

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

YESTERDAY - TODAY - TOMORROW

Honoring Our Own: Black History, Black Excellence, Youngstown Strong

Black History Month is a time to celebrate the strength, resilience, and excellence of those who came before us, and here in Youngstown, Ohio, that history is deeply personal. Our city is home to trailblazers who were born, raised, educated, and shaped right here, yet whose impact reached far beyond city limits. From education and faith to civil rights, public service, arts, and culture, we have our very own Youngstown trailblazers who broke barriers, opened doors, and built pathways for future generations. Their contributions remind us that legacy lives here, in our neighborhoods, our institutions, our families, and our stories. As we honor Black history this month, we do so with pride, gratitude, and a commitment to carry their legacy forward by continuing the work they so boldly began.



Dr. Consuelo
Clark-Stewart,
wife to William R.
Stewart

William R. Stewart,
married Dr. Consuelo
Stewart in 1890.



Dr. Herbert Louis
Armstrong

Mrs. Betty W. Armstrong
and children at the
McGuffey Library branch
in 1973.



Image Source: MAHONING VALLEY artiFACTS, curated by Jessica Trickett, MVHS Collections Manager.

Youngstown Trailblazers: Honoring the Firsts Who Paved the Way

Faith & Education

- Reverend Mother Elizabeth Powell – The Mahoning Valley's first female Baptist minister, breaking gender and cultural barriers in faith leadership.
- Dr. Herbert Louis Armstrong – Youngstown's first Black elementary school principal, 1965, shaping educational leadership.
- Betty W. Armstrong – The first Black librarian in Youngstown, 1953, expanding access to knowledge and literacy.
- Mary Ella Lovett Belton – The first Black woman hired as a teacher in the School District in 1940. She then became the first Black elementary school supervisor and the first Black female principal in 1968.
- Hugh Frost - The first Black American elected to the Youngstown Board of Education in 1962.
- Dr. Earnest Perry - earned his pre-med degree from Youngstown University in 1959 and his medical degree from Meharry Medical College. A general surgeon, he practiced on Youngstown's North Side and served as an associate professor at Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine.
- Robert L. Pegues – The first Black superintendent of schools in Youngstown, 1972-1978, and Warren, 1980-1986.
- Alfred L. Bright – The first Black full-time faculty member at Youngstown State University.
- Dr. Martha Irene Bruce – An educator and principal whose literacy programs in Nigeria were nominated for the UNESCO Literacy Prize.
- Edna Pincham - The first Black woman elected to the Youngstown Board of Education, 1983. She was the first woman and the first black person appointed to a Youngstown mayor's cabinet, serving as an assistant to Mayor Patrick Ungaro in 1986. She was the first black woman to run for mayor of Youngstown in 1997.

Civic Leadership, Law & Civil Rights

- William R. Stewart – The first Black elected to the Ohio House of Representatives, 1895.
- Dr. Consuelo Stewart – The first Black American woman to practice medicine in Ohio, and a pioneer of Black-owned medical practice in Youngstown.
- William S. Vaughn - The first Black elected to Youngstown City Council, 1927.
- Judge Nathaniel R. Jones – Jones was among the first Black Americans appointed as a federal judge, selected by President Jimmy Carter to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit.
- J. Maynard Dickerson – Civil rights leader, attorney, and founder of The Buckeye Review, Youngstown's only Black newspaper.
- Lloyd R. Haynes - The first Black American Municipal Court Judge, 1972.
- Darlene Kimbrough-Rogers – The first Black councilwoman, 1987.
- Sylvester Patton – The first Black representative of Ohio's 60th District, 1998-2006.
- Sarah Brown-Clark - The first Black woman elected Youngstown Clerk of Courts, 2000-2024.
- Tracey Winbush – The first Black American appointed to the Mahoning County Board of Elections, 2016.
- Carla Baldwin – The first Black female judge, 2018, opening doors for women in law.
- Anita Davis - The first Black woman to serve as President of Youngstown City Council, 2026.



Youngstown Municipal
Judge Carla Baldwin



Sarah Brown-Clark,
Youngstown Municipal
Clerk of Court 2000-2024

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Public Safety & Law Enforcement

- William Fitzhugh - Youngstown's first Black mail carrier, in the late 1800s.
- Charles Williams - The first Black police officer in Youngstown, 1909.
- Martha Warner - The first Black female police officer, joining the force in 1931.
- Jesse L. Carter Sr. - The first black fireman in Youngstown, hired June 20, 1960.
- Robert Bush Jr. - The first Black police chief, 2001, co-founder of the Black Knights Police Association, advocating for minority recruitment.
- Jay Williams - The first Black Mayor of Youngstown, ushering in a new era of leadership, 2005.
- Barry Finley - Youngstown's first Black Fire Chief, 2018, leading with integrity and excellence.
- Sharon Cole - The first woman and first Black woman Police Chief, 2026, redefining leadership in public safety.

Activism & Social Justice

- Rev. Lonnie Kwajo Asim Simon was a committed civil rights leader and pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church.
- In 1965, he marched as a chant leader alongside Martin Luther King Jr. during the March on Montgomery. Following Dr. King's assassination in 1968, Rev. Simon remained steadfast in his belief in peaceful advocacy, helping restore calm in Youngstown while continuing to fight for civil rights. His dedication came at great personal cost—facing threats and surviving a car bombing in 1972—yet he never wavered in his commitment to justice and community healing. In 1971, Reverend Lonnie Simon and McCullough Williams Jr. became the first black members elected to the Youngstown Board of Education.
- Dr. Ron Daniels - A Youngstown native, has dedicated much of his life to politics, activism, & social justice. Widely recognized as a commentator and essayist, he has held numerous leadership roles, including serving for more than a decade as Director of the Center for Constitutional Rights. He also led Freedom, Inc. from 1968 to 1974, served as Executive Director of the Rainbow Coalition in 1987, and was Deputy Campaign Manager for Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign in 1988. From 1992 to 1998, Daniels served as National Chairperson of the Campaign for a New Tomorrow and, in 1992, ran for President as an independent—along with extensive involvement in many other movements and causes.



Rev. Lonnie K. A. Simon in his office

Source unknown, accessed from Delta Heritage Project at YSU Digital Archives



Dr. Ron Daniels

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Business, Industry & Community Institutions

- P. Ross Berry – The region's leading brick contractor of his time, builder of major structures including the original Rayen School (1861), Youngstown Opera House, the 1876 Mahoning County Court House, and the First Tod Hotel.
- Samuel Stewart - The first black barber in Youngstown, serving as the first barber at the Tod Hotel.
- Birdie Welcher – Founder of the McGuffey Center (1940), a cornerstone of Black culture and arts.
- Clarence L. Robinson – President of the Roberts Deliberating Club, a key self-help and leadership organization. His service to the community was honored with the opening of the Clarence Robinson Center on Youngstown's South Side.
- Lavina Simpson Webster – The first Black graduate of Rayen High School, marking a milestone in educational access.

Arts, Culture & Media

- Karen Clark-Green – Founder of Archangel Dance Theater and creator of Jazz in the Park, elevating arts access in Youngstown.
- Betty Allen – A world-renowned mezzo-soprano opera singer, representing Youngstown on global stages.
- Mizell Ewing – An operatic tenor who performed across Europe and taught music in Newark, NJ and Youngstown.
- Shedrick Hobbs – Drummer for Gladys Knight & the Pips, The Temptations, and The Four Tops, contributing to legendary music history.
- Margaret Linton – Hosted One Woman's World on WYTV in the 1960s–1970s, a trailblazer in local media.

As we reflect this Black History Month, we are reminded that the story of Youngstown is inseparable from the courage, leadership, and resilience of its Black trailblazers. The individuals we honor were not only "firsts," but foundation builders, creating pathways for progress and possibility. May their legacy inspire us to continue leading with purpose, advocating for justice, and uplifting our community for generations to come.

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