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Black Women Matter: Recognizing the Legacies of Black Women at Cal

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# **Black Women Matter: Recognizing the Legacies of Black Women at Cal**

**By Sheila Humphreys**

## **Introduction:**

To celebrate 150W, we honor some of the many Black women pioneers at the University of California, Berkeley with brief accounts of their legacy. Reflecting on Black History Month, UC President Michael V. Drake acknowledged the contributions of Black leaders to the history of UC. We are committed to highlighting both the past struggles and achievements of Black women scholars affiliated with the campus.



## **Message from the 150W Executive Committee:**

The 150W project created a version of the 150W logo featuring "Black Lives Matter". 150W is a celebration of the contributions of women over the history of UC Berkeley. That includes celebrating a number of incredible, remarkable, Black and brown women. But that number is not nearly what it could or should be. 150W is also a history project. Any history of UC Berkeley includes the honest and painful recognition that societal and institutional racism excluded so many women from the UC student body, staff, and professoriate, and put obstacles in their paths every step of the way. We grieve this oppression. It has caused tremendous loss and pain to individuals, to UC, to society. For the 150W History Project, the stories of Black women's lives matter. We are committed to lifting up those stories, as well as to shining an honest light on the places where those stories are grievously absent, due to oppression that as a society we have not yet addressed.



Vivian Rodgers (1884-1914), BA in 1909  
Berkeley's first Black woman undergraduate

**Vivian Logan Rodgers**, the daughter of a prominent Black pioneer, Amos Logan Rodgers (1835-1900) in Stockton, California, was the first African American female student at Berkeley. Her father, Amos Rodgers, traveled a long distance from slavery in Missouri to prosperity in California at the time of the Gold Rush. Highly respected in the business community, he owned and supervised and owned gold mines, in which he employed Chinese laborers. Thanks to her father's success in mining, Vivian grew up in a prosperous family. Rodgers insisted on the best education available to them for each of his five daughters. She graduated from UC Berkeley in 1909 with a Bachelor of Letters in English. Possibly because she could not find a teaching job in California, Vivian Rodgers accepted a teaching position in a public school in Hilo, Hawaii. Not long afterwards, she contracted a tropical disease, which developed into typhoid fever. After confinement to a sanatorium for three months she was able to return to San Francisco aboard the SS Lurline, and convalesce at her home in Stockton. Her condition worsened and she died at the age of twenty-nine on August 4, 1914. The family home in Stockton which Moses Rodgers built is on the Register of National Historic Places.

*Source: Gia White, Institute of European Studies Administrative Director  
Photo: UC Berkeley Blue and Gold Yearbook, 1909*



Vivian Costroma Osborne Marsh (1898-1986), BA '21 & MA '22  
Founder of Delta Sigma Theta and Berkeley Anthropology's first Black woman graduate

**Vivian Osborne** earned two degrees at Berkeley: a bachelor's in 1920 and a master's degree in 1922, both in anthropology. Osborne was the first African American woman to earn a master's degree from Berkeley's Anthropology Department. She wrote her MS thesis was "Types and Distribution of Negro Folklore in America." Born in Houston, Texas, Osborne moved to California at the age of fifteen with her widowed mother and graduated from Berkeley High School. In 1921, while a student at Berkeley, Osborne founded the Kappa chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, the first sorority at Berkeley for African American women and the first Delta Sigma Theta chapter West of the Rocky Mountains. Delta Sigma Theta, which was founded at Howard University in 1913, proclaimed a dual purpose of "academic excellence and social service." Osborne maintained a passionate, lifelong association with her sorority. From 1935-39 she served as the seventh national president. One of her initiatives was a traveling library for children in rural Georgia. She hosted meetings of the sorority members in her home in Berkeley.

After marrying Leon F. Marsh, Vivian Osborne Marsh and her husband were community activists and influential leaders in many organizations in San Francisco and the State. During the Depression Marsh led the Division of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Organization, which found jobs for unemployed youth. She was elected president of the California State Association of Colored Women in 1941 and was active in the National Council of Negro Women. During WWII, Marsh led the Women's Ambulance and Defense Corps of America. She ran for City Council of Berkeley with the support of several organizations in 1959 but lost. The city of Berkeley declared Vivian Osborne Marsh Day on February 21, 1981 to honor her leadership and significant contributions.

*Source: Sheila Humphreys, 150W History Project Co-Chair and Emerita Director of Diversity, EECS  
Photo: OpenUCLA Collections*



Ida Louise Jackson (1902-1996), BA '22 & MA '23  
Oakland's first Black teacher and educational leader

Born in Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1902, **Ida Louise Jackson** credits her parents for teaching her honesty and outspokenness from an early age. She also recalls that her parents “put education ahead of everything,” believing that education would increase opportunity in a prejudiced system in which they themselves had struggled. Ida Jackson went to Rust College for two years, and graduated from a teaching course at New Orleans University (now Dillard). When she arrived in Oakland, California, in 1918 and requested a teaching application from the county superintendent's office, they suggested she apply for a full California teaching credential. Eager to continue learning, Ida Jackson enrolled in the University of California, majoring in education. By 1921, she had formed the sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha to build a safe community for the small number of Black students.

After graduating with a B.A in 1922 and M.A in 1923, Ida Jackson went on to apply for a teaching position in the Oakland public school system. At the time, she recalls that the general consensus was that a Black person was not capable of teaching, especially in Oakland where there were very few Black students that continued on to high school. She was rejected and told that she needed teaching experience. This led her to become the first Black high school teacher in California at the racially segregated East Side High School for Mexican and African American students in El Cerrito in 1923. Once again, Jackson applied to teach in Oakland and was rejected. Even then, her fiery determination to teach in Oakland did not falter. She received help from President Walter Butler of the Northern California branch of the NAACP, who worked with influential white members of the Board of Education whom he personally knew in high school. Social reformer Anita Whitney intervened to endorse her teaching credibility. Only after such interventions did Ida Jackson receive an offer at the Prescott School in Oakland in 1926. Finally, she became the first Black teacher in the Oakland public schools.

Jackson realized that the students not only were starved from education but also basic healthcare. Turning her focus to include welfare, Jackson, along with Dr. Dorothy Boulding Ferebee and AKA volunteers, began establishing child health care centers in rural areas. From the 1930s–1940s, Jackson became founder and director of the Mississippi Health Project, which expanded to include care for adults as well as children. Meanwhile, her passion for education also did not dim. She spent a year at Columbia University and had gotten within two units of a doctorate in education, but did not officially obtain the degree because she could not afford the expense. Afterwards, Jackson held the position of dean of women at Tuskegee Institute, but ultimately returned to teach at McClymonds High School in Oakland upon retirement in 1953. In addition to all this, Jackson was active in the National Council of Negro Women, where she strove to improve the economic and social conditions for low-income Black women. She was also highly involved in the education department of the NAACP in their mission, as she described it, to “encourage more Blacks to get higher education, and to sort of fight the prejudice that was in the schools.” In 1972, she donated her farm to UC Berkeley, requesting that the profits be used toward graduate scholarships for Black students. Ida Jackson passed away on March 8, 1996, but her legacy lives on. In 2004, UC Berkeley unveiled the Ida L. Jackson Graduate House Apartments in her honor.

*Source: Deborah Qu. “The Fighting Spirit of Ida Louise Jackson.” UC Berkeley Bancroft Library. August 4, 2020.  
Photo: the Ida Louise Jackson estate*



Louise Thompson Patterson (1901-1999), BA '23  
Social and political activist associated with Harlem Renaissance

**Louise Alone Thompson (Patterson)** is a notable African American Berkeley alumna whose adventurous life is less well known than Jackson’s, despite her international scope. She overlapped at Berkeley with both Vivian Osborne Marsh and Ida Jackson. Patterson, who lived in New York, traveled widely to organize and speak on behalf of political causes she believed in.

Patterson, whose maiden name was Thompson, graduated from Oakland High School at fifteen. At that time UC Berkeley was open to all high school graduates who had completed the college curriculum and were recommended by their school. Patterson lived with her mother in a house near campus on Bancroft Way, where much of her social life took place. She enrolled in the College of Commerce and completed a major in economics and a minor in Spanish. In March of her senior year, she attended a lecture by W.E.B. DuBois, the most important Black intellectual of her time, on “The Economic Condition of the Negro in the United States.”

Thompson was spellbound: “He stood up. First of all, his presence was something. He commands you just when he stands up. And then he spoke. He didn’t look at a note. He didn’t read it from a paper. . . . And the hall, you could hear a pin drop. They listened. And I walked out feeling, well, it is something to be black.”[1] Neither the Daily Cal nor the Berkeley Daily Gazette reported on DuBois’s campus address. Louise was shocked that DuBois hadn’t been mentioned in her History of Education class. Later she wrote later to DuBois asking for a job on the *Crisis*, the most respected Black magazine of the day. Thompson graduated with honors among the top sixteen students in a class of 182 economics majors.

A self-described rebel, Louise Thompson Patterson engaged in lifelong political activism, from defense of the Scottsboro Boys case to freeing Angela Davis. She joined the Communist Party, and followed poet Langston Hughes to New York in 1928, where she worked among artists, writers, and intellectuals in the Harlem Renaissance. Zora Neale Hurston was one of her employers. Patterson’s friendship with Hughes lasted until the end of his life. At the invitation of the Soviet Union, she traveled with Hughes to Russia in 1932 in a group of young African Americans associated with the cultural life of Harlem. They were promised that they would make a film about race in America to be called “Black and White.” The Soviets planned to illustrate the oppression of African Americans in America and to attract them to the Communist party, but the film did not pan out. Thompson returned home but in 1937 she joined Hughes, Paul Robeson and other American communists to combat Fascists during the Spanish Civil War.

Patterson sustained a lifelong battle for social justice. In 1970, she stepped forward as the Executive Secretary to the New York Committee to Free Angela Davis. Davis, who had taught at UCLA, was incarcerated in connection with a shootout at the Marin County Courthouse, because a handgun registered to her was recovered at the scene. Patterson organized and participated in events to defend Angela Davis in the US and Europe. At the age of ninety, Patterson returned to the Berkeley campus to attend the Seventeenth Annual Black Graduation, where she received the Fannie Lou Hamer Award.

*Source: Sheila Humphreys, 150W History Project Co-Chair and Emerita Director of Diversity, EECS*  
*Photo: Harlem World Magazine*



Annie Virginia Stephens Coker (1903-1986), BA '24 & JD '29  
California's first Black woman attorney

In 1929, **Annie Virginia Stephens Coker** was one of just two women in her class and the first Black woman to graduate from Berkeley Law. She was California's first Black female lawyer and a legal icon upon whose shoulders students stand. When the law school began admitting women in 1894, female students felt immense pressure to outperform their male counterparts in order to be treated as equals. Coker, who also got her undergraduate degree at Berkeley, was one of those trailblazers who deserves recognition for the barriers she broke as a woman of color practicing law at a time when the courts were dominated by white men.

An Oakland native, Coker (then Annie Stephens) was born April 7, 1903, the only child of William and Pauline Stephens. Though Coker hated to cook, her family ran Stephens' Restaurant, an Oakland establishment off 14th Street near Lake Merritt and one of the first Black-owned businesses in the area. William Stephens emphasized the importance of education in his household and employed Black students at the restaurant to help them earn money for school. As a child, Coker attended Oakland public schools, but the family moved during her teenage years to Pacific Grove, where she would graduate from high school. She received high marks in all of her classes, but specifically excelled in arithmetic, geography and agriculture, according to Oakland Public Library archives.

Known as Virginia to her classmates, Coker was described as being very conscientious and a hard worker who also loved music and enjoyed traveling. Coker was also active in Greek life as a Berkeley undergraduate and, along with Ida Louise Jackson, was a charter member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, one of Berkeley's first Black sororities. Jackson, like Coker, was a pioneer in her own right and would become the first Black woman certified to teach in California.



After graduating from Berkeley in 1924 with a bachelor's degree in legal studies, Coker was urged by her father to pursue a degree at the university's law school.

William Stephens himself had a history of challenging legal standings, including in a letter he wrote in August 1931 that petitioned city officials about the unfair use of housing discrimination in his attempt to purchase a residence in San Francisco's Excelsior neighborhood.

Inspired by her father, Coker enrolled in Berkeley's law school, where she was one of two women in a class of 47 students. She passed the California Bar Examination in 1929, the same year she graduated. According to Harbin-Forte, Coker had "fulfilled a lifelong dream of becoming a lawyer."

Soon thereafter, she married fellow attorney George Coker. The couple were committed to helping bring racial diversity to the courts, and they tutored Black students for the bar exam. After moving to Alexandria, Virginia, they started their own private practice, providing law services for nearly 10 years before moving back to California and settling in Sacramento. In May 1939, Annie Coker received an appointment as an attorney in the State Office of the Legislative Council in Sacramento. She worked there for more than 25 years and served the council as deputy of the indexing section, prior to retiring in 1966. At the age of 83, Coker died in Sacramento on Feb. 11, 1986.

*Source: Ivan Natividad. "Legacy of Berkeley Law's first Black female graduate lives on." Berkeley News. July 20, 2020.  
Photo: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority*



Miriam Matthews (1905-2003), BA '27  
California's first credentialed Black librarian

**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 and the first hired by the Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL).

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. When she realized how few resources LAPL held on Black history, she began collecting materials on the subject, which she shared with librarians, researchers, and other users. She also spearheaded efforts in 1929 to establish "Negro History Week" in Los Angeles which then became "Negro History Month. From 1949 until her retirement in 1960, she served as regional librarian for LAPL, supervising twelve branch libraries in LAPL's South Central region.

She also served as both a member and chair of CLA's intellectual freedom committee during the late 1940s. In 1977, she was appointed to the California Heritage Preservation Commission, where she led efforts to identify important Black institutions. The Los Angeles Historical Society established an annual Miriam Matthews Award in recognition of her work, and in 2004, the Hyde Park branch of LAPL was renamed for her.

*Source: Gia White, Institute of European Studies Administrative Director  
Photo: California Library Association*



Eliza Atkins Gleason (1909-2009), MA '36  
First Black woman to earn PhD in Library Science

Pioneering Berkeley alumna **Eliza Atkins Gleason** (MA '36) was the first African American to earn a doctorate in library science. At the height of the Great Depression, in 1936, she completed

her M.A. in Library Science at the University of California, Berkeley. She had already demonstrated her commitment to learning and to the library profession by earning two bachelor's degrees, one at Fisk University and the other, in library science, at the University of Illinois. Additionally, she had held positions as an assistant librarian and as head of the library at the Municipal College for Negroes in Louisville, Kentucky. As she readied herself to return to the profession with her master's degree, she could not have foreseen that her work would be widely influential and that her career would be the subject of entries published in the *World Encyclopedia of Library and Information Services*, *Notable Black American Women*, the *Historical Dictionary of Librarianship*, and others.

In the late 1930s, she worked on her Ph.D. at the University of Chicago, where in 1940 she became the first African American to earn a doctorate in library science. One of her mentors there, Carleton B. Joeckel, had worked from 1914 to 1927 as director of the Berkeley Public Library, overseeing a significant increase in book circulation and the creation of new branches. Joeckel also taught the public library administration course offered by UC Berkeley's Department of Library Science. His dissertation, completed at Chicago in 1934, was published by the University of Chicago Press as "The Government of the American Public Library" in 1935, the year he joined the University of Chicago Graduate Library School faculty. Although Joeckel's and Atkins's time in Berkeley did not overlap, their familiarity with the city and the university gave them something in common beyond their research interests. Under his guidance, Eliza Atkins completed her dissertation, "The Government and Administration of Public Library Service to Negroes in the South," in 1940.

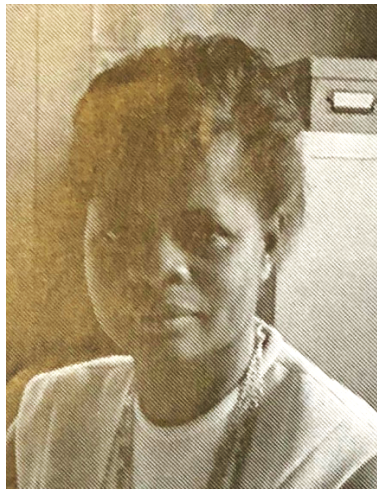
The next year, the University of Chicago Press published her dissertation as a book, titled *The Southern Negro and the Public Library*, under her married name, Eliza Atkins Gleason. Her research documented the existence of many racially segregated southern public libraries. Gleason noted pointedly that cities and towns in the South did not have the financial means to create two separate systems that were equal in terms of facilities, staff, and collections. She suggested that the better alternative was to fund a single library serving all equally. Joeckel endorsed the work with a blurb on the inside front flap of the book jacket: "Accurate and detailed in its factual basis, and carefully objective in its method of treatment, the study breaks new ground with extensive information concerning the dual system of service . . . ." The book was widely and positively reviewed and, two decades before passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, marked an early turning point in how some whites thought about public libraries and the people they served.

From Chicago, Gleason went to Atlanta University where she served as Dean of the newly established School of Library Service, designed to graduate African American students who would serve in the public libraries Gleason had studied as well as in academic libraries at southern Black colleges and universities and elsewhere. After World War II ended, Gleason left Atlanta to join her husband, a physician, in Chicago. There she raised a daughter — who went on

to become a college professor — and continued to work in the library field, eventually becoming the first African American to serve on the Council of the American Library Association. In recognition of Gleason’s profound effect on library science education and on libraries, the Library History Round Table of the American Library Association named its periodic award for the best book in library history after her.

*Source: Cheryl Knott. “Changing Minds, Making a Difference: Eliza Atkins Gleason.” UC Berkeley School of Information. Feb 4, 2019.*

*Photo: University of Louisville Photo Archives*



Assistant Professor Irene Sawyer (1929-1988)  
Co-director of Black Cultural Center and African American Art Historian

**Irene Sawyer** was an artist, art historian, and educator, who played a key role in developing the field of African American art history. Like other Black women art historians and archivists of the 1970s and 1980s, Sawyer recognized the critical role that comprehensive archival databases of work by Black artists would have for future students and researchers of the field. She worked over the course of her career to create these archival databases, and to develop the exhibitions, texts, and educational resources that they made possible.

A Bay Area native, Sawyer earned her B.A. and M.A. in Art History from Mills College, focusing in these early studies on ancient Greek art. In the late 1960s—in part influenced by the ideas of the Black Power and Black Arts Movements—she shifted her focus to art created by Black American artists. Sawyer taught high school in the Oakland Unified school district from 1958 until 1966, while maintaining her own artistic practice, focused on oil and collage. In 1969, she became an assistant professor at San Francisco State University.

In 1970, she was tapped to co-direct, alongside Dr. Margaret Wilkerson, the University of California, Berkeley’s new Black Cultural Center, imagined as a campus and community hub for research, dialogue, and education in Black art and performance. Although the Center was

short-lived, Sawyer remained affiliated with the University in a research capacity. From 1971-1976, she was the director and primary investigator for the Black Cultural Research Project. Supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, the Black Cultural Research Project was dedicated to documenting and researching the work of Black artists and craftspeople in the United States, beginning in the 1700s and culminating in Sawyer's own moment. From 1971-1974, Sawyer traveled across the country, visiting archives, meeting with curators and art educators, and interviewing artists. Although she worked under a rotating group of on-campus sponsors—almost entirely White, male scholars, like Folklore pioneer Alan Dundes, Anthropology professor William Bascom, and History professor Lawrence Levine—Sawyer herself was the project's director and tireless advocate. By 1976, she had compiled a collection of slides that was at the time the most comprehensive visual archive of the work of Black American artists in existence at that time. The collection included some 4,300 unique slides, along with transcribed interviews with artists, artist biographies, and an annotated bibliography. It is still held in the archives of the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley.

While working on the Black Cultural Research Project, Sawyer began doctoral studies in Art History at the University of California, Los Angeles. She worked with professor E. Maurice Bloch, writing a dissertation titled "The Afro-American Artist-Illustrator: A Cultural and Historical Survey, 1770-1950." Drawing on the breadth of knowledge granted by her work on the Black Cultural Research Project, Sawyer developed multiple art history courses, including a survey of African American art. She lectured at University of California, Berkeley, delivering probably its first course on African American art history, as well as at UC Davis, and later at Harvard. She was a W.E.B. Du Bois fellow at Harvard University from 1977-1979. She died in San Francisco in 1988.

*Source: Claire Ittner, PhD Candidate in the History of Art at UC Berkeley, in "Irene Sawyer." Hearst Museum of Anthropology.  
Photo: UC Berkeley Hearst Museum of Anthropology*



Helene Powell (1919-1989), BA '41  
Labor Activist and Gender Equality Advocate

**Helene Powell** was born on April 17, 1919, and raised by a close-knit family in a small Black community in San Jose. When Powell turned seventeen, her family moved to San Francisco, where she attended college preparatory courses at Lowell High School. After high school, Powell enrolled in University of California, Berkeley in 1937, earning a bachelor's degree in Spanish. There, Powell served as president of the Negro Students Club and participated in the Associated Student Government's Committee for Peace, California Youth Legislature, and Student Workers Federation.

Upon graduating in 1941, Powell took a job with Alexander Balart Coffee Company in San Francisco, participating in a three-day strike against the company over wages. Powell's involvement in the strike prompted her to become active in the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, Local 6. As a member of Local 6, Powell frequently served as shop stewardess, spoke at membership meetings, and conducted house meetings. In 1943 Powell was appointed as the ILWU's International Representative to Los Angeles. With Local 26, she organized aircraft workers at Aero Reclamation Company. In Los Angeles Powell became particularly active in organizing African American and Mexican American women warehouse workers and in housing reform for minorities. Powell also served as an election worker for the CIO Political Action Committee, registering Black voters around Los Angeles' Central Avenue. In the mid-1940s Powell returned to San Francisco and Local 6, becoming active in the Legislative Committee. As a member of the committee, Powell took up a variety of issues, including Local 6's involvement in the war effort, gender discrimination, rent control, and housing reform.

*Source and Photo: The California Historical Society*



Professor Barbara Christian (1943-2000)  
Berkeley's first Black woman to earn tenure and promotion to full professor

**Barbara Christian**, a pioneering scholar of literary criticism, was the first Black woman to be granted tenure at UC Berkeley (1978) and to be promoted to full professor (1986). Born and raised in St. Thomas of the United States' Virgin Islands, she dedicated her life to challenging prevailing ideas about race, gender, class, and epistemology within academia. She received her Bachelor's degree from Marquette University in 1963 and Master's from Columbia University in 1964—continuing on to earn a PhD in English Literature with honors in 1970. Christian taught at three colleges during graduate studies. In 1971, she accepted a position as associate professor at the University of California, Berkeley. Originally hired in the Department of English, she played an instrumental role in establishing the university's new Department of African American Studies. She participated in numerous teach-ins, talks, and colloquia on topics ranging from community education and justice to feminist theory and literature. As an advocate for underserved students in higher education, she mentored and empowered both graduate and undergraduate students.

Christian served as the Chair of African American Studies from 1978 to 1983, as well as the head of UC Berkeley's inaugural Ethnic Studies doctoral program from 1986 to 1989. Her research created a Black literary tradition that challenged academia's emphasis on theory and its consequential "cultural reproduction of the powerful." Her groundbreaking first book, *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition* (1980) won the American Book Award in 1983 and pioneered the study of Black women as literary subjects and creators. She contributed almost a hundred articles, books and journals in her tenure. Christian's *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (1985) analyzed the seminal works of Black women writers such as Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker. Her reputation in the field of Black literary scholarship led to her appointment as editor of the contemporary section of the Norton Anthology of African American Literature.

In 1991, Christian became the first African American to win the UC Berkeley's Distinguished Teaching Award. She noted: "I love the subject I study...I try to share with students what I do outside the classroom: the joys and difficulties of doing research, the papers I write, the institution-building necessary to the preservation and development of this field." Some of her many accolades include the Afro-American Society Hall of Fame award (1980); American Women's Educators Association award (1982); Modern Language Association MELUS award for contribution to ethnic studies (1994); and Gwendolyn Brooks Center award (1995). Christian received UC Berkeley's highest honor, the Berkeley Citation, right before passing away from lung cancer in 2000. "She was a path-breaking scholar," said Percy Hintzen, then-chairman of the department of African American studies. "Nobody did more to bring Black women writers into academic and popular recognition."

*Source: Mary Tan, 150W Project Assistant and UC Berkeley Class of 2020 from "Barbara T. Christian 1943–2000 Feminist literary critic, scholar, educator." Encyclopedia.com.*

*<https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/christian-barbara-t-1943-2000>.*

*Photo: Jane Scherr*



Professor June Jordan (1936-2002)  
Renowned "Poet of the People" and Political Activist

One of the most acclaimed Jamaican American writers of her generation, poet, playwright and essayist **June Jordan** was known for her fierce commitment to human rights and political activism. Over a career that produced twenty-seven volumes of work, Jordan engaged the fundamental struggles of her era: for civil rights, women's rights, and sexual freedom. Her poetry is known for its immediacy and accessibility as well as its interest in identity and the representation of personal, lived experience—her poetry is often deeply autobiographical. Jordan's work also frequently imagines a radical, globalized notion of solidarity amongst the world's marginalized and oppressed. Regarded as one of the key figures in the mid-century American social, political and artistic milieu, Jordan also taught at many of the country's most prestigious universities including Yale, State University of New York-Stony Brook, and the University of California-Berkeley, where she founded Poetry for the People. Her honors and awards included fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Massachusetts Council on the Arts, and the New York Foundation for the Arts, a Rockefeller Foundation grant, and the National Association of Black Journalists Award.

Born July 9, 1936, in Harlem, New York, Jordan had a difficult childhood and an especially fraught relationship with her father. Her parents were both Jamaican immigrants and, she recalled in *Civil Wars: Selected Essays, 1963-80* (1981), "for a long while during childhood I was relatively small, short, and, in some other ways, a target for bully abuse. In fact, my father was the first regular bully in my life." But Jordan also has positive memories of her childhood and it was during her early years that she began to write. Though becoming a poet "did not compute" for her parents, they did send the teen-aged Jordan to prep schools where she was the only Black student. Her teachers encouraged her interest in poetry, but did not introduce her to the work of any Black poets. After high school Jordan enrolled in Barnard College in New York



City. Though she enjoyed some of her classes and admired many of the people she met, she felt fundamentally at odds with the predominately white, male curriculum and left Barnard without graduating. Throughout her long career, Jordan gained renown as both an essayist and political writer, penning a regular column for the *Progressive*. *Some of Us Did Not Die: New and Selected Essays of June Jordan* (2002) was published the year of her passing from breast cancer.

Source: *The Poetry Foundation*, "June Jordan, 1936–2002." <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/june-jordan>  
Photo: Gwen Phillips



Michèle Woods Jones (1945- ), BA '69  
Berkeley's first Black woman to be Staff Ombudsperson

**Michèle Woods Jones** was the first Black woman to serve as Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for Business Affairs and Ombudsperson for Staff at the University of California, Berkeley. Michele Woods Jones came to Berkeley as an undergraduate in 1966 from Monterey, California, after spending two years at Merritt Community College. She was part of the first cohort of Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) students and lived in student coop housing. In her oral history, she recalls observing the Third World Strike unfold around her during an era of radical social transformation. Woods graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology and History in 1969. Upon graduating, Woods Jones held increasingly responsible positions on the Berkeley campus, from her first job as counselor in the Educational Opportunity Program to Director of Student Services, and finally Staff Ombudsperson. She served from 1970 to 1991. She earned a Master of Science Degree in Counseling Psychology from California State University Hayward, California (CSU) while working at Berkeley. Her extensive Counseling Credentials include K-12, Community College and Marriage and Family Counseling.

Since retiring from UC Berkeley to live in Hampton, Virginia, Woods Jones was offered a consulting position with the City of Hampton. She worked for the City Manager as a consultant to the City, to develop a process in which she coordinated the work of appointed citizens, both adults and high school students, along with City staff, to develop a response to race relations

concerns in the City of Hampton. “It took almost two years, but the birth of the Citizens' Unity Commission (CUC) was a wonderful outcome,” said Jones.

In 1995, Woods Jones created her own successful business, LeAun Consulting Services, where she is the CEO and Senior Consultant. She is a Communications expert and is skilled in Organizational Development, Conflict Resolution, Multicultural/Multiracial Communication, Problem-Solving, Relationship Building, and Leadership Development. Since then she has managed over 75 major contracts in which she provided professional advising, workshop facilitation, and training and development for diversity and inclusion efforts. She has received numerous awards for projects bringing diverse people together to collectively solve problems in community relations. Woods Jones says, "My most earnest personal goal while at Cal was to enhance the life experiences of students and staff." Upon retirement, she was presented with the The Berkeley Citation, the campus's highest honor.

*Source: Sheila Humphreys, 150W History Project Co-Chair and Emerita Director of Diversity, EECS  
Photo: Michèle Woods Jones*



Professor Jewelle Taylor Gibbs (1933- ), MSW '70, PhD '80  
Noted author and clinical psychologist

**Jewelle Taylor (Gibbs)** was born in Stratford, Connecticut and raised in Ansonia of the Naugatuck Valley near Yale University. Her earliest memories concerned family, the church, and the beach on Long Island Sound. Her father founded the NAACP of Connecticut in 1944 and led the organization for twenty-five years as its inaugural president. He was also politically active as Vice Chair of the Democratic Party, exposing young Jewelle to the likes of Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and prominent Chicago Congressman William L. Dawson. In 1950, Taylor chose to attend Radcliffe College because of its true co-ed nature. With mixed Black and white heritage, she organized to protest segregation in the dormitories and joined Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) Sorority, the oldest Black sorority in the nation. AKA gave Taylor a network of role models and peers as the only Black student in her class. During her senior year, she met James Lowell Gibbs Jr., a graduate student in anthropology at Harvard and the university's first African-American resident tutor. Wedded in

1956, they were one of the earliest Black couples to appear in the social pages of The New York Times' wedding announcements—an editorial decision that “reflected the changing racial attitudes in American society.”

Soon after, the new couple moved to a Liberian village for Mr. Gibbs' anthropological study. Living in a mud hut without electricity, plumbing, or television brought the two daily adventures and unmatched closeness. In 1966, Mr. Gibbs accepted the position of anthropology professor at Stanford University and eventually became its first tenured African-American faculty member. When their two sons were of schooling age, Gibbs began pursuing a Master's in Social Work at the University of California, Berkeley. She graduated in 1970 and served as a clinical social worker at Stanford's Cowell Health Services while her husband became the university's first dean of undergraduate studies. Her interests in minority mental health brought her back to UC Berkeley for a PhD in Clinical Psychology. Hopes of opening a private practice stalled when Proposition 13 (a cap on property taxes) in California passed and limited funding for social services. She turned her attention to teaching as assistant professor at the UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare in 1979, became an associate professor in 1983, and then a full professor in 1986. Her research interests included juvenile justice issues, adolescent psychosocial problems, biracial and bicultural identity issues, and urban social policy.

In her oral history with UC Berkeley's Bancroft Library, Gibbs named Dorothy Height (former president of the National Council of Negro Women), Thurgood Marshall (first Black Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court), Leon Higginbotham (civil rights advocate and judge), and Eleanor Roosevelt (former first lady of the U.S. and human rights activist) as role models in her work. Professor Gibbs mentored a generation of students and faculty. In 1993, she was named the Zellerbach Family Fund Professor of Social Policy, Community Change and Practice and became the first African American professor appointed to an endowed chair in the entire University of California system. “This ‘first black’ designation was a mixed blessing,” she wrote in her 2014 autobiography *Destiny's Child: Memoirs of a Preacher's Daughter*. “You are expected to represent the whole race, you are always under the microscope, and you can't afford to fail.” Despite these pressures, she received the highest academic honor at the University of California, the Berkeley Citation, and testified before Congress during her tenure. In 2010, she and her husband moved to a retirement community in Oakland.

*Source: Mary Tan, 150W Project Assistant and UC Berkeley Class of 2020, from “An Oral History of Jewelle T. Gibbs.” The Bancroft Library, 2010.*

*Photo: UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare*



A Week with Rosa Parks at Our Home in East Oakland, May 1980

Photo Courtesy: Donald Johnson, 1980

**Professor Daphne Muse**  
Inaugural Elder-in-Residence, Black Studies Collaboratory

**Daphne Muse** is a writer, activist, educator, editor, social commentator and cultural broker. In February 2021, Muse was appointed the Inaugural Elder-in-Residence for the Black Studies Collaboratory (BSC) in the Department of African American Studies at the University of California - Berkeley. The Elder-in-Residence is part of a larger Abolition Democracy Fellows Program, which will bring together artists, activists, locals, and scholars to amplify the interdisciplinary, political, and world-building work of Black Studies.

Born in Washington, DC to parents who were part of the second wave of migration up South under *The Warmth of Other Suns*, Muse graduated in 1967 from Fisk University where she was anointed by the hand of University Librarian and Harlem Renaissance writer and poet Arna Bontemps. She went on to teach in DC Public Schools before managing *Drum and Spear*, a bookstore and cultural center founded by members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

In 1971, she migrated to Northern California. Three weeks after her arrival, Muse became a secretary to the Legal Defense Team for the Angela Davis Trial. In 1972, she joined the faculty of UC Berkeley's Afro-American Studies Department and went on to serve on the faculty of the English Department and as the research coordinator for the McNair Scholars Program. As a

cultural broker and in collaboration with her colleagues Francophone visionary Dr. VeVe Clark, Reference Librarian Phyllis Bischof and English Professor Dr. Erskine Peters, she organized readings, events and exhibits at UC Berkeley that included Pulitzer Prize-Winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks, author Shirley Graham DuBois, anthropologist and choreographer Katherine Dunham and iconic author James Baldwin.

Muse also served on the faculty of Mills College in the Ethnic Studies and English Departments and as the director of the Women's Leadership Institute. There she taught a survey course on Black Women Writers, Expository Writing and Multicultural Children's Literature. At Mills, she also mounted "On These I Stand: An Exhibit of Rare Black Books and Collectibles" (1978 and 2014). She also produced the "Right-on Rainbow Children's Book and Film Festival" (1978-1983) and brought a host of world-renowned scholars, artists, writers and activists to campus including the Quilters of Gees Bend, author and activist Yolanda King, novelist and poet Alice Walker and prize-winning children's author Eloise Greenfield. From 1978-1984, she also produced the Right on Rainbow Children's Books and Film Festival.

In her role, she also served on the Advisory Committee for the Office of the President at Mills. As director of the Women's Leadership Institute (WLI), she established a program for undergraduate and graduate fellows, collaborated with colleagues on establishing guidelines for the Barbara Lee Chair, developed an interdisciplinary curriculum and created partnerships with community-based organizations to better serve students and faculty in raising the profile of the college as an institution critically essential to the culture of Oakland and the greater network of women's colleges.

Muse's work as a cultural broker also includes two years as the program director for the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame, serving as a publicist for Alice Walker from 1979-1984, and consulting with the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley on the acquisition of Pulitzer Prize winning poet and author Gwendolyn Brooks' papers (1917-1980). From 2014-2016 Muse served as a consultant to Google Talks, bringing authors, artists, and journalists to the series including Alice Walker, photographers and co-founders of Question Bridge Hank Thomas and Chris Johnson, and journalist Belva Davis.

She is the author of four books, a screenplay and series of poems, including her most recent "Love Poem to Harriet." Her commentaries and essays have been published in the Washington Post, Black Scholar, and The Atlantic and aired on Public Radio. For more than 40 years, she has worked with clients in realizing their works from concept to published manuscript, scripts for TV shows, narratives for museum exhibits and rites of passage. She spent six years as a lead writer for a partnership between the Education Division Commission on Major League Baseball and Scholastic, Inc. and served as a writer for Norman Lear's Declaration of Independence Road Show.

Muse also serves on the advisory board of Julia Morgan School for Girls and was appointed an Ambassador of the Word by the César Egidio Serrano Foundation in Italy. Her community service includes serving on the selection committee for the Yoshiyama Awards (1996-2001) on behalf of the Hitachi Foundation and on the Board of ARTAIDSART based in Cape Town/Khayelitsha, South Africa since its founding in 2003, and donating books for rites of passage including birthdays, graduations and Halloween. She is the recipient of Black Women Organized for Action Living Legend Award (1973), ALA YA Notables List (1998), Daisy Award Recipient San Francisco Bay Area Girl Scout Council (1998), Forever New Frontiers Radio Essayist Honoring Gwendolyn Brooks (2004), and served as 2018 Writer-in-Residence at the International Peace and Art Center (Oakland, CA). In 2017, she was invited to write a Black History Month Tribute for Public Radio to Maya Angelou “Life Doesn’t Frighten Me: Maya Angelou’s Messages to Young Readers.”

Recently, Muse has made presentations at the SF Commonwealth Club, USC, UC Berkeley, the Library of Congress, and the University of Baltimore based on “The Daphne Muse Collection of Correspondence: Documenting Black Life and Culture Across the Diaspora” from 1958 to the present.

*Source: Sheila Humphreys, 150W History Project Co-Chair and Emerita Director of Diversity, EECS  
Photo: Daphne Muse*



Professor Margaret Wilkerson (1938- ), PhD '72  
Educational activist and arts advocate

**Margaret B. Wilkerson** is a scholar, theatre director, experienced administrator and educational activist who devoted her life and career to social justice and equity in education and philanthropy. She is Professor Emerita at the University of California at Berkeley having returned to the San Francisco Bay Area after retiring from the Ford Foundation in New York City. At Ford, she was Director of Media, Arts and Culture, with programmatic responsibilities

for the Foundation's grantmaking in the U.S., Africa and the Middle East, Russia, Asia, and Latin America, after serving briefly as Program Officer in Higher Education responsible for U.S. grantmaking related to diversifying colleges and universities. Two of the Foundation's signature programs, U.S. Artists, and the Public Service Media Initiative (Global Perspectives in a Digital Age), were developed under her guidance.

The author of *9 Plays by Black Women*, the first anthology of its kind, she has published extensively on the playwright Lorraine Hansberry. Her biography of Hansberry, based on unrestricted access to her unpublished papers, is projected for publication by the University of Michigan Press in 2011-12. Wilkerson has also published numerous essays and articles on educational equity and access.

During her many years at Berkeley, she taught dramatic literature, directed campus productions and chaired the Department of African American Studies and what is now the Theater, Dance and Performance Studies Department, leading the development of new Ph.D. programs for each department. Earlier, Wilkerson was Director of Berkeley's Center for the Study, Education, and Advancement of Women, a program of research and academic enrichment, and taught English and Drama at Jordan High School in Watts (Los Angeles), her birthplace.

As an active member of the Berkeley Academic Senate, she served on a number of committees, including Special Scholarships, Admissions, and Senate appointments as well as administrative committees on affirmative action in admissions, and Title IX policies in athletics. She has served on the Board of Trustees of Mills College and the University of Redlands; was a faculty member of the Lilly Endowment Workshop for the Liberal Arts, a program of professional and institutional development for colleges and universities throughout the country; and served on a number of theatre and higher education committees and boards. She also taught in the Harvard Executive Leadership Program and the Management Program.

Wilkerson is a Kennedy Center Fellow of the American Theatre, and recipient of various educational and theatre awards and national fellowships (e.g. Career Achievement Award for Outstanding Educator from American Theatre in Higher Education; Scholar's Residency at Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Study and Conference Center in Italy; Award for Academic Leadership from Council of Independent Colleges Dean's Institute; Profile of Excellence from KGO-TV in San Francisco; research fellowships from the Ford and the Rockefeller Foundations.) Wilkerson received her B.A. in history from the University of Redlands, M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Dramatic Art from the University of California at Berkeley, and the honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, from her undergraduate alma mater, the University of Redlands, and Saint John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Currently, she is an independent consultant for colleges and universities and for arts organizations. She serves on the Mills College Board of Trustees where she just completed service on the Mills College Presidential Search Committee (which recently named its first African-American, a woman, for its 13th President). She is currently on the Board of the Independent Television Service, the External Advisory Board for the Center for Studies in Higher Education at UC Berkeley, and chairs the Board of Directors of Bear Arts Foundation.

*Source and photo: UC Berkeley Center for Studies in Higher Education*



Representative Barbara Lee (1946-), MSW '75  
U.S. Representative for California's 13th congressional district

Everything **Barbara Lee** (MSW '75) does – be it campaigning against poverty, advocating for AIDS research, or voting against giving the President the power to declare war – is informed by the social work values she learned at the UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare.

"A clinical psychologist must speak out on every crime against humanity that has produced discontent, sick and frustrated individuals," Lee wrote in her application for admission to UC Berkeley's School of Social Welfare, "Whether that be through politics, development of programs, or helping effect change in the various social institutions which I see as responsible for this discontent."

Born in El Paso, Texas in 1946, Lee quickly grew to become an activist and advocate for her community and the most vulnerable within it. Throughout her young life she encountered the lasting legacy of discrimination that had enslaved her great-grandmother—"whites-only" drinking fountains, denial to movie theaters and drive-in restaurants, and segregated schools.

Life in California didn't turn out to be much better than it was in Texas for a young Black woman. Schools in the town of San Fernando, where her family moved in the early 1960s, were



also segregated. In fact, with help from the local NAACP, Lee battled to be allowed to tryout for cheerleading at San Fernando High School.

Lee was not immune to the hardships she saw around her – at the age of 16 she became pregnant and later had to receive public assistance in order to make ends meet. The experience was humbling, and gave her important insight into the stress and fear a mother feels at the prospect of not being able to meet her children’s basic needs of food, shelter and clothing.

Lee received a HUD fellowship to attend the School of Social Welfare in 1973 and enrolled in the community mental health track, focusing on clinical social work. In her work she found a lack of clinical treatments relevant to African Americans and went on to found the Community Health Alliance for Neighborhood Growth and Education (CHANGE). Soon after receiving her degree she traveled to Washington, DC to work for then Congressman Ron Dellums (MSW '62). "[Dellums] asked me if I would come back and head up his office," said Lee in a speech in 2001 where she was honored by the Social Welfare Alumni Association. "I said, 'Wait Ron, I want to be a social worker. I want to be the best psychotherapist in the world.' That was my goal. Never did I believe or think that I would be here! But I always say that what I was taught in training as a clinician and as a psychotherapist is to let your life evolve, understand what’s coming, and don’t program yourself too much, because otherwise you may miss some opportunities. And somehow, I got to where I am going. But I just want to say it has been with your help, and with your guidance, and with the foundation of this School that I’ve been able to move forward and fight the good fight."

Lee served in the California state assembly and state senate, and was elected to the US Congress in 1988 to represent California’s Ninth Precinct, which includes Berkeley and Oakland. She has held the position ever since, and today currently serves as Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus. She is perhaps best known for being the only member of Congress to oppose President Bush’s request for authorization to use “all necessary and appropriate force” after the September 11, 2001 attacks, but has been involved in countless reforms aimed at improving health and education, the environment and those in poverty.

*Source: UC Berkeley School of Social Welfare, “Congresswoman Barbara Lee (MSW '75) on fighting the good fight.” Jan 2, 2018. <https://socialwelfare.berkeley.edu/news/congresswoman-barbara-lee-msw-%E2%80%9975-fighting-good-fight>*

*Photo: U.S. House of Representatives*



Clothilde "Cloey" V. Hewlett, BA '76 & JD '79  
First Person of Color as Executive Director of the Cal Alumni Association

**Clothilde “Cloey” Hewlett** received her B.A. in political science from UC Berkeley in 1976 and her J.D. from the UC Berkeley School of Law in 1979. Prior to joining Cal Alumni Association, Cloey’s career has spanned law enforcement, state regulatory oversight, and government relations. She has served California under three different governors.

Cloey’s life growing up was framed by poverty from experiencing rural poverty in upstate New York, to tenement living in Philadelphia to San Francisco surrounded by crime, drugs and violence. Her childhood reflected the changes being advocated by the Civil Rights movement of the 20th Century; her mother helped to train the Freedom Riders who participated in the desegregation missions in the South. Cloey’s life changed at the Community Streetwork Center in San Francisco when a volunteer named Jerry Brown—who later became Governor of California--encouraged her to attend UC Berkeley.

Cloey began her career as a pioneer in law enforcement as an Assistant District Attorney in San Francisco. She was one of the first Women Peace officers and became a member of the San Francisco Police Commission. During her tenure, Cloey worked to implement community based policing and police officer de-escalation training. After leaving law enforcement Cloey went to the State Bar of California and created the Moral Character unit for admission to practice law in California which is still in place today.

Cloey returned to her passion she discovered at UC Berkeley: public policy. As Interim Director of the State of California’s Department of General Services and Undersecretary of the State and Consumer Services Agency, she managed 16 state agencies with oversight over procurement, real estate, and telecommunications; victim’s compensation, personnel, and information

technology; consumer affairs and the CalPERS and CalSTRS retirement systems. She led the team during California's 2001 energy crisis, and created the Flex Your Power Campaign. During the events on September 11, 2001, her responsibilities included oversight of the State of California's Victim's Compensation Board, providing support to survivors and the families of victims.

Cloey continued her path as a partner at K&L Gates and then Nossaman, LLP, advising national and global corporations, as well as sports teams. She focused on government contracting, crisis management, appropriations, and diversity initiatives. She's worked on signature sports and local economic development efforts for the Santa Clara Stadium Authority and Sacramento Kings; Cloey served as the co-chair of FIRST Community Advisory Council for the Golden 1 Entertainment Sports Center.

Throughout her career, Cloey has been committed to and actively involved in raising the next generation of leaders. Cloey was a co-founder and first President of Black Women Lawyers of Northern California. For over 12 years, she has been a member of the Board of Directors for the San Francisco 49ers Foundation. Cloey has also been extensively involved with her alma mater, serving as a board member for CAA; as a speaker, panel moderator, reunion co-chair for Berkeley School of Law; and honorary reunion chair for her 40th reunion. In 2016, Cloey became the second woman and first person of color in over 144 years as Executive Director of the Cal Alumni Association.

For her dedication to these efforts, Cloey has been recognized for her significant professional and community contributions. She is a recipient of the Commission on the Status of Women Leadership Against Domestic Violence Award; the Black Women Lawyers of Northern California Outstanding Achievement Award; San Francisco Police Department Award for Bravery. Cloey has received CAA's Excellence in Service Award; the Adhama Award from Berkeley School of Law's Journal of African-American Law & Policy; Wiley Manuel Law Foundation Legal Pioneer award; and the Berkeley School of Law California Law Review Alumni of the Year Award. She has also received the Silver SPUR Award for Lifetime Civic Achievement; the Latino Journal's Excellence in Public Service award; Cloey has been honored on the National Diversity Council's Most Powerful and Influential Women of California; San Francisco Business Times Forever Influential Honor Roll; and Women Leading Change from the National Coalition of 100 Black Women.

*Source: Cal Alumni Association*

*Photo: California Department of Financial Protection & Innovation*



C. Diane Howell (1950-2008), PhD '78  
Berkeley's first Black woman to earn PhD in Psychology

**Cecilia Diane Howell** was a community leader born July 20, 1950, in Washington, D.C. A social and political powerbroker in her own right, Howell used her multifaceted enterprise to promote issues of economic empowerment, education access and political and social activism in every way conceivable. The Chicago native earned a B.A. in psychology from Barnard College and Ph.D. in clinical psychology from UC Berkeley. Howell was active with the Bay Area Association of Black Psychologists for many years and was elected president of the association in 1983. Recognizing the need to increase the visibility of African American psychologists in the Bay Area, she published the association's first newsletter, *Black Perspectives*, in 1984.

Through her work in her profession and in various social and political circles, Howell recognized the need to better promote African American businesses in the Oakland San Francisco Bay Area. In 1989, she published the first edition of *Black Business Listings* with no staff and no money, only a strong will. After serving as the local coordinator for the Black Expo USA for several years in the early 1990s, Dr. Howell took over as producer of the Oakland Black Expo in 1997. In 2000, she established the nonprofit organization SEEDS (Self-Empowerment through Entrepreneurship and Dreams), which has awarded more than \$25,000 in scholarships supporting the educational aspirations of local youth.

Over the course of her illustrious career, Dr. Howell was recognized by numerous organizations. The most recent of these include the Social Entrepreneur Award from the National Association of Women Business Owners, the Local Hero Award from KQED, the 2008 Community Award from 100 Black Men of the Bay Area, a Citation of Achievement from the Oakland City Council, and the Woman of the Year Award by Sacramento's Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. She passed away on Christmas Eve from complications from pneumonia at 58.

Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums was among many who paid tribute to Howell upon learning of her passing. “I am deeply saddened by the passing of Dr. C. Diane Howell, who meant so much to our community as a leader, friend and pioneer of social entrepreneurship,” said Dellums. “She was a tireless advocate for the African American community and small business owners. Dr. Howell empowered the community and helped all whom she touched to realize their potential.” Congresswoman Barbara Lee called her a “beacon of optimism and hope, particularly for the owners of minority businesses throughout the Bay Area.” Lee also stated, “Dr. Howell was a great friend and human being. I was proud to call her my sister, and I will miss her kindness, wise counsel and her love. My thoughts and prayers are with her family, her staff, and those in the business community whose lives were enriched by Dr. Howell’s unwavering commitment to her community.”

*Source: Jill Tucker. “C. Diane Howell dies - black business leader.” SFGate, Jan. 5, 2009.*

*Photo: Giselle Bonds*



Cynthia "Cynt" Marshall (1959- ), BA '81

First African American female CEO in the NBA & Berkeley's first Black cheerleader

In February 2018, **Cynthia Marshall** took over as CEO of the Dallas Mavericks—becoming the first African American female CEO in the NBA. She also inherited an organization in crisis, after a Sports Illustrated story revealed rampant sexual harassment, incidents of domestic abuse, and a toxic culture. But Marshall, a lifelong pioneer, is familiar with navigating difficult situations. The Cal alum was the first African American cheerleader at UC Berkeley in the late 1970s and the first in her family to graduate from college. She was also the first Black head of the North Carolina Chamber of Commerce. During her more than three decades as a high-up at AT&T, she adopted four kids and survived colon cancer.

Marshall grew up in Richmond, not far from the Berkeley campus. She was born in Alabama, but her parents didn’t want “their kids to grow up in the Jim Crow South.” Despite the odds against her, Marshall went to college, with a full ride to Berkeley. She studied business administration, with a focus on organizational behavior and human resources. When she

graduated, she had 13 job offers and she took the one that offered a fast-track management program and that paid the most: \$16,800. Working her way up, she served as president of AT&T in North Carolina and then senior vice president of human resources and chief diversity officer for the national corporation. When she started out, she was managing long-distance operators in San Francisco's Mission neighborhood. She stayed with AT&T for 36 years.

When she was finally ready to retire, Dow Chemical Company invited her to help pioneer an inclusion program, and she couldn't say no. Before the project had even ended, Mark Cuban called from the Mavericks. She continued her work in diversity and inclusion, planning to meet with every single one of the 140 employees at headquarters "to find out who they are, why they're doing this job, what their vision is, any issues." She's over 95 percent done. All of it, Marshall believes, is possible because of a combination of the things she's learned throughout her life, from Cal to AT&T and beyond. That's why the advice she always gives students is to try everything. "Soak up the whole experience," Marshall advises. It'll build a foundation "you can stand on for the rest of your life."

*Source: Kelly Dunleavy O'Mara. "Always a Maverick: Cynthia Marshall Made Her Mark Before Dallas." Cal Alumni Association, 2018.*

*Photo: United Talent*



Assistant Professor VèVè Amasasa Clark (1944-1997), PhD '83  
Scholar and pioneer in "diaspora literacy"

**VèVè Amasasa Clark**, born December 14, 1944, joined the ancestors December 1, 2007. Raised in Queens, New York, Clark received her bachelor's and master's degrees from Queens College. She first came to the University of California, Berkeley, as a graduate student and completed her Ph.D. in French and ethnology in 1983. After earning tenure at Tufts University, Clark returned to UC Berkeley in 1991 as an associate professor in the Department of African American Studies (AAS).

Clark's scholarship, teaching, and service reflect her passionate commitment to the field of African American and African diaspora studies. Especially concerned with the interplay between

vernacular and literary epistemologies, Clark’s work consistently challenged binary paradigms for reading and understanding African diasporic responses to slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism. Fluent in French, Spanish and Creole, conversant in Wolof, and with training in literary studies and anthropology, Clark embodied interdisciplinarity. Clark often spoke of infrastructure as a means to dismantle institutional barriers and foster social justice through the academy.

A recipient of numerous awards, Clark won a Guggenheim Fellowship for her research on Katherine Dunham, the legendary African American dancer, anthropologist and social activist. Clark also authored numerous essays on Haitian theater, African American dance and Caribbean literature. One of her best-known essays coined the term “diaspora literacy” and in so doing helped to define the rapidly expanding field of African diaspora studies. “Developing Diaspora Literacy: Allusion in Maryse Conde’s *Hérémakhonon*,” first published in 1989. Profoundly engaged with the connections among historical narratives, cultural productions and political possibilities for resistance and change, Clark argued that analyses absent “diaspora literacy” could not succeed in assessing either the symbolic or material significance of African diasporic cultural production.

A teacher par excellence, Clark ensured that her students discovered, honored, and articulated their own voices in the classroom. Employing a variety of multimedia, Clark made “high” literary theory accessible and relevant to her students without reducing its complexity. She made herself available as well; both undergraduate and graduate students lined up outside her door and she regularly extended office hours in order to make time for each student. The University recognized Clark’s exemplary service by awarding her the first Social Sciences Distinguished Service Award in 1996. She died in 1997.

*Source and photo: Ula Y. Taylor, Sara E. Johnson, Trica D. Keaton, Lisa Ze Winters. University of California Academic Senate In Memoriam, “VèVè A. Clark, Associate Professor of African American Studies, UC Berkeley, 1944 – 2007.”*  
[https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/\\_files/inmemoriam/html/veveclark.html](https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/_files/inmemoriam/html/veveclark.html)



Pearl Alice Marsh (1946- ), PhD '84  
Berkeley's first Black woman to earn PhD in Political Science

With a Master's Degree in Public Health and a PhD in Political Science, **Pearl Alice Marsh** was the first African-American woman to achieve a PhD in Berkeley's Political Science Department 1984. She has since retired after a decades-long service in the United States Congress in Washington D.C., focused on global health and African foreign policy. She was also the Associate Director for the Berkeley-Stanford Joint Center for African Studies between 1985-93. As a Democratic Congressional staff member, she wrote legislation to preserve and make available electronically to the public the post-Civil War Freedmen's Bureau Records, and wrote an original \$15 billion bill to fund the U.S. global HIV/AIDS initiative, targeting 15 African countries, responsible for saving millions of lives globally. Her life of political activism in the San Francisco Bay Area spans decades of social movements and public service. Since retiring, she continues to live as a political activist and pursue her retirement research interest in the migration of African Americans to rural Oregon. Her related publications include articles in the Oregon Historical Quarterly and a collection of memoirs, "But Not Jim Crow: Family Memories of African American Loggers of Maxville, Oregon."

**How did Berkeley shape your academic and life experiences?**

"Berkeley afforded me the best academic training anyone could want. I studied personally with renowned faculty who were revered in universities around the world. The academic rigor at Berkeley prepared me as a critical thinker and strategist in foreign policy, politics, and social activism."

**How has being a woman affected your career and activism?**

"I had the fortune to come of age as an African American woman during the social and political movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Being both Black and female allowed me to bring feminist thought to my Civil Rights activism and racial awareness to my feminist activism. Being Black and female in terms of career was a mixed bag and, at times, difficult to determine whether my race or gender was at issue."

**What advice would you like to give to the next generation?**

Marsh has advice for young people who might be discouraged by lack of progress on social and economic issues: "I would tell young people their anxiety is warranted. But I would also say, turn that sense of discouragement and despondency into positive impatience and action. Know that, wherever you find yourself, there always is a purpose to fulfill." Frederick Douglass said, "power conceded nothing without a fight, it never did and it never will." Sometimes change comes in leaps and bounds and other times it's scratched out inch by inch. To paraphrase Nelson Mandela, "Change is always impossible until it happens."

*Source and photo: UC Berkeley Political Science Department*





Professor Patricia Turner, PhD '85  
Folklorist, Scholar and Professor

**Patricia Turner** is a professor in World Arts and Cultures and African American Studies whose research focuses on racial dynamics as they surface in folklore and popular culture. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science from SUNY College at Oneonta and a master's and Ph.D. in rhetoric from the University of California, Berkeley. Her dissertation, "Tampered Truths: A Rhetorical Analysis of Antebellum Slave Narratives" challenged existing views of slave narratives. A Humanities Graduate Research Grant funded her work in the summer of 1983 reading original slave narrative texts housed in the Moorland-Spingarn Collection at Howard University, the Library of Congress, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and the New York Historical Society. Her fourth book, *Crafted Lives: Stories and Studies of African American Quilters*, was published by University of Mississippi Press in 2009.

Turner was appointed senior dean of the UCLA College in June 2016, and has served as dean and vice provost of UCLA's Division of Undergraduate Education since December 2012. Turner came to UCLA from UC Davis where, in 1999, she was appointed vice provost for undergraduate education. From 2004 to 2006, she served as interim dean of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies, before returning to the position of vice provost of undergraduate education in the spring of 2007. Turner is a member of UCDC Academic Advisory Council. She also has served as executive director of the Reinvention Center, a national consortium of deans and vice provosts of undergraduate education at research universities.

Changing perceptions through African American folklore, in her own words:

"I was in graduate school earning my Ph.D. in rhetoric when I attended a lecture on the ways in which a culture's most popular proverbs are a reflection of that culture's worldview. It stirred memories of my childhood – listening to sermons, hearing stories of past African American experiences. I realized then that I could apply rhetorical theory to African American folklore. It was an important field for me to enter – introducing the many traditions of African American folklore allows us to see how extraordinarily diverse the experience is.

As a professor of African American Studies, I seek to give a richer set of examples from which we can derive our scholarship of the field. In my book, *I Heard It Through The Grapevine*, I show how misperceptions about African American culture can move quickly to popular belief. My book *Crafted Lives* follows the traditions of African American quilt making, an area rich in folklore, artistry, and diversity. It is through the real stories and real examples that we can make changes in perception. My hope is that through teaching and writing, I can help all people better understand the richness and diversity of African American culture."

*Source and photo: UCLA Faculty page, Department of African American Studies*



Professor Lorraine Fleming, PhD '85  
Berkeley's first Black woman to earn PhD in Civil Engineering

**Lorraine Fleming** became the first African American woman to receive a doctoral degree in Civil Engineering from UC Berkeley in 1985. Prior to her time at Berkeley, she received her bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering from Howard University, to which she returned as a professor after completing her PhD and where she has served as Interim Dean of the College of Engineering, Architecture, and Computer Science and Chair of the Department of Civil Engineering at Howard University. Lorraine's vision was to return to her alma mater with the knowledge and credentials needed to provide academic and career mentorship to students like herself who had little to no guidance in the engineering field during the formative years of their undergraduate education.

Fleming currently leads multiple engaging mentorship programs at Howard University. One of which, the Global Education and Awareness Research Undergraduate Program (GEAR-UP), provides students each year the opportunity to travel across the globe to one of eight countries to work on focused international research projects. The program's aim is to equip students to be globally minded young professionals by exposing them to cultures in emerging environments in

places like Thailand, Indonesia, Romania, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Tanzania where social issues and challenges differ greatly from those experienced in the United States.

The second program spearheaded by Professor Fleming is the Howard University Science, Engineering, and Mathematics Program (HUSEM), which serves to offer undergraduate students opportunities to get involved in research opportunities unlike those they may get involved in during internships in order to broaden their horizons and open the potential path to graduate and doctoral studies.

In addition to being a licensed professional engineer and a Fellow of the American Society of Civil Engineers, Fleming has received a number of accolades for her extensive research and initiative in improving and enhancing the experience of African American students in STEM disciplines. Her HUSEM program was bestowed the Exemplary Program Award for Mathematics, Science and Engineering Education by the national Quality Education for Minorities (QEM) Network in 2004. Lorraine was selected as a 2005 Carnegie Scholar and as a 2008 Golden Torch Award recipient for the Engineering Educator of the Year by the National Society of Black Engineers for her dedication to understanding both undergraduate teaching and learning. In 2015, she received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring (PAESMEM), the highest mentoring award in the country, from President Barack Obama at the White House. On June 16, 2022, Lorraine was inducted into the Academy of Distinguished Alumni by the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering (CEE) at UC Berkeley for outstanding professional accomplishments.

*Source: Sheila Humphreys, 150W History Project Co-Chair and Emerita Director of Diversity, EECS  
Photo: Lorraine Fleming*



Cara Stanley, BA '86  
Executive Director of the Student Learning Center & Director of Summer Bridge

**Cara Stanley** earned her B.A. from the University of California at Berkeley in Ethnic Studies and M.A. from San Francisco State in Interdisciplinary Social Science. For over three decades, Cara has worked with Cal undergraduates to empower them to embrace their authentic selves, live up to their intellectual gifts, and take ownership of their academic journeys. In addition to directing both the Student Learning Center and Summer Bridge Program, Stanley has taught courses on Black student identity and Black feminist thought as a Senior Lecturer since 2007 in Berkeley's Department of African American Studies, and a Guest Lecturer in the Department of Ethnic Studies. In AAS, Among the courses in which she lectured are *Black and Female: Eyeing the Spirit*; *The Life and Work of Audrey Lorde*; and *Empire Strikes Black: Capitalism and the Intersection of Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Television Series "Empire."* She has received numerous awards for her leadership, management, and service to a wide variety of campus organizations. Stanley's skill as a manager has been acknowledged through the campus "Excellence in Management Award" four times, most recently in 2021. Twice she has been recognized as Outstanding Staff Member by African American Student Development and twice she received the Louise Patterson Award for Outstanding Black Staff Member. She is a mentor for the Black Women's Mentoring Collective. Stanley was a member and former president of the Black Faculty and Staff Organization (BFSO); Co-Founder of the Veve Clark Institute for Engaged Scholars of African American Studies; and is the founder of the SPEAR Middle School Scholar Academy. She has participated on numerous search committees for senior positions. The scope and length of Cara Stanley's service to UC Berkeley are indeed remarkable.

*Source: Sheila Humphreys, 150W History Project Co-Chair and Emerita Director of Diversity, EECS*  
*Photo: Cara Stanley*



Michele de Coteau, BA '88  
Berkeley's first Black woman to win Rhodes scholarship

**Michele de Coteau**, PhD, has spent her career advocating for equity and inclusion for underrepresented, first-generation, and low-income students in STEM. Dr. de Coteau graduated from UC Berkeley with a B.S. in Materials Science and Engineering and became the first

Berkeley student in 25 years and the first African American woman from Berkeley ever to win a Rhodes scholarship. She earned her D. Phil. (Ph.D.) in Metallurgy and Science of Materials from the University of Oxford, England. As Assistant Dean for Special Programs in the College of Engineering at the University of California, Berkeley, she was responsible for diversity initiatives in the college, serving faculty, undergraduate, and graduate students.

She led Berkeley's Center for Underrepresented Engineering Students (CUES), which offered programs to recruit underrepresented minority students and women, and provided academic support to ensure that they thrived academically, completed their degrees, and made successful transitions to graduate school and careers. She was also the Academic Advisor for the Cal-NERDS (New Experiences in Research and Diversity) Program, serving STEM students in undergraduate research programs at Berkeley.

Dr. de Coteau was singled out in a survey of undergraduates as one of Berkeley's "everyday heroes" – remarkable employees who make day-to-day encounters memorable and give the campus experience a human face. At the UC San Francisco Graduate Division, Dr. de Coteau served as Assistant Dean for Graduate Programs and Outreach, where she directed, developed, and analyzed the delivery of graduate academic services for students, faculty, and administrative units. As deputy diversity officer, she drove outreach and academic initiatives for recruitment and retention of students from diverse backgrounds, managed NIH and NSF grants, and directed the summer research program for undergraduates. Most recently, she was on the planning committee for the inaugural Making Waves Foundation College Success Institute.

*Source: Sheila Humphreys, 150W History Project Co-Chair and Emerita Director of Diversity, EECS*  
*Photo: Michele de Coteau*



Professor Arlene Cole-Rhodes, PhD '89  
Berkeley's first Black woman to earn PhD in Electrical Engineering

Dr. **Arlene Cole-Rhodes** is Associate Dean of Graduate Studies & Research in the Clarence M. Mitchell School of Engineering and Professor in the department of Electrical & Computer Engineering at Morgan State University, an Historically Black University established in 1867. In her current role she is charged with overseeing graduate programs in the School of Engineering at Morgan State University. In spring 2017, Dr. Cole-Rhodes spent a six-month period of sabbatical leave at the Carnegie Mellon University, Africa campus as a Visiting Professor in the Information & Communications Technologies (ICT) Center of Excellence in Rwanda. While there she contributed to graduate talent development, while exploring the role of ICT as a development program in this region.

Professor Cole-Rhodes is the first Black woman engineer to receive a doctoral degree in Electrical Engineering at UC Berkeley. She grew up in Sierra Leone and traveled to England to earn a B.Sc. degree in Applied Mathematics from Warwick University, England, and an M. Phil. degree in Control Engineering from Cambridge University, England. In 1989 Cole-Rhodes received her Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering from the University of California, Berkeley with Professor Shankar Sastry as her research advisor. In 1990 she joined the Machine Perception Research Department at AT&T Bell Labs in Holmdel, NJ as a member of Technical Staff. She has been on the faculty at Morgan State University since 1993. Her early research was in the area of control of robot manipulators; her more recent research has focused on developing adaptive algorithms for the detection and estimation of signals in wireless multiple-access MIMO communications. Her signal processing research has also focused on developing beamforming and equalization algorithms, as well as algorithms for multi-sensor remote-sensing image registration and fusion. Dr. Cole-Rhodes has worked with and mentored both graduate students and undergraduate students on research projects in her lab, and results have been presented at national and international conferences. Many of these research projects were collaborative efforts, funded by NASA, the Army Research Labs, the National Science Foundation and the Dept. of the Navy. She contributed three chapters to the book *Image Registration for Remote Sensing*, published by Cambridge University press (2011). In 2021 Cole-Rhodes was awarded a new patent titled, 'Method and System for MIMO Communications in Millimeter-wave Networks'. She regularly performs peer reviews for IEEE and International Journals and conference publications, mainly in the areas of image registration and communications signal processing.

*Source: Sheila Humphreys, 150W History Project Co-Chair and Emerita Director of Diversity, EECS*  
*Photo: Arlene Cole-Rhodes*



Valerie E. Taylor (1963- ), PhD '91

Director of the Mathematics and Computer Science (MCS) Division, Argonne National Laboratory & first Black Chair of the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at Texas A&M University (2003)

2020 EE Distinguished Alumna **Valerie Elaine Taylor** learned about mechanics and electronics at the hands of her father. He was an engineer at Sonicraft, said to be the first Black technology company to land large government contracts. Taylor attended Purdue University where she received a B.S. in computer and electrical engineering in 1985 and an M.S. in electrical engineering in 1986. She then came to Berkeley where she co-founded the Summer Undergraduate Program in Engineering Research at Berkeley (SUPERB) and earned her Ph.D. in EECS in 1991 under the supervision of David Messerschmitt. "I wasn't sure if I would like academia, but my advisor kept telling me, 'Oh, you've got to become a professor, you've got to go into teaching! Women need role models!' My shoulders felt so heavy," she said. But when she was hired at Northwestern University as an assistant professor in 1991, she wasn't just worried about preparing her first lecture, she was at a loss about what to wear and how to present herself. At the time, she said to a friend "I've never seen a Black woman [professor] stand in front of me, so I don't know what it looks like, and I don't know how that person will be received by the students." It took a semester for her to begin to feel comfortable as an instructor and as herself. "And I wore bright colors," she laughed.

Taylor was promoted to full professor in 2002 and joined Texas A&M University as the Chair of the Department of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) the following year--the first African-American to hold that position. There, she also served as the senior associate dean of academic affairs in the College of Engineering and a Regents Professor in the field of high performance computing (HPC). In 2017, she became the director of the Mathematics and Computer Science (MCS) Division of Argonne National Laboratory (part of the U.S. Department of Energy) and was elevated to Argonne Distinguished Fellow in 2019, "the highest scientific and engineering rank at the laboratory." She is also currently the Executive Director of the Center for Minorities and People with Disabilities in IT (CMD-IT), a non-profit she co-founded to help create a more diverse U.S. IT workforce.

Taylor's research is focused on performance analysis and modeling of parallel, scientific applications, and she has authored or co-authored over 160 papers. Among Taylor's many accolades are the 2001 Hewlett Packard Harriet B. Rigas Education Award; the 2002 UC Berkeley Distinguished Engineering Alumni Society Young Outstanding Leader award; the 2002 Computing Research Association (CRA) A. Nico Habermann Award; the 2005 Richard A. Tapia Achievement Award for Scientific Scholarship, Civic Science, and Diversifying Computing; and the 2018 Purdue University Outstanding Electrical and Computer Engineer (ECE) Award. She became a fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) in 2013 "for contributions to performance enhancement of parallel computing applications," and a Fellow of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) in 2016 for her "leadership in broadening participation in computing."

*Source: UC Berkeley EECS Department*

*Photo: Argonne National Laboratory*



Nadine Burke Harris (1975- ), BA '96  
California's First Surgeon General

Dr. **Nadine Burke Harris** is California's first-ever surgeon general. Governor Newsom established the position with the understanding that some of the most pernicious, but least-addressed health challenges are the upstream factors that eventually become chronic and acute conditions that are far more difficult and expensive to treat. As the first California Surgeon General, Dr. Burke Harris has prioritized early childhood development, health equity, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and toxic stress.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased risk of toxic stress for this generation through economic hardship and the vicarious trauma of witnessing racial injustice. Toxic stress is exposure to repeated, severe, or chronic stressors, without the buffering protections of trusted, nurturing



caregivers and safe, stable environments. This can lead to prolonged activation of the biological stress response, which can alter the structure and functioning of children’s developing brains, metabolic, immune, and neuroendocrine systems. Dr. Burke Harris highlights research from other natural disasters that show how large-scale public health emergencies have affected public health and development. Under her leadership, California is the first state in the nation to create and implement an equity metric tied to the state’s reopening. This aims to provide greater equity in access to COVID-19 testing, education, and support to reduce transmission of the virus among all communities in California. She also helped launch the ACEs Aware initiative in January, a first-in-the-nation effort to train physicians and health care providers on how to recognize and respond to the toxic stress response, which recognizes exposure to racism and discrimination as a risk factor in public health.

*Source: Maddy Weinberg. “As the Pandemic Rages on, a Conversation about Stress and Coping.” Cal Alumni Association. December 15, 2020.*

*Photo: Christopher Michel*



Melody Ivory, PhD '01  
Berkeley's first Black woman to earn PhD in Computer Science

**Melody Ivory** is a scientist and a poet. Dr. Ivory is the first Black woman to earn a PhD in computer science from UC Berkeley in 2001. In addition to this degree, she holds an MBA from Wharton Business School. In 1993, she graduated with a BS in computer science and math with honors Purdue University. She was awarded an inaugural Bill and Melinda Gates Scholarship as an undergraduate student. She has been a Google innovation facilitator and product manager for consumer electronics and software.

She has two decades of experience in data science and ethics, software technology, and tech education across industries and organizations such as GE and Microsoft. She also taught computer science as an Assistant Professor at the University of Washington.

At the company she founded, Thrivafy, Melody Ivory is disrupting the status quo for marginalized communities with smart solutions to inspire, enlighten, and empower all to stop

settling in life, at work, and with technology. Having struggled with health conditions and imposter syndrome, she overcame institutional barriers to act as a voice for her community. She has written a new book to be published in 2021, titled *Why Tech Sucks (and How Sustainable Disruption Can Make It Suck Less)*. In her own words, "Melody Ivory is here to elevate her life. More than anything, she wants you to be a Thriving Warrior." The 5th annual Women in Tech Symposium, sponsored by CITRIS, will feature a closing keynote speech by Dr. Ivory titled, "Sustainable Disruption: Ensuring an #InclusiveHCI Future Is Not Enough."

Source: Sheila Humphreys, 150W History Project Co-Chair and Emerita Director of Diversity, EECS  
Photo: Melody Ivory



Associate Professor Ruha Benjamin (1978- ), PhD '08  
Founder of the Ida B. Wells Just Data Lab

**Ruha Benjamin**, a 2008 doctoral graduate in sociology from UC Berkeley, specializes in the interdisciplinary study of science, medicine, and technology; race-ethnicity and gender; knowledge and power. Professor Benjamin received her BA in sociology and anthropology from Spelman College, MA and PhD in sociology from UC Berkeley, and completed postdoctoral fellowships at UCLA's Institute for Society and Genetics and Harvard University's Science, Technology, and Society Program. She has been awarded fellowships and grants from the American Council of Learned Societies, National Science Foundation, Ford Foundation, California Institute for Regenerative Medicine, and Institute for Advanced Study. In 2017, she received the President's Award for Distinguished Teaching at Princeton. In 2018, she founded the Ida B. Wells Just Data Lab, a space for activists, technologists and artists to reassess how data can be used for justice. She also serves on the Executive Committees for the Program in Global Health and Health Policy and Center for Digital Humanities at the University of Princeton.

Professor Benjamin is author of *People's Science: Bodies and Rights on the Stem Cell Frontier* (Stanford University Press 2013), *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Polity 2019), and editor of *Captivating Technology: Race, Carceral Technoscience, and*

*Liberatory Imagination in Everyday Life* (Duke University Press 2019), as well as numerous articles and book chapters. In her book, *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*, Benjamin expands upon her previous research and analysis by focusing on a range of ways in which social hierarchies, particularly racism, are embedded in the logical layer of internet-based technologies. At the American Association for the Advancement of Science Annual Meeting in February 2021, Benjamin gave a keynote address: “Race to the Future? Reimagining the Default Settings of Technology and Society.”

Source: Sheila Humphreys, 150W History Project Co-Chair and Emerita Director of Diversity, EECS  
Photo: Cyndi Shattuck



Assistant Professor Ashia Wilson, PhD '17  
Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at MIT

**Ashia Wilson** joined the MIT faculty as an assistant professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (EECS) in 2021. She received her BA from Harvard University with a concentration in applied mathematics and a minor in philosophy, as well as a Ph.D. from UC Berkeley in statistics. Ashia held a postdoctoral position in the machine learning group at Microsoft Research, New England. Her journey comes full circle as her mother, Carol Espy-Wilson became the first Black woman to earn a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering from MIT in 1987.

As a new professor, diversifying the STEM field is at the forefront of her mind. “I’m hoping that as we start penetrating these spaces that it (diversity) will change. I think a large part of retention is seeing yourself in these spaces. Diversifying at the faculty level is in part the reason why I

decided to go into academia rather than industry because it will allow me to mentor students of color with whom I can relate to being a person of color in STEM.”

Wilson’s research focuses on the methodological foundations and theory of various topics in machine learning. She’s interested in developing frameworks for algorithmic assessment and providing rigorous guarantees for algorithmic performance. “I’ve now pivoted a little bit from classical optimization into thinking through issues in quantifying uncertainty. I’ve done some work that looks at cross-validation, which is a very fundamental statistical tool.

I’ve also started thinking through issues of fairness which is growing as a field in machine learning. This includes thinking through the decision-making pipeline in machine learning, including how problems are formulated, data is collected, and analyzed and how errors are treated, all with issues of power and justice in mind.” Ashia grew up on the MIT campus with her parents serving as assistant head-of-house in a dormitory there for several years. “I always had this idea as a child that maybe one day I could be a part of the MIT community in a meaningful way. I’m definitely excited to begin my career there.”

*Source: Lauren Pitcher, UC Berkeley Computing, Data Science, and Society staff  
Photo: MIT faculty page*