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Texas Black History and Culture Highlights

May 2024



May 2, 2009, The Texas Medical Association (TMA) elected Houston neurologist William H. Fleming III as its 144th president and the first African American to lead the organization. Dr. Fleming practices neurology at Memorial Neurological Association in Houston, where he also serves as a clinical assistant professor of neurology at The University of Texas Medical School at Houston. Before entering medical school, Dr. Fleming was a captain in the U.S. Air Force from 1967 to 1970. He earned his medical degree from Saint Louis University School of Medicine in Missouri. He completed his internship at Montreal General Hospital in Canada in 1976 and his residency at Mayo Clinic in 1979. He joined Memorial Neurological Association in 1979 and is certified by the American Board of Neuromuscular and Electrodiagnostic Medicine. A native of Memphis, Tennessee, Fleming was named a Texas "Super Doctor" by Texas Monthly magazine in 2005 and 2006 and Top Doctor by Houston magazine in 2007. More about Dr. Fleming can be read [here](#).

May 3, 1901, Estelle Massey Riddle Osborne was born in Palestine, Texas. The eighth of eleven children, she and her siblings were encouraged to attend college by their hard-working parents. Massey received a teaching certificate from Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College (now Prairie View A&M University) but decided to pursue nursing after she was nearly killed in a violent incident while teaching at a public school. She joined the first nursing class of St. Louis City Hospital and became their head nurse after graduating in 1923. In 1926 or 1927, Massey moved to New York City to teach at the Lincoln School of Nursing and the Harlem Hospital School of Nursing. She attended summer sessions at Columbia University and then became a full-time student with a scholarship from the Rosenwald Fund. Massey received a bachelor's degree in 1930 and a master's in nursing education in 1931, becoming the first African American to do so. In 1945, she became the first African American instructor in the Department of Nursing Education at New York University. More about Estelle Massey Riddle Osborne can be read [here](#).



May 7, 1935, Myrtis Dightman was born in Crockett, Texas. Dightman is a former professional rodeo cowboy who specialized in bull riding. Known as the "Jackie Robinson of Rodeo," Dightman was the first African-American to compete at the National Finals Rodeo. Dightman started his career in rodeo in Houston. In 1964 he became the first Black cowboy to compete at the National Finals Rodeo (NFR). He qualified repeatedly for the NFR from 1966 to 1970 and 1972. In 1967, he had the best year-end finish of his career by placing third in the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) World Standings. The PRCA was formerly known as the Rodeo Cowboys Association. In 1971, he won both the Calgary Stampede and Cheyenne Frontier Days. He was hired to do stunts and play himself in the rodeo movies *J.W. Coop* and Sam Peckinpah's *Junior Bonner* 1971. Over the years, Dightman endured death threats to thwart his progress, but he remained determined. More about Myrtis Dightman can be read [here](#).

May 11, 1994, Dr. Carol Surles became the first African-American president of Texas Women's University in Denton. A native of Florida, Surles earned her undergraduate degree in psychology at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, her master's degree in counseling from Chapman College in California, and her doctoral degree in education from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. Dr. Surles served as Vice President for Administration and Business Affairs at California State University—Hayward, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Management at Jackson State University in Mississippi, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Associate Professor of Management at the University of Michigan—Flint, and as Associate Vice President for Human Resources at the University of Central Florida. Dr. Surles also worked in public service and public television before joining TWU. During her tenure at TWU, Dr. Surles was actively recruited by other higher education institutions. In December 1998, Dr. Surles chose to accept the presidency of Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, Illinois. More about Dr. Surles can be read [here](#).



May 12, 1846, entrepreneur and politician Norris Wright Cuney was born in the Brazos River valley near Hempstead. Cuney is regarded by many as the most essential Black leader in Texas in the 19th century. He was the son of a white planter, Phillip Minor Cuney, and an enslaved servant, Adeline Stuart. Following the Civil War, Cuney became active in Galveston politics, serving as an alderman and a national Republican delegate. He was appointed as United States Collector of Customs in 1889 in Galveston. Cuney had the highest-ranking appointed position of any African American in the late 19th-century South. He was a member of the Union League and helped attract black voters to the Republican Party; in the 1890s, more than 100,000 blacks were voting in Texas. Establishing his dockworker business, he helped unionize black workers in Galveston, opening jobs for them on the docks. He substantially improved employment and educational opportunities for blacks in the city. He eventually rose to the chairmanship of the Texas Republican Party and became a national committeeman. More about Norris Wright Cuney can be read [here](#).

May 17, 1954, The U.S. Supreme Court issued its landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, declaring that segregation in public schools is unconstitutional. The court consolidated five cases dealing with racial segregation in public schools (in Kansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, South Carolina, and Virginia) under one name, *Oliver Brown et al. v. the Board of Education of Topeka*. Oliver Brown brought the case against the Kansas Board of Education because his daughter, Linda, in third grade, had to cross railroad tracks and ride a school bus 21 blocks to a Black school, even though a white school was only five blocks away from her home. The court ruled unanimously that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." The 1946 *Heman Sweatt* case against the University of Texas School of Law was a precedent for the ruling. More about *Brown v. Board of Education* can be read [here](#).



May 18, 1983, Former NFL Quarterback, Vince Young was born in Houston. Young played football for the University of Texas from 2002-2005. In 2006, he was selected by the Tennessee Titans as the third overall pick in the 2006 NFA draft. He spent the first five seasons of his career with the Titans. In his rookie season, Young was named the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year. He played one year for the Philadelphia Eagles in 2011 and had offseason stints with the Buffalo Bills, the Green Bay Packers, and Cleveland Browns from 2012 to 2014. In 2017, he attempted was recruited by the Canada's Saskatchewan Roughriders, but was released before the season began. The Texas Senate passed a resolution on February 20, 2007, to declare the day "Vince Young Day" throughout the state. More about Vince Young can be read [here](#).

May 20, 1881, Educator, Mary Elizabeth Branch, was born near Farmville, Virginia. The child of former slaves, Branch, received a bachelor's degree in 1922 and a master's degree in English in 1925, both from the University of Chicago. In 1930, the American Missionary Association appointed her president of Tillotson College in Austin, making her the first woman to head an accredited college in Texas. Under her direction, the college's facilities improved, the library's holdings expanded, and the faculty size doubled. She also permitted the organization of fraternities and sororities and encouraged the formation of academic and athletic clubs. In 1944, Branch helped to establish the United Negro College Fund. More about Mary Elizabeth Branch can be read [here](#).



May 22, 1863, The United States Colored Troops (USCT) was established to facilitate the recruitment of African-American soldiers to fight for the Union Army during the American Civil War. Established in response to a demand for more units from Union Army commanders, USCT was composed of formerly enslaved and those who escaped slavery and gave their lives for the cause of ending slavery. At its peak, this infantry division had 179,000 men, with 47 soldiers from Texas. With every engagement they fought in, the USCT repeatedly proved their mettle. At Port Hudson in Louisiana, Fort Wagner in South Carolina, Spotsylvania, New Market Heights, Wilson's Wharf in Virginia, and elsewhere, USCT units displayed courage under fire and won glory on the

battlefield. African Americans accounted for 10 percent of the Union army by the war's end. The USCT was a watershed in American history and one of the first significant strides on a long road toward gaining equal civil rights. More about the United States Colored Troops can be read [here](#).



May 28, 1924, Restaurateur and the founder of the Houston-based franchise Frenchy's Chicken, Percy Pennington Creuzot, was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. Creuzot, the son of a medical doctor, served in the United States Navy during World War II and received an honorable discharge in 1946. In 1949, he graduated from the Hampton Institute (now Hampton University). In 1965, he moved to Houston to establish a Louisiana-style sausage business. Still, he found that it would be more costly than he initially believed because the Texas and federal authorities had increased regulations on food service. He became a salesman and sold New Orleans-style "sno-balls" during his spare time to earn more money. Creuzot and his wife opened Frenchy's Po-Boys, a sandwich shop specializing in Southern cuisine. After urging from a

local businessman, he added fried chicken to the menu. Before the restaurant's opening, Creuzot was not known by the nickname "Frenchy." He gained the nickname "Frenchy's" because people associated the restaurant's name with him. By 1985, Creuzot purchased the property in Galveston. Creuzot died of a stroke at age 86 in 2010. His grave is located at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Houston. More about Percy Pennington Creuzot can be read [here](#).