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## Texas Institute for the Preservation of History and Culture Newsletter - June 2024

Texas Institute for the Preservation of History and Culture

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## Texas Black History and Culture Highlights

# June 2024



**June 3, 1913**, Azellia Jones White was born in Gonzalez, Texas, and became the first African American woman to earn a pilot's license in Texas. She married her high school sweetheart, Hulon White in 1936. In 1941 the couple moved to Tuskegee, Alabama where Hulon became a mechanic for the Tuskegee Airmen. She taught herself how to fly riding with her husband and his colleagues at Tuskegee. Azellia and Hulon returned to Texas in 1945 and opened an aviation school that served as a segregated airport in Houston. White received her pilot's license in 1946. The flying school closed in 1948 after financial restrictions to the GI Bill made it difficult to operate. She became a licensed beautician and worked in a department store after the school closed. White was inducted into the Texas Aviation Hall of Fame in 2018, at the age of 105. She died in 2019 at age 106. More about Azellia White can be read [here](#).

**June 6, 1944**, Tommie Smith, a gold medalist, activist, and emblem of political dissent, was born in Clarksville, Texas. Smith made history at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, where he won the 200-meter dash in 19.83 seconds—the first time this distance was run in less than 20 seconds. Smith attracted international attention during the medal ceremony when he and his teammate, John Carlos, lowered their heads and raised a black-gloved fist while the US national anthem was playing. The audience booed as Smith and Carlos left the podium. Smith later said, "If I win, I am an American, not a Black American. But if I did something bad, then they would say 'a Negro'. We are Black, and we are proud of being Black. Black America will understand what we did tonight." The Black Power salute, as it came to be known, was a statement against the systemic oppression of Black people in the US and marked a defining moment in civil rights activism. More about Tommie Smith can be read [here](#).

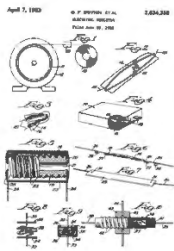


**June 7, 1863**, The Battle of Milliken's Bend was an important moment for African American participation in the Civil War. A brigade of Texans led this attack under the command of Union Brigadier Gen. Henry McCulloch. The Union defenders were three newly assembled African American regiments. As these soldiers had no previous experience with firearms, the victory at Milliken's Bend came at a high cost, with many of these newly freed men being killed or returned to slavery. But Union and Confederate leaders could not deny their strength and the potential impact of utilizing African American troops in battle. Major General Ulysses S. Grant described the attack as the first significant engagement in which Black troops had seen combat, describing their conduct as "most gallant." Confederate General John G. Walker recalled "the obstinacy with which they fought...open the eyes of the Confederacy to the consequences" of the decision to allow African Americans to fight. More about the Battle of Milliken's Bend can be read [here](#).



**June 9, 1929.** The first Mass of Our Mother of Mercy Roman Catholic Church occurred in Houston's historic community of Frenchtown. Frenchtown developed in the 1920s. In 1922, a Francophone, free Black and mixed race or Créole population migrated to Houston from Louisiana for employment opportunities with the Southern Pacific Railroad. The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 forced many more people to leave Louisiana, and settle in this intimate enclave of Houston's Fifth Ward. Louisiana's pioneers first used the term Créole to distinguish themselves from foreign-born settlers and later from Anglo-American colonists. Being a majority Roman Catholic population, Our Mother of Mercy Catholic Church served as Frenchtown's cultural center where residents brought a distinct language, cuisine, and zydeco music to Texas. More about Our Mother of Mercy Roman Catholic Church can be read [here](#). More about Frenchtown can be read [here](#).

**June 10, 1933.** Ella Ruth Lee Romani was born in Tyler, Texas. The international lyric spinto soprano grew up in Los Angeles, California and received a Bachelor of Arts degree at California State University in 1955. Lee performed operatic principal roles throughout Europe and the United States making her operatic debut in 1966 as the Ethiopian Princess *Aida* with the Guild Opera Company in Los Angeles. Throughout her career she performed *Aida* more than 500 times with opera companies, including the San Francisco Opera, the Vienna State Opera in Vienna, Austria, the Bavarian State Opera in Munich, Germany, and the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in the United Kingdom. After retiring in 2000, Lee co-founded the Opera Pasadena Company. In 2008 she played a pivotal role in establishing the Los Angeles Metropolitan Opera. An operatic force, she died in 2013 at age 80. More about Ella Ruth Lee can be read [here](#).



**June 16, 1959.** Inventor Otis Boykin received U.S. Patent No. 2,891,227 for his wire precision resistor. Otis Boykin was born in Dallas, Texas, in 1920. The wire precision resistor makes pacemakers stronger and able to withstand temperature and air pressure shifts. The wire precision resistor made electronic devices more cost-effective to manufacture. Boykin's resistors are now in televisions, IBM computers, and military missiles. Boykin's achievements led him to work as a consultant in the United States and Paris from 1964 to 1982. He

continued working on resistors until the end of his life. He created an electrical capacitor in 1965, an electrical resistance capacitor in 1967, and several electrical resistance elements. He is also known to have invented a range of consumer innovations, including a burglar-proof cash register and a chemical air filter. Throughout his life, he earned over 25 patents from 1959 to 1985. More about Otis Boykin and the wire precision resistor can be read [here](#).

**June 19, 1865.** Union General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston and delivered the news about the Emancipation Proclamation, initially issued by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863. Granger, supposedly from a balcony at Ashton Villa, one of the state's first brick structures, read General Order No. 3, which officially freed 250,000 enslaved people in Texas. The order read: "The people are informed that in accordance with a Proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free." People were advised to remain with their enslavers and work for wages. They learned that they would not be allowed to collect at military posts and that idleness was forbidden. In 1979, Governor William P. Clements signed an act that made the day a state holiday. In 2021, Juneteenth became a federal holiday. More about Juneteenth can be read [here](#).

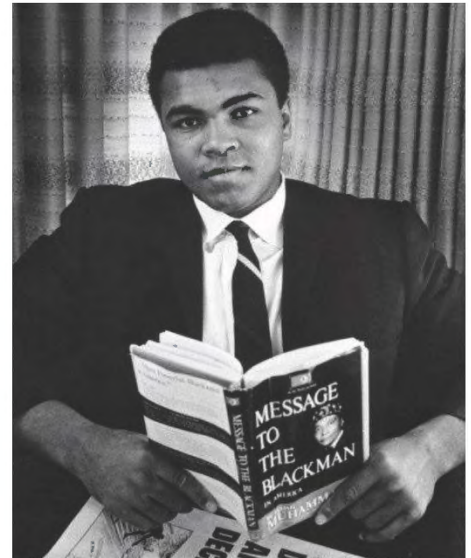






**June 19, 1948**, Actor Phylicia Rashad was born in Houston, Texas. Rashad became a household name portraying Claire Huxtable on *The Cosby Show* from 1984-1992. After receiving with a B.F.A. in theatre from Howard University, she found work with New York's Negro Ensemble Company. She had minor roles in Broadway hit musicals before transitioning to television. Inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame in 2016, Rashad received Tony and Drama Desk Awards for her performance as 'Lena Younger' in *A Raisin in the Sun*. Ms. Rashad has directed plays by August Wilson (*Gem of the Ocean*, *Fences*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*) and Paul Oakley Stovall (*Immediate Family*) at prestigious regional and Off-Broadway Theaters. Rashad has led the Advisory Council for the African American Cultural Heritage Fund, and from 2021-2024, she served as Dean of Howard University's Chadwick A. Boseman College of Fine Arts. More about Phylicia Rashad can be read [here](#).

**June 20, 1967**, Heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali was tried, convicted, and sentenced in a Houston court for refusing to serve in the military. He was ordered to serve five years in prison and to pay a \$10,000 fine for draft evasion. In 1964, Ali failed the U.S. Armed Forces qualifying test, but with the Vietnam War's escalation in 1965, he was reclassified as eligible for induction into the U.S. Army. When notified of this change, he expressed that he considered himself a conscientious objector and that "War is against the teachings of the Holy Qur'an. In early 1967, Ali changed his legal name and residence to Houston, Texas. He appeared for his scheduled induction into the U.S. Armed Forces in Houston in April of 1967 but refused, three times, to step forward at the call of his name. An officer warned him he was committing a felony, but again, Ali refused to move when instructed. Ali's lawyers appealed the Houston court's decision, which was denied in May 1968. *Clay v. The United States* found its way to the Supreme Court, where on June 28, 1971, Ali's conviction was overturned. More about Muhammad Ali's Houston trial for draft evasion can be read [here](#).



**June 22, 1866**, William Madison McDonald, an American politician, businessman, and banker of great influence in Texas was born in College Mound, Texas. His father was a freed slave, and his mother was a free woman. He attended Roger Williams University in Nashville, Tennessee. McDonald studied religion, ran a school, and organized a state fair to show off the accomplishments of black farmers; all before he turned 21. He became prominent in Texas Republican politics in 1892, when he was elected to the party's state executive committee. For more than thirty years he remained a notable figure of the party and attended many national conventions. He moved to Fort Worth and, with the support of Black lodges, founded the Fraternal Bank and Trust Company, which quickly became the chief depository of funds for the state's Black Masonic lodges. McDonald died in 1950. His grave in Fort Worth is marked by a huge obelisk, and a historic marker recalling his influence. More about William Madison McDonald can be read [here](#).