizen, she has devoted her time to assisting children, young people, and senior citizens. One of her earliest efforts was when she donated more than eight hundred hours annually to assist the Considine Recreation Center’s youth programs. Her concerned citizen’s activities were not only directed at youth programs but also to the physical environment of the community as was exemplified in her thirteen year quest to secure a neighborhood playground and recreation center which was finally realized when a park was created at Brush and Bethune streets in Detroit. A fighter for employment, education opportunities, housing and recreational needs for all people, her humanitarian outreach has touched thousands of individuals. One of her most successful projects through NEYIC has been the “Adopt-A-Child for Christmas Program” that unites thousands of volunteers, parents and low-income children. The children participants receive gifts, warm clothing and toys; additionally, they receive mentoring advice from the volunteers. Mrs. Bennett has been active in Detroit’s North End for more than fifty years and has been a member of several organizations, including the Metro Youth Council, Operation Green Thumb, and United Way Services. Additionally, she has been the recipient of numerous awards including The Erma L. Henderson Distinguished Community Service Award, Michiganiaan of the Year, the Gertrude Powe Community Service Award and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Youth Sports and Recreation Commission.

Catherine Carter Blackwell, African and African-American Historian

Catherine Blackwell, an internationally known authority on African history and culture, has been described as a pioneer in the field of African and African American studies. A native Detroit, she began her teaching career at Garfield Elementary School in Detroit. During her thirty year teaching career with the Detroit Public School System, she devoted herself to teaching from an African-centered perspective and to educating students regarding the contributions of African Americans to the development of the United States. An author of many papers on African and African American studies for elementary and secondary education, she has represented Region Five on Wayne State University’s Training Institute for Desegregated Education. In 1993, she was inducted into the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame. Ms. Blackwell’s contributions to education were honored by the Detroit Board of Education when it named one of its schools, the Catherine C. Blackwell Institute of International Studies, Commerce and Technology.

Cardinal Barbara “Nandi” (Cleage) Martin, Cultural Activist

Cardinal Barbara “Nandi” (Cleage) Martin is the founder and first National Director of the Shrine of the Black Madonna Cultural Centers and Book Stores. The cultural centers and book stores opened in Detroit, Michigan in 1970. As a result of Ms. Martin’s monumental efforts, the cultural centers and book stores were also opened in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Atlanta, Georgia and Houston, Texas. Her work with the centers and book stores have profoundly contributed to the Pan-African world community by providing an institution that strengthened the Pan-African community both mentally and spiritually by serving as an important resource to its community. It has provided, for decades, a resource for Black people and an outlet for many Black publishers and distributors (including, the Black Classic Press, the Third World Press and the African World Press) who otherwise would not have had a venue for their published materials. In addition to providing a much needed venue, the cultural centers “provided a place for Black people to immerse themselves in the history, beauty and majesty of Africa.” As a result of her efforts, she has had a “profound effect on Black lives nationally and internationally”. In addition to her work associated with the Shrine of the Black Madonna’s Cultural Centers and Book Stores, she worked with other dedicated African Americans to found, in 1973, the Black Slate, Inc., a not for profit public relations and community service

organization that endorsed candidates. The importance of the Black Slate, Inc. as well as the extent of its influence became apparent when Coleman A. Young became the first Black man elected mayor of the City of Detroit, a victory that Mayor Young partially attributed to the Black Slate.

Esther Gordy Edwards, Music Producer, Museum Director and Curator

Esther Gordy Edwards, the oldest girl of eight children in a family that placed a high value on education, attended Wayne State University and graduated from Howard University in Washington, D. C. After World War II, she and two of her brothers founded the Gordy Printing Company and in 1951, she established a family loan fund called the Ber-Berry Co-op that permitted family members to loan money to other family members to finance new business projects. In 1959, one of its first loans was to her younger brother “Berry” who used a loan to begin a music business that was to become the Motown record label. Mrs. Edwards joined the new family business, assisted in its bookings and management and became an ‘anchor for its aspiring young artists.’ As Motown expanded, she became involved in its financial operations and became its vice president and CEO. In 1972, after Motown moved from Detroit to Los Angeles, she left the label but remained a resident of Detroit where she continued to manage Motown’s assets and affairs, including several scholarship and foundation operations. She has left an indelible mark on the city that is independent of her participation in Motown. She has served on various boards, including the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce, and served as the board director of the Detroit Bank of the Commonwealth; additionally, she has been an active participant in numerous nonprofit organizations. Her notable contributions to the city include the founding of the African American Heritage Association and her participation in the development of the annual Sterling Ball fundraiser that raises money for inner-city children’s organizations. Perhaps one of her greatest contributions to the City of Detroit has been her establishment of the Motown Historical Museum that opened in the 1980’s in the label’s “Hitsville USA” headquarters. The museum’s mission is preserving Motown’s legacy and to educate and motivate young people through its exhibitions and programs that are designed to promote the values of vision, creativity and entrepreneurship.

Honorable Geraldine Bledsoe Ford, Jurist (1926 – 2003),

The Honorable Geraldine Bledsoe Ford received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1948 from the University of Michigan and her Juris Doctor Degree from Wayne State University Law School in 1951. After completing law school, she joined her father’s law firm, Bledsoe, Ford and Bledsoe. The public service phase of her career began when she became the first African American woman in the United States to attain the coveted position of Assistant United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan. Elected the first female African American judge in the United States in 1966, she later served as Assistant Corporation Counsel for the City of Detroit. She was an active member of several professional organizations, including the Wolverine Bar Association, the National Bar Association and the American Bar Association. Judge Ford in retirement continued to be active; she was appointed to the Michigan Gaming Commission and the Public Library Commission; additionally, she was an officer in the Hyde Park Cooperative Board of Directors. In 2003, the African American Women Lawyers Association honored her with a distinguished service award.

Aretha Louise Franklin, Singer, Songwriter and Pianist

Aretha Louise Franklin born in Memphis, Tennessee moved to Detroit, Michigan when her father, Rev. C. L. Franklin became the pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church. As a young girl, it became clear that Aretha was a child prodigy, with a gifted voice and was adept at playing the piano which she taught herself to play by listening to records. In 1960, at the young age of eighteen, she signed with Columbia Records. Six years later, in 1966, she accepted an offer with Atlantic Records and quickly became one of its star performers following the release of her first single, “I Never Loved a Man.” Her second single, “Respect” has become her “signature tune”; in 1968, she won two Grammys, one for “Respect” and the second for “Best Female R&B Vocal Performance.” In 1972, her release of *Amazing Grace*, which sold over two million copies in the United States, became, at that time, the “best selling gospel album of all time.” Ms. Franklin has received numerous awards, including, but not limited to, the 2008 Vanguard Award at the NAACP Image Awards, The Presidential Medal of

Freedom Award in 2005 by President George W. Bush and the 1999, National Medal of Arts Award by President William J. Clinton. Her many achievements include, among others, becoming the first woman to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, in 2004 being ranked, #9 on Rolling Stone Magazine's list of the 100 Greatest Artists of All time, being the youngest recipient of a Kennedy Center Honor and being the first African American woman to appear on the cover of Time magazine. Ms. Franklin's positions as *Soul Sister # 1*, "*Lady Soul*" and "*The Queen of Soul*," as well as her well earned place in the history of African American music and culture is undeniable.

Honorable Erma L. Henderson, Community and Social Activist

Erma Henderson "has committed her life to social activism, racial and cultural inclusion, democratic ideals and spiritual principles." She attended Detroit Public Schools and several colleges before she received her Masters Degree in Social Work from Wayne State University. She served on the Detroit City Council for sixteen years and was the first African American woman to serve on the Detroit City Council. Additionally, she was the first female, African American or white, to be elected Detroit City Council President, an office she held for three consecutive terms. Among her most important social and civil rights contributions are those efforts she made to ensure that African Americans received fair treatment in the legal system, gained admittance to hotels and restaurants and were able to secure mortgages and loans in a non-discriminatory manner. As a result of her commitment to equal justice and equal access, she has been the recipient of many awards and honors including an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters from Shaw College and was named by the Detroit News as "Michiganian of the Year" in 1978.

Imani Humphrey, Educator

Imani A. Humphrey, is known affectionately as "Mama Imani." In 1974, she and other individuals interested in creating a learning environment that reflected the African culture of students, founded the Alexander Crummell Affirmative School in 1974. Its name was later changed to the Aisha Shule School to reflect the vision of its founders. In 1992, the W.E.B. DuBois Preparatory Academy was founded; two years later, the two schools merged and became the Aisha Shule/W.E.B. DuBois Preparatory School. Ms. Humphrey is the principal of the school which continues to reflect as its mission, the accurate reflection of the culture of children of African descent. For almost thirty five years, Ms. Humphrey has devoted her life to ensuring that an African-centered learning environment is available in Detroit to 'bridge the gap of the void' that was and continues to be present in traditional American public school systems.

Dr. Rachel Boone Keith, Pioneering Physician, Civil Rights Advocate (1924-2007)

Rachel C. Boone was born in Monrovia, Liberia to American Baptist medical missionaries. She arrived in the United States at the young age of three. Her early education was completed in Virginia. She attended Houghton College in New York and graduated from the Boston University School of Medicine in 1949. That same year, she was featured in "*The Boston Globe*" for achieving the highest score on a medical school test and was featured in *Look Magazine*. Prior to moving to Detroit in 1951, she completed her internship at Harlem Hospital. In 1953, she completed her two year residency at Detroit Receiving Hospital and also completed residencies at Herman Kiefer Hospital in Cardiovascular Diseases, Coney Island Hospital in Anatomic and Clinical Pathology and the Harlem Hospital Center. She began private practice in Detroit with Dr. Thomas Batchelor and joined the medical staff of Detroit Memorial Hospital. Despite a busy practice, Dr. Keith was active in the NAACP and was a member of several organizations including the Wayne County Medical Society, the Michigan State Medical Society, the American Medical Association, the Detroit Medical Society, the Detroit Gastroenterological Society, the National Medical Association, the Links, the American Leprosy Mission, the Detroit Science Center, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and the Michigan Board of Medicine. Dr. Keith was the wife of federal court judge Damon Keith and for forty years she was a strong advocate for patients, the disadvantaged, the poor and the uninsured.

Dr. Violet T. Lewis, Educator (1897-1968)

In 1928, as a result of the segregation laws in the United States, Dr. Violet T. Lewis founded the Lewis Business College in Indianapolis, Indiana to provide education at the post secondary education level for African American young adults unable to attend “white” schools. Ten years later, Dr. Lewis received a request from the Detroit Chamber of Commerce to open a business school in Detroit, Michigan. This solicitation was because there were no vocational schools in Detroit that would permit black students to matriculate at their institutions; as a consequence, in 1939, Lewis Business College was established. It was later reorganized in 1941 in the State of Michigan as Lewis College of Business. Dr. Lewis served on its first board of directors as the Secretary/Treasurer. The college not only provided its students with an education, but additionally was committed to assisting financially needy students attend the college. In 1978, the school secured accreditation from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools as a junior college. Nine years later, it was designated by the United States Secretary of Education as a Historically Black College and University. Having been so designated, the college is the only Historically Black College in Michigan. In its first half century of existence, the college has educated in excess of 20,000 students. Dr. Lewis, in addition to her active involvement with the college, in 1943 co-founded with Elizabeth A. Garner, Gamma Phi Delta Sorority, a business and professional sorority whose focus was young women seeking post secondary education through matriculation at a two year institution and the improvement of “the economic, social and political status of all women.”

Josephine Love, Humanitarian (1915 - 2003)

Josephine Love, co-founder and longtime director of Your Heritage House Museum for Children, devoted her life to culture. She is best known for her life’s work of exposing children to art and to music through Your Heritage House Museum for Children which she co-founded in 1969. A graduate of the Juillard School and Radcliffe College where she received her Masters Degree in musicology, she also studied at the Mozarteum Academy in Salzburg, Austria. Mrs. Love was a ‘cultural icon’ in Detroit. She served on several boards: the Cranbrook Institute of Science, the Michigan Council of the Arts, the University of Michigan Bentley Library and served on the National Endowment for the Arts panels. She received the Distinguished Warrior award by the Detroit Urban League and the Alain Locke Award from the Detroit Institute of Arts Founders Society Friends of African and African American Art.

Carmen A. N’Namdi, Educator

Carmen N’Namdi, is perhaps best known for founding, with her husband George N’Namdi, the Nataki Talibah Schoolhouse of Detroit in 1978, following the passing of their young daughter, Nataki. The Nataki Talibah Schoolhouse of Detroit was formed as a private school with a primary mission of providing a “normalized” learning environment for children of African ancestry. In 2002, she was appointed to the McPherson Commission which was formed by the Michigan legislature to study charter schools. Mrs. N’Namdi is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the National Charter Schools Institute whose primary mission is the promotion of quality development, achievement and accountability of charter schools. She has served on the Board of Directors in the capacity as the chair and as the vice chair; she also serves on the Board of the Michigan Association of Public School Academies.

Cudellis “Dell” Pryor, Cultural Icon and Entrepreneur

Cudellis “Dell” Pryor, is the owner of Dell Pryor’s Galleries, a leading art gallery located in the Midtown area of Detroit, Michigan. Initially, she worked as an interior designer before pursuing her love of art. Perceiving a void of gallery space that was available to Black artists, Ms. Pryor decided to fill the void. Over the years, she has exhibited the work of local and national Black artists at various Detroit locations, including Eastern Market, Greektown and Harmonie Park. In addition to introducing Detroiters to visual artists, Ms. Pryor also introduced her followers to musicians and performing artists. Dell Pryor has “remained on the cultural radar” for decades; one of her most innovative business concepts is the “Spiral Collective” located in Midtown that opened in 2002. The “Collective”, a group of three female businesses housed within the same location, serves as the venue for Dell Pryor’s Galleries. Ms. Pryor has stated her “passion for art is more than just making

money...you might say... I'm a bit of a pioneer because of what I've had to endure....but I thought it was important for me to be here." As a result of Dell Pryor's devotion, her love of art and her contribution to the cultural environment, she has enriched the City of Detroit.

Annette Rainwater, Activist, Community Activist, Public Servant

In 2001, Michigan State Representative David E. Bonior, in describing retiring state representative Annette Rainwater, stated she was "one of Detroit's most committed activists." Annette Rainwater held a variety of leadership positions, including the Southern Christian Leadership Council, the National Political Congress of Black Women and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. She was a precinct delegate, a Board Member of the Fifteenth Democratic District Congressional Organization and Democratic State Central member. Her devotion to public service included acting as the chief of staff for Detroit City Councilman Clyde Cleveland; additionally, her dedication to public service and activism was reflected in her mentoring of Jewel Ware, Wayne County Commissioner, Judge Greg Mathis and the Vice President of the National Women's Political Caucus, Llenda Jackson-Leslie.

Jessie Pharr Slaton, Educator, Activist and Jurist (1908-1983)

Jessie Pharr Slaton was born in Georgia and moved to Detroit with her family at a young age. Her first employment position, as a secretary with the Detroit City Hall in 1933, was a rarity for an African American at that time. She later attended Wayne State University and became a special education teacher with the Detroit Board of Education; during this time, she became actively involved in the civil rights movement. She participated in the struggle of African Americans to move into the federally financed Sojourner Truth Housing Project in Detroit and her participation in the struggle served as an example to other African American women to become involved in the civil rights movement. Her participation in the struggle of African Americans to move into the project was influential in her decision to begin a legal career. She graduated from the University of Detroit Law School in 1951 and thereafter held employment positions as a private attorney and as an attorney with the City of Detroit. In 1972, she was appointed Referee in Detroit's Recorder's Court Traffic and Ordinance Division, becoming the first woman in the then forty three year history of the court to serve in that capacity. In 1978, Governor Milliken appointed her Common Pleas Judge, a position she held until her retirement. Remaining active in retirement, she continued to commit herself to public service and the defense of human rights. In 1980, she accepted an appointment by Governor Milliken to the State Crime Victims Compensation Board and served as the chairperson. During her remaining years, she continued her steadfast commitment to the concerns of crime victims in the State of Michigan.

Martha Jean ("The Queen") Steinberg, Radio Personality and Community Activist (1930-2000)

Martha Jean Jones was born in Memphis, Tennessee where she married Luther Steinberg. While married, she began a career as a nurse in Memphis and later began working at Memphis radio station, WDIA during the time it was making its transition to an all African American format. Not long after joining WDIA, as a weekend radio host, she became the host of one of its evening prime-time rhythm and blues programs. WDIA had an expansive radio signal that reached into as many as five states. The pioneering presence of Martha Jean Steinberg and similar personalities at other African American oriented radio stations, in contrast to the previously white-dominated radio announcers, sparked the era of the "on-air personality" radio program. Martha Jean "The Queen", as she was nicknamed by a fellow radio announcer in Memphis, moved to Detroit in 1963. She accepted a position at radio station WCHB and within a short time frame, moved to WJLB, one of Detroit's powerhouse radio stations. After her move to WJLB, a transition took place in the manner and message of her presentations, their tone becoming more serious in partial response to the civil rights events during the 1960's. In 1967, during the Detroit riots, she remained on the air for forty eight consecutive hours urging the Detroit citizenry to remain calm. 1972 marked another transition in her career, when she became a self-ordained minister and opened a church, Home of Love, which grew to almost one thousand parishioners by the year 2000. Martha Jean "The Queen" became an

icon in Detroit; her expansive and devoted listeners, was such that city politicians often sought 'her favor.' An important part of The Queen's messages was the importance of improving the situation of African American women whom she encouraged to continually strive for economic independence, as well as respect from their male counterparts. In the 1980's, she and other investors created a gospel and talk oriented radio station, WQBH. Martha Jean "The Queen" continued to inspire her audience base by hosting noontime "Inspirations with the Queen" broadcasts at WQBH until two weeks prior to her passing.

Honorable Cynthia Diane Stephens, Jurist

Hon. Cynthia D. Stephens received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1971 from the University of Michigan and her Juris Doctor Degree in 1976 from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Prior to her election to the 36th District Court bench in 1981, she was a solo practitioner; additionally, she served as vice-chairperson of the Wayne County Charter Commission, as Associate General Counsel to the Michigan Senate, and as a consultant to the National League of Cities Veterans Discharge Upgrade Project. In 1985 she joined the Third Circuit Judicial Circuit Court where she served until her appointment to the Michigan Court of Appeals in 2008. While serving at the Circuit Court, Judge Stephens was the Chief Judge Pro Tempore, Mediation Tribunal Chair and Presiding Civil Division Judge for the Circuit Court. She has been extremely active in bar work and public service. She has written numerous articles and has been the recipient of several awards. Her bar work includes appointments to the Office of Child Support Enforcement of the Department of Health and Human Services, the Michigan Judicial Institute Academic Advisory Board, the Prison Overcrowding Commission and the Ethnic Issues Task Force of the Michigan Supreme Court. Public service commitments by Judge Stephens have included her continued membership in the Association of Black Judges of Michigan, since 1982, her association with the American Corporate Counsel Pro-Bono Advisory Committee, the Girl Scout Council of Metropolitan Detroit, the Greater Detroit Health Care Council Board of Trustees and the Inner-City Business Improvement Forum Board of Directors. Judge Stephens's awards have included among others, the Wolverine Bar Association's Damon J. Keith Community Spirit Award, the National Bar Association Presidential Award, the Wolverine Bar Association and D. Augustus Straker Bar Association Award in 1997, and the Detroit Human Rights Commission, Anita Hill Award. In 2005, she received the State Bar of Michigan's highest honor, the Robert P. Hudson Award.

Dr. Cledie Collins Taylor, Educator

Dr. Cledie Collins Taylor is the Director and founder of the Arts Extended Gallery, Inc., the first African American art gallery in Detroit, which was founded by Dr. Taylor a half century ago. She received her B.S. and M.A. degrees from Wayne State University and her Ph. D in Art History from the Union Institute in Springfield, Ohio. In addition to serving as the Director of the Arts Extended Gallery, Inc., she serves as an appraiser of African and African American art, is a studio artist and traveler. Dr. Taylor has been an active participant in the cultural arena of Detroit for decades. She has served as the Assistant Director of Detroit's Children's Museum, Supervisor of Art Education for the Detroit Public Schools and has been an Instructor at Wayne State University and a teacher at Cass Technical High School. Her memberships in the art community include, among others, the Detroit Council of the Arts (its First President), the Michigan Council for the Arts and the Michigan Foundation for the Arts. She has served on the Board of Directors of the Haystack Mt. School of Crafts, as Guest Curator for the "Oclear Story" and "Café Mural Project". In addition to her memberships and teaching, Dr. Taylor has exhibited her works of art at the Bellevue Museum in Washington and the Michigan Artists Show at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Reverend Charleszetta Waddles, Humanitarian (1912-2001)

Affectionately referred to as "Mother Waddles," Reverend Charleszetta Waddles for almost forty years, devoted her life to providing service and assistance to the poor in the form of food, shelter and medical care. In the late 1940's she began holding prayer meetings in her home and emphasized the importance of charitable actions. With the assistance of her husband, Payton Waddles, her belief in the importance of charitable action was brought to fruition when she established the Helping Hand

Restaurant where wholesome meals were offered to the needy for thirty-five cents and were provided free to those who could not afford to pay. In 1956, she and her husband opened The Perpetual Mission for Saving Souls of All Nations which was to later become known as Mother Waddles Perpetual Mission. Through Mother Waddles Perpetual Mission, she continued her devotion to helping those who needed help the most. She became an ordained minister in the First Pentecostal Church and was reordained in the International Association of Universal Truth. Her tireless devotion to the needy provided spiritual strength and confidence to thousands of individuals through the many programs she offered through Mother Waddles Perpetual Mission, including a self help center with classes in typing, dressmaking, machine operating, and upholstery. She has been the recipient of numerous awards and honors including Michigan's Volunteer Leadership and Wolverine Frontiersman awards, the Sojourner Truth Award and the Lane Bryant Citizens Award. In 1968, she was honored with a special presidential commendation by President Richard Nixon.

Margaret McCall Thomas Ward, Journalist, Archivist and Community Leader (1918-2007)
Born in Alabama during the Jim Crow era, Margaret Thomas Ward and her parents, the publishers of a weekly newspaper, The Emancipator, devoted to uplifting the African American community, moved to Detroit in 1920 following threats they received by the Ku Klux Klan. Following graduation from Southeastern High School in Detroit at the age of fifteen, she worked with her parents editing and publishing The Detroit Independent and the Detroit Tribune newspapers. She received her Bachelor of Arts Degree and her Master's degree from the University of Michigan in Library Science; additionally, she completed post-graduate studies at Wayne State University. Mrs. Ward devoted her time to preserving the history of Detroit's African American community. She was the Detroit Public Library's Burton Historical Collection librarian-archivist from 1974 until she retired. During her years with the library, she formed the first African American genealogical society in the state, The Fred Hart Williams Genealogical Society. Mrs. Ward assisted Dr. Charles H. Wright in developing a library for the Museum of African American History and served as the librarian of the Museum of African American History for twelve years. As a result of her tireless devotion to the museum, it dedicated Room 207 as the Margaret McCall Thomas Ward Rare Book Room. A participant in many organizations and the recipient of several awards including the Wayne County Artistic Excellence and Community Commitment Award and the Dr. Alain Locke Award from the Friends of African and African American Art, Mrs. Ward was a valued community leader.