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**As I Walk these Paths:
Honoring the Unheralded Courage of the African American Women Pioneers of
the University of California, Berkeley**

By Gia White, Admin. Director, Global, International, & Area Studies/IES, UCB

“Thus has the Negro girl proven her right to a share of democracy. Rights and liberties of civilized humanity include the right to move freely over the face of the earth. Yet after Negro girls have labored to acquire the needed education and culture, most of the doors of industry are shut in their faces, not because of their inability, but because of their color.”

Vivian Osborne Marsh, Oakland Tribune, May 9, 1926

A glance, a scent, a sound. All vehicles of memory and imagination that can transport us at any time and in any place. The sound of the Campanile bells this morning; strong, solid, reverberating, marking time as we know it as they do every day. But this day, they summon me to celebrate the courageous young African American women who came before me and whose very presence is woven into the fabric of the history of the University of California, Berkeley.

I imagine how it must have been for the first African American women walking the freshly paved paths and shrub lined curves of the beautiful and spacious Berkeley campus in the 1920s. They had to be just as hearty and resilient as the greenery that surrounded them every day. They too heard the Campanile bells, just as I do now, setting their thoughts and aspirations to music on the days that would shape their young lives.

As a young African American woman entering UC Berkeley in the fall of 1982, I also traversed the iconic arch of Sather Gate, but in a markedly different time and space. Sadly, I knew nothing of these remarkable women that came before me. I did not benefit from the knowledge of their historic presence. I wasn't buoyed by thoughts of their achievements or comforted by their ability to persevere, even in the darkest of times. That information void is counter to the motto of this towering institution that strives to bring knowledge to light as expressed by *Fiat Lux*.

As a newly minted transfer undergraduate, I experienced the palpable excitement that comes when you begin to envision your future. The Berkeley campus was humming with activity and possibility. To my youthful eyes, it was a veritable smorgasbord of faculty, staff, students and visitors from all backgrounds; purposely lunching at the communal cafeteria, bumping trays, exchanging ideas, and then efficiently crisscrossing the campus to their next destination. The noontime Sproul Plaza promenade was a feast for the eyes, with its colorful cast of Berkeley personalities and student groups all vying for attention. The African American students faithfully gathered at “the wall,” making their small but mighty presence known. The sheer diversity of the scene served as a visible reminder of the gains made during the Civil Rights, Free Speech and Black Power Movements.

I marveled at the depth of the Berkeley Course Catalog and longed to take a variety of classes that appealed to me. But, time was not on my side. Working two jobs while going to college quickly tempered my enthusiasm. I had to make good choices to meet all the breadth requirements for graduation. It is only in retrospect that I truly understand the significance of being a student at a time when I could experience the brilliance of Dr. Barbara T. Christian – the first Black woman to be granted tenure at Berkeley. I had the privilege of taking her class on Black Women Novelists and I hung on her every word. When the class bell rang, it felt like such a rude intrusion. I lingered as long as I could with her other “groupies.” Her class, along with

those of Margaret Wilkerson, June Jordan, and others, created a tectonic shift in my consciousness. Today, I imagine how much more I could have steeped myself in their knowledge, attributing my lack of foresight to the centrifugal force of youth.

By contrast, the first African American Women attending UC Berkeley in the early 1920s, knew immediately that their resources were minimal and their allies were few. They found some refuge at the YWCA Cottage as a student gathering place. However, it was the steadfast network of the African American community that provided their much-needed housing and financial safety nets for their academic pursuits. In addition to the unfailing moral support so essential to mitigate the relentless currents of racism that punctuated their existence.

In August of 1922, Berlinda Davison, the first African American woman to earn an M.A. degree at the University of California, Berkeley, graced the cover of *The Crisis*¹ in full academic regalia. This publication, founded and edited by W.E.B. DuBois, annually announced the statistics on African American graduates from across the country and proudly displayed their photos. The University of California was well represented in this volume which also recognized Vivian Osborne, Ida Louise Jackson, Modest O. R. Tatum and Walter Arthur Gordon as graduates. The happy graduation news, however, was interspersed with reporting on the Anti-Lynching parade in Washington, DC, held during the 13th Annual Conference of the NAACP. A sobering reminder that progress and achievement were often met with horrendous atrocities – a fact the graduates were keenly aware of in those days. Several of their families participated in the first wave of *The Great Migration* (1910-1940) to escape economic inequality and the sustained threat of violence in the South. California had its own version of discriminatory practices and prejudices; nonetheless, it was in stark contrast to the Southern States.

Not all of these women would live long lives or have important careers that would fill a Wikipedia entry, but their presence mattered. Only one of them, Ida Louise Jackson, is rightfully lauded and recognized by the University of California, Berkeley as a distinguished alumna, also as the first African American school teacher in Oakland, a recipient of the Berkeley Citation, and a campus donor. It is through her oral history interview, *Overcoming Barriers in Education*² that we learn of the other African American women in her circle, Berlinda Davison, Vivian Costroma Osborne, Modest Oreathial Richardson Tatum, Louise Alone Thompson, Ruby Cozetta Jefferson, Annie Virginia Stephens, Talma Catherine Brooks, Myrtle Price, and Coral Johnson. Although not mentioned in Jackson's Oral history, Tarea Hall Pittman also belongs to this group recounting her experiences of those days in her interview with the *Earl Warren Oral History Project*.³ Miriam Matthews and Josephine Cole are also on campus during this ten-year span of the early 20s. There is no indication that any of these women knew of Vivian Logan Rodgers, the very first African American woman to graduate from UC Berkeley in 1909. Nevertheless, the sisterhood born of their struggles to navigate the forces of discrimination inside and outside of the academic world, will forever bind them together.

¹ *The Crisis*, Vol. 24, No. 4. (August 1922)

² Ida Louise Jackson, Oral History. *Overcoming Barriers in Education*, University of California Black Alumni Series Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley, 1984-1985

³ *The Earl Warren Oral History Project*, July 1974, Tarea Hall Pittman, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

*It is dangerous for a woman to defy the gods; To taunt them with the tongue's thin tip,
Or strut in the weakness of mere humanity, Or, draw a line daring them to cross;
The gods own the searing lightning, The drowning waters, tormenting fears
And anger of red sins//*

Letter to my Sister - Anne Spencer – 1927 - African American Poet, Civil Rights Activist

The First African American Woman to Graduate from the University of California, Berkeley
Vivian Logan Rodgers – (1884–1914) – B.L., English '09



Vivian Logan Rodgers – *Blue and Gold Yearbook* 1909

Vivian Logan Rodgers was the daughter of Moses Logan Rodgers one of California's first African American Pioneers. Moses Rodgers was born into slavery in Missouri and made his way to California in 1849 during the onset of the Gold Rush. He became a prominent mining engineer in Mariposa County and he and his wife Sarah had five daughters. Vivian Rodgers was the second born. After graduating from Stockton High School, Rodgers, befitting her upbringing in a pioneering African American family, became the first African American woman to graduate from UC Berkeley with a Bachelor of Letters degree in English in 1909. The NAACP was formed that same year.

Being the first in those early days could not have been easy. She did not have a group of African American women to bond with as did those who followed her. However, she did have the support of strong family and community ties. Due to the notoriety of her father, the Rodgers family often found mention in Stockton, California newspapers. In fact, the local newspaper, *The Evening Mail*, proudly announced Rodgers on the list of "Stocktonians" who graduated from Berkeley in 1909.⁴ Only five year later, that same publication would summarize her achievements while announcing her death. "After her graduation from UC Berkeley, Vivian Rogers [*sic*] accepted a teaching position in Hilo, Hawaii in the autumn of 1913. Soon after that she was stricken with Sciatic Rheumatism which developed into Typhoid Fever and for three months she was confined to a Sanitarium at Hilo."⁵ The article goes on to say that Rodgers recovered enough to return home. Indeed, she did travel to San Francisco on the *SS Lurline*,⁶ as shown in the "Passengers Departed" section of the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, May 12, 1914.⁷ She endured the long journey home where her health improved. However, she suffered a relapse

⁴ *The Evening Mail* (Stockton, California) May 13, 1909, 5

⁵ *Ibid*, August 6, 1914, 5

⁶ *Wikipedia*: Matson Navigation Company built a steamship named *SS Lurline* in 1908; one which carried mainly freight yet could hold 51 passengers along with 65 crew.

⁷ *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* (Honolulu, Hawaii) May 13, 1914, 12

and passed away at the young age of 29 after being stricken with paralysis. The Rodgers family home in Stockton was added to the Register of National Historic Places in 1978.

Cohort of African American Women Students - 1919 - 1929

During the period of 1919-1929, a small cohort of African American women entered the University of California for undergraduate and graduate studies. During this period, Lucy Stebbins was the Dean of Women and by all accounts was a reliable ally of the African American women on campus. She was a source of encouragement and strongly supported their campaigns to start two different sororities on campus, the Rho Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha, headed by Ida Louise Jackson and the Kappa Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, headed by Vivian Osborne. Both groups were groundbreaking West Coast firsts. The Delta Sigma Theta sorority was the first to be officially recognized between the two groups in the campus' *Daily Californian* newspaper of February, 1921.⁸ At first, they were excited about being recognized in the paper, but, as the article referred to their newly established Kappa Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta as part of the national "negress" sorority, their joy was quickly replaced with disappointment. This derogatory term dating back to 1786, persisted right up until the 1960s, and was splashed in publications all over the country to describe women of African descent. African American women sororities and club movements of those times fought strenuously against this kind of terminology and the debasing assertion that they were immoral, hypersexual, and uneducated. These onslaughts put a great burden on them in addition to the academic rigors they had to contend with in their student life.

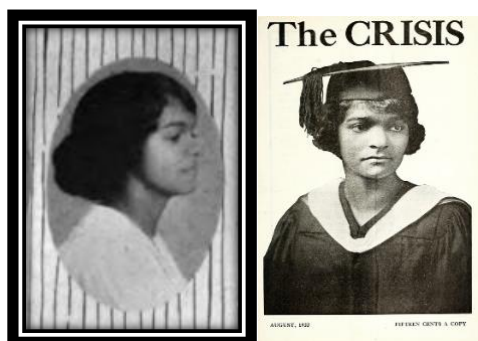
The Rho Chapter of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority led by Ida Louise Jackson, has a now iconic photo of the group (displayed in full glory at the African American Museum and Library in Oakland – AAMLO) showing their young faces beaming with earnest pride. A photo that would never make it into the yearbook and ultimately come to represent their dismissive treatment. As told by Ida Louise Jackson in, *Overcoming Barriers in Education*, each of the women with the help of family members had collected enough money to pay the \$45.00 yearbook photo fee (equivalent to about \$600 today). Yet, their sorority photo never appeared in the yearbook. As Jackson stated, "When the *Blue and Gold* came out, we weren't in there. It just was a terrible thing." They decided to make an appointment to see President David P. Barrows. "We wanted to know why we did not appear in the *Blue and Gold*; we met the requirements, we had paid our fee and had our picture made, and why weren't we in there? So he told us we 'weren't representative of the student body.'"⁹

So here they were, a sisterhood that would splinter at times and suffer painful losses, but also have incredible victories. Their courage born from a tradition that would command them to not only fully embrace their own destinies, but to also make a difference in the lives of the generations that would follow. A tradition where the scales of balance tipped towards family and a sense of community to form a strong identity of self-worth. This is evident by the motto of the "National Association of Colored Women's Clubs" at the time, and echoed by the California Chapter, "Lifting as We Climb." They carried the torch of the "race women" that came before them. A term used to describe African American women who entered into public leadership roles and felt it was their duty to serve as activists, institution builders and public thinkers on the questions of race and the condition of the African American community in the United States. These women worked diligently to replicate opportunities denied their

⁸ *The Daily Californian*, February 9, 1921, 1

⁹ Jackson, *Overcoming Barriers in Education*, 29

community in education, healthcare, religious expression, music, and recreation. Where a door was shut in their face, they opened their own.



Berlinda Davison,
Blue and Gold Yearbook, 1919/Cover of *The Crisis* – August 1922

Berlinda Davison Mabson – (1896 – 1974) - A.B. '19, M.A. '22

Berlinda Davison's San Francisco roots run deep. She lived there for the majority of her life and was an influential leader in the African American community in the 1940s. But, she also spent some of her youth in Alaska. An article in the *San Francisco Examiner* in 1922 extolled Davison's accomplishments and in a one liner mentioned that she graduated from Nome High School in Alaska – a fact that possibly opens up a window to understanding her origins. The U.S. Census of 1910 shows 209 Black residents in the entire state of Alaska just two years before Davison's high school graduation in 1912. It is no wonder that she received special mention out of a graduating class of five seniors. A document titled, *A History of the Nome, Alaska Public Schools: 1899 to 1958 From the Gold Rush to Statehood*,¹⁰ provides data on the history of Nome High School showing Davison as "Linda" Davison – her first name shortened – describing her as the "Negro girl, brilliant and lovely, the first of her race to graduate from this 'white' high school."

Complimentary headlines continued to follow Davison throughout her life. She enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley earning her A.B. degree in English in 1919, and her M.A. in Education in 1922. She was featured on the cover of *The Crisis* magazine, and in the following year the *San Francisco Examiner* reported on her continued success.¹¹ The headline read "Colored Girl Wins High Post." It announced that Belinda [sic] Davison – her first and last name often misspelled in publications – received her A.B. degree from Berkeley in 1919; a high school teacher's certificate in 1920, and was the first 'colored' girl to receive a degree of Master of Arts at the University of California, Berkeley. The article also noted that she would be leaving for Petersburg, Virginia to be an instructor in chemistry, education and mathematics at the Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute.¹² It went on to mention that her position was secured by two US Senators representing California (Hiram W. Johnson and Samuel Shortridge) for the "brilliant young colored girl." The article names the topic of her thesis, *Educational Status of the Negro of the San Francisco Bay Region*, and it informs the reader that she received "Two flattering offers, from Tuskegee, Alabama and from a Missouri School for colored pupils."¹³

¹⁰*A History of the Nome Alaska, Public Schools: 1899 to 1958 From the Gold Rush to Statehood*, Poling, 1970, 39, 73

¹¹ *San Francisco Examiner*, San Francisco, California, Sept. 7, 1922, 7

¹² Virginia Normal and College Institute opened as a teacher training college for both male and female Black students in 1883 with 126 students and seven faculty members all of whom were Black. Blackpast.org – *Virginia State University (1882 -)*, January 10, 2010, Eligio Martinez.

¹³ *San Francisco Examiner*, Thursday, September 7, 1922, 7

Davison married Edward D. Mabson, a prominent San Francisco Lawyer who founded the first NAACP Chapter in San Francisco in 1915. She became the president of the San Francisco Branch of the NAACP in 1942. Her brother Stuart T. Davison was the first African American to graduate from the UC Medical School in 1918, and served as a First Lieutenant in the *Medical Corps* in World War I.

Berlinda Mabson Davison died in 1974, six years after her husband, and shortly before the death of her brother Stuart in 1975. The notice of her death made mention only of the fact that she was a San Francisco resident for over 74 years.



Vivian Costroma Osborne Marsh

Vivian Costroma Osborne Marsh – (1898 – 1986) – A.B. '20, MA '22

Born in Houston, Texas, Vivian Osborne moved to California with her sister and their widowed mother in 1913. She graduated from Berkeley High in 1914 and then applied to UC Berkeley. Due to her southern schooling, she was required to take four separate entrance exams despite her high grades. She passed two with flying colors so the University waived the others. She received her A.B. from UC Berkeley in 1920. Ida Louise Jackson remarked in her oral history interview that Osborne was getting her Master's degree when she entered UC Berkeley and that they were good friends. Jackson recounted that the two of them would provide a place for African American students to meet outside of campus since they both had houses, as opposed to those renting rooms.¹⁴ Jackson also describes Osborne as smart, critically minded, and more sophisticated than she was at the time.

Vivian Osborne Marsh's accomplishments were numerous. Marsh was one of the first African American women awarded the Master of Arts degree (Anthropology) from UC Berkeley in 1922. Second only to Berlinda Davison who graduated one semester prior. Osborne became the first National President of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority and in 1926 she gave an address on radio station KGO. She spoke on the topic of *The Negro Girl's Contribution to Civilization*, naming several in her UC Berkeley sisterhood and giving voice to the frustration felt by so many African American women who found that even with college degrees their opportunities were extremely limited.¹⁵ Osborne was also active with the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, beginning as a member of the Phyllis Wheatley Club, the YWCA, and the Berkeley Women's Civic Club. She was also director of the Oakland junior branch of the NAACP from 1928 to 1929. She earned a teaching credential from UCLA in 1932. Osborne also traveled to Washington D.C. to represent her sorority working for anti-lynching legislation.

¹⁴ Jackson, *Overcoming Barriers in Education*, p. 22

¹⁵ *Oakland Tribune*, May 9, 1926, *Activities Among Negroes Column*, Delilah Beasley
Quote by Vivian Osborne Marsh

The *Who's Who in Colored America*¹⁶ enumerates her many accomplishments and notes her constant community involvement. She supervised the Division on Negro Affairs of California's National Youth Administration during the Depression, and was elected president of the California State Association of Colored Women in 1941. Osborne was elected Vice President of the National Council of Negro Women in 1945, and was also the first Black person to serve on the City of Berkeley's Planning Commission. She had numerous positions of leadership in fraternal and civic organizations at the local, regional, and national levels. Her sorority sisters praised her unswerving dedication and commitment to the struggle for social justice and equality. In 1981, the Berkeley/Bay Area Alumnae chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, paid tribute to her at their 60th anniversary celebration by establishing the Vivian Osborne Marsh Social Action Scholarship. She died at the age of 87 not long after suffering a stroke in 1986.



Ida Louise Jackson, Rho Chapter, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority photo

(Photo courtesy-African American Museum and Library at Oakland, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA – University of California Collection)

Ida Louise Jackson (1902 – 1996) – A.B. '22, M.A. '23

Ida Louise Jackson was born in 1902 in Vicksburg, Mississippi. The youngest of eight children and the only girl. She was a brilliant child who began to read at the age of three and graduated high school at the age of 14. Jackson first studied at Rust College for two years and then transferred as a senior for one additional year to New Orleans University (now Dillard) so that she could be near her Aunt Ida L. Young. She graduated in 1917 with what was called in those days a Normal Teaching Diploma, which meant she was fully trained to be a teacher. In her oral history interview, Jackson tells of how her mother and father instilled in all of their children a sense of pride and self-worth, attributes that would normally be welcome and well received in any community. But, they spelled danger for African Americans in the Jim Crow South. It is also what compelled Ida Louise Jackson's mother to send her sons out of the cesspool of Anti-Black violence that permeated Mississippi and on to Northern California. In 1918, Jackson and her mother joined them and they settled in the city of Berkeley.

Jackson enrolled in the University of California, Berkeley in 1920 earning her A.B in 1922. She applied for a teaching job in Oakland schools, but was told she was not qualified to teach. She returned to UC Berkeley and earned her M.A. in 1924. In 1925, she became the first African American teacher in the Oakland Public Schools. Her assignment to teach at Prescott School was at first met with protests and hostility. Her students, however, were fully supportive of her which helped her through that difficult period she later called, "the unpleasantries." Jackson became National President of her sorority in 1934, and the same year she founded the Mississippi Health Project, bringing much needed medical attention to children and adults in rural areas of Mississippi via mobile clinics. In 1979, she donated her Mendocino ranch to UC

¹⁶ *Who's Who in Colored America* (Yenser 1942), 355

Berkeley specifying that the proceeds be used as graduate fellowships for African American students pursuing their degrees. She died in 1996 at the age of 93. In 2004, the Ida Louise Jackson Graduate House was named in her honor.



Modest Oreathial Richardson
Blue and Gold Yearbook, 1922/Berkeley High School Yearbook, 1917

Modest Oreathial Richardson Tatum (1899 – 1927) – A.B. French/Music – ‘22

Modest Oreathial Richardson’s parents moved as part of the *Great Migration* from Louisiana to Berkeley where she attended Berkeley High. The 1917 Berkeley High School Yearbook shows Richardson’s early interest in music as a member of the Piano Club. She graduated in 1918, just as the influenza pandemic was spreading across the United States and the world. She survived that pandemic and enrolled in the University of California, Berkeley in 1921, joining the Rho Chapter of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority spearheaded by Ida Louise Jackson. She married Archie Tatum while still a student and then graduated in 1922 with an A.B. degree in French & Music. Unfortunately, Richardson’s life was cut short in 1926 at the age of 26 by another deadly disease of that era, Tuberculosis. After her death, her parents continued to live in the city of Berkeley for the remainder of their lives. They are laid to rest together at Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland.



Louise Alone Thompson, *Blue and Gold Yearbook* - 1923

Louise Alone Thompson Patterson – (1901– 1999) - B.A. ’23, cum Laude

Louise Alone Thompson was born in Chicago, Illinois, but her family moved to the San Francisco Bay Area when she was eight years old. Her early years were filled with a variety of experiences in East and West coast cities. When Louise Thompson, her mother, and stepfather settled in Oakland for the second time she had to face the great influenza pandemic head on. She became ill at the age of seventeen, fighting hard to recover and complete her senior year of High School. In June 1919 she graduated from Oakland High. Having fully recovered, she set her sights on enrolling at the University of California where she embraced an intense workload in the College of Commerce. She achieved much academic success in a short period of time and surpassed the required credits for what was then a “junior certificate.” At only nineteen years

of age, she had pulled within fifty credits of being eligible for graduation.¹⁷ During this time, Louise teamed up with Vivian Osborne to head the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. She would also be listed in the 1923 *Blue and Gold Yearbook* in the *Honor Societies* section as being a member of Sigma Delta Pi (Spanish).

Inspired by a lecture given by W.E.B. DuBois at UC Berkeley (Wheeler Hall) in March of 1923, her passion for social justice grew. After graduating with a Master's degree in Economics, she taught at Hampton Institute in Virginia. She lost her job after supporting a student strike against the racial policies set by the university administration. Her life, now set on a path of social activism would put her in close quarters with legends of the Harlem Renaissance, such as Paul Robeson, Zora Neale Hurston, and her close friend Langston Hughes. In 2012, the *California Alumni Association Magazine* wrote a piece on her life and described her expert ability to formulate and execute plans of action as she embarked on a film project called *Black and White*. The article highlights recruitment efforts for the project spearheaded by Louise Thompson calling out Hollywood's pervasive racist stereotypes with the appeal "Hollywood producers continue to manufacture sentimental and banal pictures, and particularly cling to traditional types in portraying the Negro."¹⁸ Ultimately, the project took a group of 22 African Americans to the Soviet Union to address the struggles of African American workers in the United States. However, the film was never made. Another set of assumptions and stereotypes surfaced that were not sanctioned by the group and they returned to the U.S.

As a fierce leader and quintessential organizer, Thompson diligently worked for causes that she believed in. She married William Patterson in 1942 and together they fought against McCarthyism in the 1950s. In the 1970s, she helped organize Angela Davis' defense fund. She died at the age of 97 leaving a record of tireless social activism and a passion for justice that never waned.



Ruby Cozetta Jefferson, Rho Chapter, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority photo
(Photo courtesy-African American Museum and Library at Oakland, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA – University of California Collection)

Ruby Cozetta Jefferson – (1904 – date unknown) – A.B. '24

Ruby Cozetta Jefferson was born in Holly Springs, Mississippi. The 1920 Mississippi Census shows her as the only daughter of four children to Nelson Jefferson (Carpenter) and Eldora Jefferson (Seamstress). Much like Ida Louise Jackson's family, the Jefferson family moved away from the oppression of Mississippi. First to Colorado, and then to California, in search of a better life. In fact, Jackson's oral history mentions how she was acquainted with Jefferson's family in Mississippi and encouraged them to move to California. Ruby Jefferson was a member

¹⁷ *Louise Thompson Patterson: A Life of Struggle for Justice*, Keith Gilyard, 2017, pp. 28, 31

¹⁸ *California Alumni Association Magazine*, 2012

of the Rho Chapter of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority and received her A.B. degree in Education in 1924. After graduation, she returned to Los Angeles and worked for the YWCA.

Ruby Jefferson had three younger brothers: Bernard, Edwin, and Ronald. Much of what we know about Jefferson after her time at Berkeley is through her brother Bernard Jefferson. His Oral history in the *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly*, 1987, details their family background.¹⁹ Bernard Jefferson graduated from UCLA and Harvard University and was one of the first African American appointees to a high position in the California judiciary and was known for his significant rulings as a trial judge. Her brother Edwin was also a judge and her youngest brother Ronald was a pediatrician. Bernard Jefferson describes their early life in Mississippi and relays a story about their parents' desire for their children to get an education. He quotes his mother as saying, "These four children of ours are not going to get any education in Mississippi."²⁰ He also mentions that his sister Ruby was a retired elementary school teacher living in Los Angeles. Unlike the obituaries of her brothers, there was no notification of her death in the Los Angeles area newspapers. Nevertheless, their obituaries show that she was still alive in 1989 when her brother Edwin died, but deceased by the time of Bernard Jefferson's death in 2002.



Annie Virginia Stephens, *Blue and Gold Yearbook*, 1924

Annie Virginia Stephens Coker – (1903 – 1986) – B.S. '24, J.D. '29

Annie Virginia Stephens was born in Oakland in 1903. Her father William Stephens, was a native of Virginia who moved to California and became a successful business owner. He met and married Paulina Stephens and Annie was their only child. The family owned Stephens Restaurant on East 14th Avenue in Oakland which was very popular in the 1920s and 1930s. At the age of fourteen, Stephens won local acclaim when her idea to name the buildings of the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition "Jewel City" was selected over 13,000 entries. The competition was sponsored by the *San Francisco Call* newspaper. The committee only found out that she was a little "colored" girl, *after* they had made their selection, as mentioned in Delilah Beasley's epic work, *The Negro Trailblazers of California*.²¹ This early notoriety would be a foretelling of things to come.

Stephens graduated from High School in Pacific Grove, California in 1921. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree at UC Berkeley in 1924, and was then encouraged by her father to continue her studies at the Boalt School of Law. Stephens was one of two women in the class of 47 students, earning her Law degree in 1929, the same year her mother Paulina died. Stephens

¹⁹ *Constitutional Law Quarterly, Oral History: Justice Bernard S. Jefferson*, 14 *Hastings Const. L.Q.* 225 (1987).

Available at: https://repository.uchastings.edu/hastings_constitutional_law_quarterly/vol14/iss2/3

²⁰ *Ibid*, 229

²¹ *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*, Delilah L. Beasley, 1919, 302

was the first African American woman who completed the program and passed the California State Bar in the same year. True to the times, most law firms in California in the 1930s were not hiring African American attorneys – and certainly not female ones. She moved to Alexandria, Virginia and had a private law practice there for almost ten years. As opportunities improved, she returned to California in 1939 and joined the State Office of Legislative Counsel as junior deputy legislative counsel. Remembered as an inspiring presence, she worked there until her retirement in 1966 and died at the age of 83 in 1986.



Miriam Matthews

Miriam Matthews – (1905 – 2003) – B.A., Spanish – '26 – Certificate in Library Science – '27

Miriam Matthews was born in Pensacola, Florida and at the age of two her father and mother made the decision to move to California. She graduated from Los Angeles High School in 1922 and then spent two years at the University of California, Southern Branch (Los Angeles). She then transferred to Berkeley where she joined the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority started by Vivian Osborne. At Berkeley, Matthews earned her Bachelor's degree in Spanish in 1926, and was elected to the Spanish honorary society Sigma Delta Pi, following in the footsteps of Louise Alone Thompson. She earned her certificate in Library Science in 1927, becoming the first credentialed African American librarian in the state of California. During this time, Matthews stayed connected with the Deltas, succeeding Vivian Osborne as the second Regional Director of the Sorority's "Farwest" region from 1929-1930. She also spearheaded efforts in 1929 to establish "Negro History Week" in Los Angeles which then became "Negro History Month."

Matthew's first post in Los Angeles was as a substitute librarian at the Robert Louis Stevenson Branch. Later on, she became the branch librarian at the Helen Hunt Jackson Library where she compiled a substantial research collection documenting the contributions of African Americans to California's history and culture. In 1944 she published *The Negro in California from 1781-1910: An Annotated Bibliography*. To further her education, she took a leave of absence to earn a Master's degree in Library Science from the University of Chicago in 1945. After her return to Los Angeles, she was promoted to regional librarian supervising twelve branches in the LA area.

Matthews was a periodic contributor to the *California Eagle* (1879-1964), the oldest Black-owned and -operated newspaper in the United States, and was often featured in local news stories. A June 1947 article²² described Matthew's importance as the Chairperson of the Committee on Intellectual Freedom during the McCarthy Era. It stated that Matthews "vigorously upheld the right for intellectual freedom, and also emphasized the urgent need for intercultural understanding." She made a report to the California Library Association regarding the organized attempts to suppress freedom of research and inquiry throughout the United States. Her efforts successfully prevented the establishment of a board of censors in the Los Angeles County Public Library.

²² *California Eagle*, June 5, 1947, p. 7

Matthews received many honors and awards, among them the Titus Alexander Award in recognition of her work documenting the history and achievement of African Americans in California, and an Award of Merit from the California Historical Society. In 2004, the Hyde Park Branch Library was rebuilt and renamed after Matthews. In 2010, she was one of the ten inaugural inductees to the California Library Hall of Fame. In her oral history,²³ speaking about her life lessons and influences, Matthews says “I greatly appreciate having learned early in life to stand on my own two feet, to form my own opinions, to stick by my principles, and to speak up for what I thought was right.” Throughout her life, Miriam Matthews proved to be a well-respected leader and supporter of the African American community. She died in 2003 at the age of 97.



Josephine Foreman Cole, 1948
(Courtesy of UC Berkeley Bancroft Library)

Josephine Foreman Cole (1913 – 2006) – A.B. Economics ‘29

Josephine Foreman Cole was a native San Franciscan who in 1943 became the first African American teacher in the San Francisco public school district. Cole’s mother Elizabeth Brown was born in San Francisco and was a faithful member of the Bethel A.M.E. church. Her father, Joseph Foreman, migrated to San Francisco from Kentucky. In 1909, he gained employment as the doorman at Shreve’s Jewelry Co. and became a legendary figure working there for an incredible 46 years.

Cole’s oral history appeared in 1978 as part of the oral history project *Afro-Americans in San Francisco Prior to World War II*.²⁴ Cole describes her parents’ dedication to their daughters’ educational pursuits, and spoke of how her father would respond when family friends asked, “What are you educating those girls for, Joe? They’re only going to get married.” He would reply, “My girls are my wealth and they’re going to get everything I can place before them. They won’t have to work in anybody’s kitchen.” Cole describes her mother as the strict disciplinarian in the family and she would remind her daughters, “Girls, you’re both girls and you’re Colored, so you’re going to have to do *twice* as much to get *half* of what the Whites have.”

Cole entered Berkeley earning her A.B. degree in Economics in 1929. Her oral history reveals that as a fellow San Franciscan, she knew Berlinda Davison Mabson and that she had joined the Deltas founded by Vivian Osborne. However, Cole decided sorority life was not for her so she left the organization. After graduation, she hoped to become a teacher right away and passed the written and oral exams. But, her career stalled when the Board of Education failed to place

²³*Black Women Oral History Project*. Interviews, 1976-1981. Miriam Matthews. OH-31. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

²⁴Oral History Project: *Afro-Americans in San Francisco Prior to World War II*, Friends of the San Francisco Library – Josephine Cole, 1978, p.11

her. She was finally assigned to Raphael Weill Elementary School in 1943. Shortly thereafter she met and married Audley Cole, the first Black San Francisco motorman for MUNI. During this time, Cole set her sights on teaching Secondary School. In spite of ranking first in testing, she was passed over for three years. In 1948, at long last, she was placed at Balboa High School where she taught until she retired in 1963.

In 1992, The Southeast Library of San Francisco State University was named the Josephine Cole Library in her honor, and in 1995 the Board of Supervisors named her as an outstanding community leader of San Francisco.



Tarea Hall Pittman, circa 1920s

(Photo courtesy-African American Museum and Library at Oakland, Oakland Public Library, Oakland, CA – E.F. Joseph Photograph Collection–MS126)

Tarea Susie Hall-Pittman (1903 – 1991) – Attended – 1923 (withdrew) - M.A. '46

Tarea Hall was born in Bakersfield, California in 1903. She was the second of five children of William Hall and Susie Pinkney. The Hall family moved from Alabama to Bakersfield in 1895 and used their already extensive farming skills to work the land that they purchased. They adjusted to the very different climate conditions in California and their crops thrived. Hall describes in her oral history interview with the *Earl Warren Oral History Project*, how her family was one of the early African American families that settled in the San Joaquin Valley.²⁵ She explains that her father and uncles also started the Bakersfield Branch of the NAACP, which sheds some light on their family culture and why she became such a powerhouse in the African American Community.

Hall enrolled in the University of California, Berkeley in 1923 and found lodging with none other than Vivian Osborne's mother, Alice Osborne. While at Berkeley, she met William Pittman, a student at the UC San Francisco Dental School. She dropped out of college to marry him and support his career. During that time, she stayed active in the NAACP and California State Association of Colored Women's Clubs. She served as President of the Association from 1936 to 1938. After supporting her husband through his studies, Hall-Pittman decided to continue her studies, receiving an A.B. in Social Service from San Francisco State College in 1942. She furthered her education by once again enrolling in UC Berkeley, obtaining her Master's degree in Social Welfare in 1946. In her oral history she talks about this period of her life, "When I graduated from San Francisco State I decided that I would go to the School of Social Welfare at Cal and get my master's degree. So this is what I did. It was quite a circuitous route that I took, you see. I think that I made a good choice but I think that if I had had more insight into what I really might have been capable of doing, maybe I would have gone into law."²⁶

²⁵ *The Earl Warren Oral History Project*, Tarea Hall Pittman, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1974, 1

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 36

Tarea Hall Pittman’s capabilities were extensive and she used her skills to advance social welfare movements in the Bay Area for the majority of her life. She became a well-known figure as host of the program “Negroes in the News.” It was broadcast on Oakland’s KDIA radio station, publicizing positive news about the African American Community locally and nationally. She died on July 31, 1991 after a prolonged illness. After a community petition in 2015, the South Branch of the Berkeley Public Library was re-named the Tarea Hall-Pittman Library in her honor.



Talma Catherine Brooks, Rho Chapter, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority photo
(Photo courtesy-African American Museum and Library at Oakland, Oakland Public Library – University of California Collection)

Talma Catherine Brooks – (1904 – 1953) - Attended UC Berkeley – 1921-1923/1925-1928

Talma Catherine Brooks was born in San Francisco in 1904. She graduated from Oakland High School in 1920 and entered the University of California in 1921. Her time at Berkeley spans into the 1927-28 academic year. She had a series of starts and stops and never completed her degree. Census data shows, however, that she remained very active in the Oakland community, working, along with Tarea Hall Pittman, in the California State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs. Brooks enjoyed singing and is often mentioned as a performer in local newspapers of the day. She was a soloist at the memorial service of the venerable author and *Oakland Tribune* Columnist, Delilah L. Beasley, who died in 1934. The following year, Brooks appeared in a 1935 photo in the *Oakland Tribune* as a member of a racially mixed group of singers called the Jackson Choral Society of Oakland. *The California State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs Yearly Journal* of 1953, acknowledged her death describing Brooks as a dedicated member of the Phyllis Wheatley Club, serving the organization over the years as both secretary and editor.

Not listed here are: Coral Johnson and Myrtle Price. Both of them have been mentioned in various sources as part of the first group of African American Women who attended Berkeley in those early years, but additional information on their lives has been elusive so far.

As we continue to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the admission of women to the University of California, the significance of these African American women and their presence on the Berkeley campus cannot be overstated. Their lives ebbed and flowed with all the complexities that the human experience can bring. The burdens they carried in the midst of a society that at every turn sought to relegate them to the status of “Other,” did not succeed in preventing them from seeking full and active lives. Just the opposite. They railed against institutional racism and defied the odds. This legacy has only deepened after the historic inauguration of California’s own Kamala Harris as Vice President of the United States. On behalf of these African American women trailblazers, let us mark their time, center their stories, and conspicuously honor their journeys at UC Berkeley for generations to come.