

## Unique Black Women Cont'd.

One of the outstanding women to enter the field is **Ella Phillips Stewart**. Born in Virginia in 1893, the daughter of sharecropper parents, she distinguished herself academically by winning five major scholarships in the Storer College in W. Va. In 1916, she graduated from Pittsburgh University of Pharmacy, the first Black to do so, and was the first Black woman to pass the Pennsylvania State Board of Pharmacy.

Stewart worked as a pharmacist at a hospital until the end of W.W.I.

After her marriage to a fellow pharmacist in 1920, they moved to Toledo, Ohio, where they purchased a building, that had their drug store on the ground floor, and living quarters above. There, for 23 years, they served the community with total involvement in all areas: political, social, and professional.

Ella Stewart has been an author; goodwill ambassador for the U.S. Department of State; chairwoman for many important committees and organizations including the NACW; and board member for numerous organizations on the national, state, and local level. She has received numerous awards including having an elementary school named after her. Finally, still active, she is the oldest living Black woman pharmacist in the U.S. It would appear that she has done all that she set out to do; and more.

One who did truly realize an impossible dream was **Bessie Coleman**. Born in Texas in 1893, she was the twelfth of thirteen children. As a child, she watched the birds soar with beautiful freedom, and she longed to do the same.

Although she received negative responses from American flight schools, her enthusiasm never dampened. Her burning ambition brought her to the attention of Robert Abbott, the publisher of the **Chicago Defender**, who told her that she could learn to fly in France. With her customary zeal, she studied French and carefully saved her money.

While overseas neither her meager accommodations nor her daily nine mile walk to school fazed her, and she graduated in 1922. Returning to the U.S., she became the first Black licensed pilot in this country. Her first exhibition was at a Labor Day celebration on Long Island, N.Y.

Coleman became a proficient and exciting stunt pilot and her reputation grew. Although she was unable to fly in as many shows as she wanted to, the racism she encountered did not lessen her love for flying. Her career was tragically shortened when she crashed while enroute to a show in Florida in 1926.

### THE SOUTH

As stated before, the climate peculiar to the South helped to create an agrarian economy, and large numbers of unskilled workers were needed to till the fields. As in the North, Blacks were



Ella Phillips Stewart

first indentured, but bit by bit, statutes were passed that made freedom more illusory. After the invention of the cotton gin, the illusion disappeared and the reality of slavery was all too evident.

"Freedom," the magic state. Slaves whispered about it, wished for it, worked and saved for it, ran to find it, fought for it, died for it.

**Gabriel Prosser**, a slave in Virginia in 1800, planned a massive revolt that he hoped would free thousands of slaves in Richmond. Reminiscent of African traditions, his co-captain and chief adviser was his wife, **Nanny**. Placed in charge of acquiring weapons, she ordered those who were trustworthy with gathering up any available metal; plows, pitchforks, tools, etc.

Working at night, these implements were fashioned by a

blacksmith into crude swords or bayonets. Between the two of them and several trusted friends, they organized their plans with military precision. Nanny was to lead one "regiment" into town. Gabriel and his brothers would lead others. Little else is known of the ill-fated plan, for on the appointed night a tremendous thunderstorm aborted the revolt, and none involved ever revealed the master plan. Nanny was hanged with her husband.

In all, there were hundreds of revolts on record, and Black women were as involved as their men.

Contrary to what some historians would have us believe (notably, U.B. Phillips), the life of a Southern slave was one of few pleasures and little free time. Black slave women worked in heavy industries. They pulled the cars used to haul out coal in the mines, dug the ditches for the Santee Canal in North Carolina, worked on the Louisiana levees, dug and laid tracks for some of the rail lines, worked in sugar refineries and lumber mills; in short, anything that a man was ordered to do, they were also forced to do.

On the plantation, all slaves worked from "Can't see to can't see." Even pregnancy offered no respite, for the slave usually worked until she went into labor, and was back into the fields within days of the birth of her child. House slaves were under the careful eyes of the mistress and often suffered because of the hatred the white women had for her imagined (or real) rival. Resistance by house slaves often took the form of feigned ignorance, ruined meals or clothing, vandalism, arson, poisoning and the like.

In Tennessee, one female slave reacted violently when her mistress hit her. Attacking the woman, the slave ripped off the mistress' clothes and forced her out the house. When men came to whip the rebellious slave, she attacked them as well. Refusing to be whipped and unable to be subdued, she was ordered to leave, but without her child. The nameless slave then grabbed her son by his legs and threatened to bash his head against the ground. She and her son were allowed their freedom.

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### Brief Moments In Black History . . .

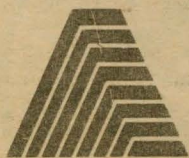
**GWENDOLYN BROOKS . . .** In 1950, Gwendolyn Brooks became the first Black to receive the Pulitzer Prize in poetry for her second book of poems, **Annie Allen**. She was named poet laureate of Illinois in 1968. She was born in Topeka, Kansas, but grew up and received her education in Chicago.

## Patricia Roberts Harris

--was the first Black to be appointed in 1965 to the Senior diplomatic corps. She later served as ambassador to Luxembourg and Secretary of H.U.D. during the Carter Administration.



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