



# WE WHO BELIEVE IN FREEDOM BLACK FEMINIST DC



## Black Feminists Highlighted in Exhibition

**Anna Julia Cooper (1858–1964)** was born enslaved in North Carolina and educated at Oberlin College, before coming to DC to teach at the M Street School. In 1892 she helped to organize the Colored Women's League in DC and published *A Voice from the South*, an early Black feminist book.

**Mary Church Terrell (1863–1954)** was educated at Oberlin College. A founding member of the Colored Women's League in DC and an activist for women's suffrage and civil rights, she helped to unify the Black women's club movement and served as the first president of the National Association of Colored Women. Read more [here](#).

**Georgia Douglas Johnson (1880–1966)** moved to Washington, DC in 1910 and became a leading poet and playwright of the Harlem Renaissance. In the 1920 and 1930s, while working for the federal government, she hosted a weekly gathering of African American writers in her home which became known as the S Street Salon.

**Lucy Diggs Slowe (1885–1937)** was a lifelong advocate for the education of Black women. In 1922, she became the first Dean of Women at Howard University and the first Black woman to serve as dean of any university. Slowe mentored many Black women activists and professionals.

**Pauli Murray (1910–1985)** graduated from Howard Law School in 1944. Combining lawsuits with direct action, Murray organized students to protest segregation in DC. Murray would continue to make connections between racism and sexism, and later coined the term "Jane Crow" for the unique form of discrimination Black women experienced. In 1966 Murray helped found the National Organization of Women. Read more [here](#).

**Eleanor Holmes Norton (1937–)** is DC's longest serving Congressional representative and a Black feminist lawyer. During Mississippi Freedom Summer in 1964, she worked with SNCC to register Black voters. In public office and the courtroom, Holmes Norton has advanced the rights of Black communities and all women.

**Bernice Johnson Reagon (1942–)**, was a founding member of SNCC's Freedom Singers (1962). In 1973 she founded the DC-based a capella music group Sweet Honey in the Rock with performers Carol Maillard, Louise Robinson and Mie. The group's "Joanne Little," "Ella's Song" and "Oughta be a Woman" became popular anthems among feminists.

**Etta Horn (1928–2001)** negotiated renovations to the majority-Black public housing project where she lived, Southeast DC's Barry Farm Dwellings. In the late 60s and early '70s, she helped to lead the Citywide Welfare Alliance (CWA) and the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO).



**Mary Treadwell (1941–2012)**, a member of the Free DC movement that supported full enfranchisement of the District's residents, was also a founder and executive director of Pride, Inc., an organization that supported Black empowerment. Treadwell was married to Marion Barry before he became the mayor of DC. She used her leadership position in Pride to advocate for the decriminalization of abortion. Read more [here](#).

**Nkenge Touré (1951–)** was a member of the Black Panther Party in DC and a leader of the DC Rape Crisis Center, the only Black women-led rape crisis center in the country. She hosted her own radio program and as a Black feminist, Touré rejected the idea that anyone had to choose between Black liberation and feminist politics.

**Loretta Ross (1953–)**, a reproductive justice activist, came to Howard as an unwed mother and quickly became an activist. Ross led DC's Rape Crisis Center in the late 1970s and early '80s. In 1994, Ross helped to develop the Black feminist "Reproductive Justice" framework to broaden conversations beyond the single issue of abortion.

## Additional Black Feminists Highlighted in Exhibition

**Ella Baker (1903–1986)** was "the most influential woman in the civil rights movement." As the highest-ranking woman in the NAACP and SCLC, she realized the power of militant Black youth and supported the formation of SNCC. Baker guided grassroots voter registration campaigns across the South and mentored many younger organizers including Eleanor Holmes Norton and Bernice Johnson Reagon.

**Frances Beal (1940–)** was a member of SNCC's New York chapter. In 1968 she helped found the Black feminist organization Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA). Beal's path breaking pamphlet "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" called for economic equality and reproductive rights and criticized racism in the women's liberation movement.

**Mary McLeod Bethune (1875–1955)** mobilized Black women in the club movement to support universal suffrage, women's rights, and civil rights. In 1924 Bethune was elected founding president of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. In 1935 she became the founding president of the National Council of Negro Women. Read more [here](#).

**Ophelia Settle Egypt (1903–1984)** was born in Texas and educated at Howard University and the University of Pennsylvania. Upon completing her graduate work in sociology, Settle conducted some of the first formal oral history interviews with formerly enslaved people in 1920s Nashville. As a DC social worker, Egypt served Black single mothers and founded the city's first Planned Parenthood clinic.

**Dorothy Ferebee (1898–1980)**, an obstetrician, advocated for racial equality and women's health as a Howard Medical School faculty member. She operated free clinics that offered birth control and vaccinations as well as assistance in childbirth to impoverished Black women in DC and the Mississippi Delta.

**Fannie Lou Hamer (1917–1977)** organized for Mississippi Freedom Summer and co-founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. By revealing the forced sterilization of Black women and sexual assaults by police officers, she brought violence against women to public attention as a violation of women's right to bodily integrity and full citizenship. Read more [here](#).

**Dorothy Height (1912–2010)** was president of the National Council of Negro Women (1957–1997). She was the only woman leader of the 1963 March on Washington, but she was not permitted to deliver a speech. Height was instrumental in protecting SNCC women from sexual violence during the civil rights movement and was an early advocate for Black women's reproductive freedom. Read more [here](#).

**June Jordan (1936–2002)**, a Black feminist poet and essayist, was the author of *Civil Wars* (1981) and *On Call: Political Essays* (1985). Jordan's poem "Oughta be a Woman" was set to music by the DC-based a cappella music group Sweet Honey in the Rock in 1981.

### **Gwendolyn Patton (1943–2017)**

participated in the Montgomery bus boycott and then joined SNCC. In the mid-1960s, she moved to DC and joined the FREE DC movement and Pride, Inc. Her essay, published in Toni Cade Bambara's Black feminist anthology, *The Black Woman*, argued that respectability politics limited Black women's leadership.

**Judy Richardson (1944– )** was a member of SNCC and participated in Mississippi Freedom Summer registering Black voters in 1964. In order to work in a majority-Black community, support the DC chapter of SNCC, and create autonomous Black institutions, many SNCC organizers like Richardson moved to DC in the mid- to late 1960s. In 1968, Richardson and other former SNCC organizers created the Drum and Spear bookstore.

**Barbara Smith (1946– )** is a Black socialist feminist and one of the founders of the Combahee River Collective. The Collective's 1977 manifesto analyzed the roots of Black women's oppression and argued that if Black women were free, everyone would be free. In 1983 she published the Black feminist anthology, *Homegirls*.

**Johnnie Tillmon (1926–1995)** led the National Welfare Rights Organization and forged an alliance between the struggle for welfare rights and the feminist movement, gaining support from NOW. She worked closely with DC's Black feminists Etta Horn and Beulah Sanders on building this cross-class, multiracial coalition.

