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## Texas Institute for the Preservation of History and Culture Newsletter - September 2023

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## Texas Black History and Culture Highlights

# September 2023



**September 1875**, Twelve former slaves organized Gilead Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas. The oldest African American congregation in the city, freedmen built a simple structure on what is now known as 15<sup>th</sup> and Crump Streets. Referred to as the heart of Fort Worth's Black church community, this church personifies self-determination. In the 1920's it was considered a "megachurch" because of its large congregation and local influence. In 1913, architect Wallace Rayfield designed a new sanctuary complete with a pipe organ, elaborate opera chairs in the balcony, and the state's first indoor baptismal. The basement was furnished with a cafeteria that initially served signature dishes, a gym, and the only indoor pool in the city where Black children could swim. The auditorium was the venue for social events, including a performance by contralto Marian Anderson in

1939. An undeniably iconic landmark in Ft. Worth, Mt. Gilead still stands at its 1913 location. More about Mt. Gilead Baptist Church can be read [here](#).

**September 1, 1990**, Dr. Marguerite Ross Barnett became president of the University of Houston (U of H) and the first Black woman to lead a major American university. Born in 1942 in Charlottesville, Virginia. Dr. Barnett grew up in Buffalo, New York. She earned a political science degree from Antioch College and her doctorate in political science from the University of Chicago. A recognized scholar in political science, Barnett taught at Princeton, Howard, and Columbia University. At the University of Houston she raised over \$150 million, establishing the Texas Center for Environmental Studies. She also instituted nationally renowned programs that supported disadvantaged students transitioning from high school to college. Barnett died of complications from a neuroendocrinological condition on February 26, 1992. More about Dr. Marguerite Ross Barnett can be read [here](#).



**September 5, 1925**, Dr. June Brewer was born in Austin, Texas. Dr. Brewer was the first of five African American women to apply for admission to the University of Texas (UT) Graduate School in 1950 after the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on Herman Sweatt's acceptance to UT law school. She was an English Professor at Huston-Tillotson College for thirty-five years. Brewer was the first Karl Downs Endowed Professor of Humanities Departmental Chair and Professor Emeritus upon retiring. She received a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship to conduct research on Black women writers. Brewer served on numerous task force campaigns within the Austin Independent School District. She founded Borders Learning Community, a nonprofit organization which promoted closing the racial achievement gap with respect to raising standardized test scores. More about Dr. June Brewer can be read [here](#).

## **September 9, 1957**

The Civil Rights Act of 1957 was signed into law by President Dwight W. Eisenhower. Originally proposed by Attorney General Herbert Brownell, the Act marked the first occasion since Reconstruction where the federal government undertook significant legislative action to protect civil rights. Although influential southern congressmen whittled down the bill's initial scope, it still included a number of essential provisions for the protection of voting rights. It established the Civil Rights Division in the Justice Department, and empowered federal officials to prosecute individuals that conspired to deny or abridge another citizen's right to vote. Moreover, it also created a six-member U.S. Civil Rights Commission charged with investigating allegations of voter infringement. But, perhaps most importantly, this moment signaled a growing federal commitment to the cause of civil rights. More about the Civil Rights Act of 1957 can be read [here](#).



## **September 12, 1977**

Azie Taylor Morton was appointed to serve as the 36th Treasurer of the United States under President Jimmy Carter's administration. She oversaw the U.S. Treasury from 1977—1981. To this day, Morton is the only African American to have held this position. Her signature is on U.S. currency printed during her tenure. Born in Dale, Texas, she attended Huston-Tillotson College at age 16. Upon graduating cum laude in 1956 with a degree in commercial education, she served on

the Texas AFL-CIO, headquartered in Austin. In 1961 she was invited by President John F. Kennedy to work for the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. She represented the United States in various capacities with regard to foreign relations including Chair of the People to People Mission to the Soviet Union and China in 1986; and an Election Observer for Presidential elections in Haiti, Senegal and the Dominican Republic. Azie Taylor Morton died in 2003 at her home in Austin, Texas. More about Azie Taylor Morton can be read [here](#).

## **September 17, 1879**

Rube Foster, the "Father of Black Baseball," was born in Calvert, Texas. Foster was a pitcher, manager, and team owner who started his career at age 18 with the semi-pro Waco Yellow Jackets. Standing 6 feet 4 inches tall, the right-handed pitcher first made his mark on the game in 1902 pitching for the Giants in Chicago, then jumped to the Otsego, Mich., semi-pro white team and before heading to the Philadelphia Cuban X Giants. That season, Foster won 44 games in a row. His style as a manager (and a player) was bold. He was an innovative strategist, and his team was renowned for bunting and baserunning. In 1910, Foster acquired ownership of the Leland Giants and guided the squad to a 123–6 record. In 1920, Foster led the founding of baseball's first successful all-black league, the Negro National League (NNL), headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri. Foster was league president, manager, and pitcher for the Chicago American Giants. The NNL had teams in the South and Midwest. Some Texas teams affiliated with the NNL and other all-black baseball associations were the Fort Worth Black Panthers, Houston Eagles, and San Antonio Black Indians. Foster was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1981. More about Rube Foster can be read [here](#).





**September 17, 1995**, NFL superstar, Kansas City Chiefs quarterback, and 2019 Super Bowl MVP, Patrick Mahomes II was born in Tyler, Texas. Mahomes is the son of former Major League Baseball pitcher Pat Mahomes. He played college football and baseball at Texas Tech. After his sophomore year, he stopped playing baseball to focus solely on football. During his junior year, he surpassed all NCAA Division I FBS players in multiple categories including passing yards (5,052) and total touchdowns (53). Mahomes was selected 10th by the Kansas City Chiefs in the 2017. He was named the starter in 2018 after the Chiefs traded his teammate, Alex Smith to the Washington Redskins. That season, Mahomes threw 5,097 yards, 50 touchdowns, and 12 interceptions. He became the only quarterback in history to throw for more than 5,000 yards in a single season in both college and in the NFL. For his performance in his first season as starter, he was named to the Pro Bowl, named First Team All-Pro, and won the AP and NFL Most Valuable Player awards. Mahomes is one of four Black quarterbacks to win the AP MVP award. More about Patrick Mahomes II can be read [here](#).

**September 29, 1971**, America's first racially integrated fine art exhibition, the *De Lux Show*, concluded a three month run. Opening on August 22, 1971, the Menil Foundation created an art exhibition in an abandoned movie theater, in Houston's Fifth Ward community. The De Luxe Theater was a hub from the 1940s until closing in 1969 when movie theaters integrated. The *De Lux Show* was a response to social protest occurring nationally. In 1968, the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition was formed in New York City to expand platforms for showcasing Black visual artists. The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition's work was championed in Houston by the French husband and wife art patrons John and Dominique de Menil. Working with instructors from Rice, TSU, and politician Mickey Leland, the film center was remodeled to display abstract art by nineteen contemporary artists including Sam Gilliam, Larry Poons, and Virginia Jaramillo. More than 4,000 people attended the exhibition. Upon the show's conclusion in 1971, the theater remained an art gallery until 1976, displaying the de Menil's African Art collection and housing the Black Art Center. More about the *De Lux Show* can be read [here](#).



**September 30, 1935**, Pop music icon, singer, and songwriter Johnny Mathis was born in Gilmer, Texas. Johnny is the fourth of seven children to Clem Mathis and Mildred Boyd. The family moved to San Francisco when Mathis was five years old. At age 19 Mathis was discovered by Helen Noga, a local nightclub owner. Noga heard Mathis casually rehearsing with a band and became his manager, booking him to sing at various venues within the Bay area. Noga also worked to secure Mathis' first recording contract with Columbia Records in 1955. In late 1956, Mathis recorded two of his most popular songs: *Wonderful! Wonderful!* and *It's Not for Me to Say*. In the summer of 1957, Mathis' appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* helped increase his popularity. Later that year, Mathis released *Chances Are*, which became his second single to sell one million copies. In 1959 he recorded *Misty*, a ballad that resulted in his first Grammy nomination. Johnny Mathis is the third best-selling artist of the 20th century, selling 360 million records worldwide. He has been the recipient of many awards including a *Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award* in 2003. Johnny Mathis is also renowned for his philanthropic generosity and for supporting such organizations as the American Cancer Society and Muscular Dystrophy Association. More about Johnny Mathis can be read [here](#).