

CELEBRATE BLACK

HISTORY MAKERS

FEBRUARY 2025

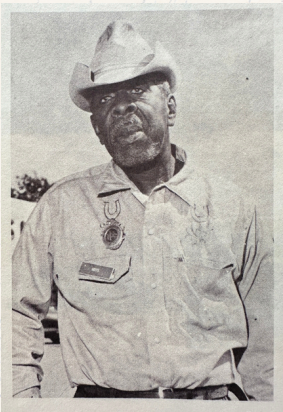
In celebration of Black History Month, we're honored to share the stories of several extraordinary Black individuals and families in Zachary who are making—or have made—history. Their journeys showcase not only their own accomplishments but also the dreams, sacrifices, and resilience passed down through generations, reflecting a legacy that is both rooted in history and boundless in possibility.



BY LAUREN POPE AND JEN GENNARO

Henry "Hots" Williams

"Hots," as he was affectionately known throughout the community, is one of Zachary's most colorful legends. He passed away in 2016 at the age of 93. Loved by all, he was devoted to the business community of Zachary serving as an honorary policeman, fireman, postman and auctioneer. Here is an undated excerpt from a story written about him by Zachary's postman, Robert Preston Kennedy, found in the archives.



Henry "Hots" Williams wearing his dime-store police badge.
Photo courtesy of Zachary Faces & Places

I Remember It Well

By Robert Preston Kennedy

I personally have known Hots when he was a young boy and lived behind my father's and mother's home. I particularly remember him when the movies came to Zachary by the way of a canvass tent with a saw dust floor. Most of the picture shows were "shoot em ups" featuring cowboys like... Mix, Ken Maynard, and Roy Rogers and of course, the Lone Ranger. Hots would always get very excited during a big fight and a horse race by the heroes to catch the outlaws, and he would become very vocal. These outbursts were never minded by the crowd - in fact, his being there added amusement to them. The tent shows faded into history, but the Trio theater was built and Hots became a fixture in the balcony at every show.

Later on, when the Zachary stockyards was organized, Hots would show up early every Wednesday for the weekly sale and he was eventually employed to assist in various jobs. It was here that Hots became to imagine himself an auctioneer. He acquired an old microphone that he would carry with him attached to his belt. He

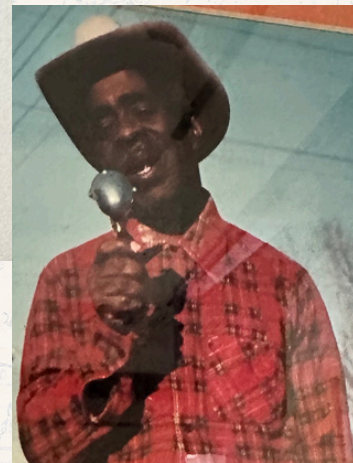
listened to the auctioneers and learned a chant that sounded quite good - the only fault was that he could not count or follow prices. At the end of most of the auctions, the owners of the barn would let him get into the auction box and then Hots and all would really have a good time!

The stockyards closed, and Hots was "lost" for a while, but shortly became interested in the "police". He acquired a "Dime store" badge, a pair of

old handcuffs and a very big stick and Hots was back in business. Back then; we didn't see police cars nearly as frequently as we do now, but Hots seemed to draw to them like magic, for you would always see him whenever a car would park. He is still very much interested in this field and I have observed him directing traffic when the train would keep cars from going over the

railroad tracks. At the last Christmas parade, I saw him all the route walking up and down the streets just like a bonafide lawman.

I have seen this man at the post office nearly every morning for over 30 years as he has always picked up mail for someone in town. Mr. & Mrs. L. L. Easterly could always depend on Hots to get her mail every morning and when she retired, he then began the same task for Mr. E. C. Schilling which he continues today.



Hots imagined himself as an auctioneer. This photo hangs on the wall at Bank of Zachary.

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MAYO BREW, SR. : A LEGACY OF COURAGE IN THE FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

This is the story of a longtime Zachary resident's arrest and exile from his hometown in the fight for equality. Born in 1942 in Winnfield, Louisiana—a place he recalls as "the most segregated town in Louisiana"—Mayo Brew, Sr. grew up during the height of Jim Crow.

By the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement was in full swing, with demonstrations across the country challenging segregation. As a high school student, Mayo became president of the Winnfield Youth League, a group advocating for change. In April 1960, Mayo and three peers decided to take a stand against the segregated Winn Parish Library.

On Good Friday, they walked into the library with a simple request: to apply for library cards. The response was anything but simple. The sheriff of Winnfield, J.J. Crippen, arrived with his gun drawn and forced the young activists into a car. "He stuck the gun to my head and dared me to breathe," Mayo recalled. It didn't help that white women across the street were shouting "Shoot him! Shoot him!"

The group was taken to jail, where they spent the day separated and enduring racial slurs broadcast over the radio. Outside, tensions escalated. White residents, including a prominent businessman who later became mayor, reportedly discussed tarring and feathering the activists.

Mayo's father secured his release that evening, but the ordeal was far from over. Threats poured in, the family home was bricked, and their phone was tapped. They were told of plans to burn the Brew family's house down. Eventually, the young activists were urged to plead guilty to disturbing the peace, and leave town for their safety. Despite these efforts to silence him, Mayo's commitment to justice only grew stronger.

After graduating high school, Mayo attended Southern University, where he continued his civil rights work, participating in marches and peaceful demonstrations. But the shadow of segregation followed him. Blacklisted in his hometown, he struggled to find work during the summer of 1960, enduring harassment daily. He was arrested again—this time for swimming in a swimming hole he had frequented all his life—after being reported



Mayo Brew, Sr., Air Force Veteran, retiree of Southern University, and former member of Zachary's Planning & Zoning Commission. Brew was arrested and exiled from his hometown of Winnfield for trying to obtain a library card in 1960.

by a young white couple. Humiliated, harassed, and without the funds to return to Southern after being blackballed from employment, Mayo enlisted in the Air Force.

Stationed first in Morocco and then in Spain, Mayo hoped to remain abroad. The racial climate was so much more inclusive than back home, he recalls, but Uncle Sam said he was needed stateside.

Returning to the U.S. on the same day as the 1963 March on Washington, Mayo found himself in a nation still deeply entrenched in racism. Shortly after, JFK was assassinated. Despite these challenges, Mayo persevered, earning a degree in management and marketing from Southern University and forging a successful career.

A LIFE OF SERVICE & COMMUNITY

Mayo moved to Zachary in 1987, after accepting a position as Secretary to the Chancellor at Southern University. He found a supportive community. Serving as a Planning and Zoning Commissioner under longtime Mayor John Womack, he witnessed the town's growth while advocating for thoughtful development. They developed a close relationship over the years, with the Mayor leaning on Mayo to be a bridge to the Black community.

"Zachary's been beautiful," he says. The town's commitment to building a truly integrated community hasn't always been straightforward or easy, but thanks to the efforts of community leaders like Mayo, it has become a reality. Consider the stark contrast between the police system in 1960s Winnfield and present-day Zachary. While the racist "good ole boy" system once terrorized the Winnfield Youth League, Zachary now has Darryl Lawrence serving as the city's first Black Police Chief—a symbol of progress and change.

Winnfield itself remains a different story. "Integration was one of the worst things to happen to our community," he explains, because of the loss of Black institutions. "The town is just depressing to drive through now," he says. Yet, he acknowledges the importance of the fight for equality: The Winn Parish Library integrated in 1968, a symbolic victory for the movement he helped ignite. He was honored in 1999 with a plaque from Winn Parish in acknowledgement of his courageous stand for integration, and again in October of 2024 by Southern University's College of Business for being a trailblazer in his pursuit of progress.

Remembering those times is difficult for Mayo. He stood face to face with the evil of racism and emerged from those days with the knowledge that the fight for change doesn't always happen when you take the first step. He could have given up and walked away from it all after his unjust arrest and banishment. Instead, he built a life of service developing his family and community, both at Southern University and here in Zachary. He teaches us what it means to labor for justice.

As he celebrates nearly 60 years of marriage and decades of service, Mayo's words ring clear: "Zachary's been beautiful." And thanks to his legacy, it's a community enriched by his unwavering commitment to justice.

Mayo Brew holds a plaque that he was presented to him in 1999 for his efforts to integrate the Winn Parish Library.



Winn Parish Library, Winnfield, LA



Patrons using library resources in the Winn Parish Library (circa 1950s)



Living the Legacy

For U.S. Army Captains Quinlan and Alexis Motley, honoring their history while building a brighter future is a family mission. Their story is one of service, impact, and the unwavering pursuit of generational progress.

For generations, Black families have overcome systemic barriers, forging paths of progress and creating opportunities for those who follow. The Motleys are a living example of this spirit of resilience, using technology, education, and community service as tools to uplift others while honoring their family's legacy.

"We've been fortunate to leverage technology and higher education to create scalable impacts," says Quinlan. This philosophy drives their two visionary ventures: **My Kid Plate Foundation** and **Pishon Consulting Firm**. "For previous generations, these advancements were unimaginable," he adds, "but they've enabled us to uplift others in meaningful ways."

Leveraging his extensive experience in government consulting and contracts, Quinlan helps faith-based organizations, schools, and community groups secure grants through Pishon Consulting Firm. Alexis, a registered dietitian with a Master's from McNeese State University, also

uses her gifts and talents to make a lasting impact on the lives of others. In 2020, Alexis secured a \$30,000 grant from Siggis Yogurt for her nonprofit, My Kid Plate Foundation, which educates children and families on healthy eating and lifestyles. Together, their personal achievements have become vehicles for broader community impact.

The Motleys often travel with their two young sons, blending family fun with lessons on history and legacy. Their recent trip to Atlanta included a visit to the Coca-Cola factory for their son's birthday — but not before they spent time at Ebenezer Baptist Church, where Martin Luther King Jr. once preached. "First, we honored our history in Atlanta," Alexis said, teaching their sons that it's people like MLK and Coretta Scott King who paved the way for us. "When we take family trips, there's always an education piece to it," she says.

Alexander, Quinlan, Alexis, and Quinlan II Motley, December 2024. Photo credit: Kelbert McFarland Photography.



For Alexis, growing up in Oakdale, Louisiana, her sense of identity and resilience was nurtured by her family's unwavering support. Though she often faced microaggressions in her predominantly white town—comments like, "You're pretty... for a Black girl"—her parents were her anchors. "They always told me I was beautiful and smart," she recalled. Her grandparents' resilience shaped her outlook, as she recalls the family Bible at her parents' house recording births, marriages, and deaths—tracing a lineage that began with sharecroppers. Alexis's grandfather's parents, once enslaved, vowed their children would never endure such physical toil.

Each generation since has worked tirelessly to fulfill that promise, passing down lessons on avoiding debt and building generational wealth — a pursuit that has been far more difficult for most Black families in America. Systemic barriers like discriminatory lending practices, redlining, and limited access to high-paying jobs have left Black families generations behind their white counterparts in wealth accumulation.

"My parents talked to me about debt from a young age," Alexis says. "I never wanted to be a financial burden to my parents," she says. Following in her brother Steven's footsteps, Alexis enrolled in the Army. "I realized I could be financially independent," she says. Despite never having shot a weapon, the self-described "girly girl" boarded the plane, lip balm in her purse, and enlisted in the Army. She emerged one of the top cadets in the nation.

Photo credit: Kelbert McFarland Photography



“MY HISTORY AND MY HERITAGE ARE THE WIND BENEATH MY WINGS.” — *Alexis Motley*

Quinlan, meanwhile, was serving two tours of duty in Iraq. In church one day, he spotted a friend he'd made at training in Oklahoma, and the two guys began hanging out. A few weeks later, his friend, Lieutenant Colonel Steven Sumbler, asked if Quinlan would be interested in talking with his sister. He opened his Bible and showed Quinlan a picture of Alexis. The rest, he says, is history.

Quinlan's journey was shaped by witnessing his mother, Rochealle Motley, persevere through challenges to provide for him. Growing up in Dallas, Texas, he was inspired by her resilience and faith. After three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a career in the auto parts industry, Quinlan began to seek a greater purpose. "I prayed for a calling, something that would allow me to help people," he said. That calling became Pishon Consulting Firm, which helps nonprofits, schools and faith-based organizations secure funding through grants.

The Motleys say the stories of perseverance from their grandparents and parents serve as a constant source of inspiration. "Their sacrifices remind us of the importance of faith and resilience in achieving success," Quinlan says. "They taught us that adversity can be a stepping stone to greatness."

The Motleys' story is a powerful reminder that while past generations dreamed of progress, today's changemakers have the tools to turn those dreams into reality. Through their leadership and innovation, the Motleys are not just honoring their ancestors — they are shaping the future.



**AS SEEN
ON TV**



Gaynell Young on Wheel of Fortune

By Jen Gennaro

Last Fall, Dr. Gaynell Young added *Wheel of Fortune* contestant to her impressive resume. The longtime Zachary School Board member and Lane Regional Medical Center board chair appeared on the November 22 episode, solving the Mystery Round puzzle: "BEETLEJUICE, BEETLEJUICE."

"It was the event of a lifetime! I won the LG Home for the Holidays featured prize of \$10,000, \$5,000 cash with a \$5,000 LG shopping spree. I also had another \$2,500 cash added for a total of \$12,500! Not bad for a 30 minute appearance," said Dr. Young.

The filming was held in California during the summer of 2024, and Dr. Young was accompanied by her husband, Lucius, her son Trey and his wife Monica as her special guests. Dr. Young and the other 20 contestants were among the fortunate few out of more than a million applicants for the show!

Dr. Young, who earned her PhD after returning to school after 40 years, has helped shape Zachary's future since 2001. As School Board president, she helped develop the district's first strategic plan in 2004, contributing to Zachary schools' 15-year run as Louisiana's top district. After retiring from AT&T in 2009, she's remained active in community service through FAZE and the Port Hudson Improvement Association. Dr. Young will also serve as 2025's President of the Zachary Community School Board.

Though she didn't win the overall game show, her "Wheel" winnings add another accomplishment to a career spent advancing education and healthcare in Zachary.

Cozy Len on The Voice

Zachary's own Cozy Len brought his signature soulful voice to downtown Baton Rouge's Cortana Kiwanis Christmas Parade as Grand Marshal in December. Fresh off his run on Gwen Stefani's team in Season 26 of NBC's *The Voice*, Len led the December 14th festivities, delighting parade-goers with the same charisma he displayed on national television.

Though eliminated during his time on *The Voice*, Len's star continues to rise locally, with his Grand Marshal appearance capping off a breakthrough year for the hometown artist. Mark your calendars for Friday, April 11th to see him perform in Zachary for Downtown Live at the Gazebo!

Dr. Gaynell Young
at her watch party



Mapping Zachary's Future



When Bryant Dixon stepped into the role of Planning and Zoning Director for the City of Zachary in 2021, he inherited more than a title. He inherited a mission to modernize and manage growth in a rapidly evolving community.

When he first started, all he was handed was a single paper map—a stark contrast to the sophisticated online GIS (Geographic Information System) mapping technology he's since implemented. This digital leap has not only brought Zachary's planning process into the 21st century but also made the city's development more transparent and accessible to its residents.

Under his leadership, not a single new subdivision has been approved since he took office. This intentional pause isn't about stifling growth. It's about ensuring that development aligns with the long-term vision for the city. Dixon's approach is methodical, strategic, and centered on maintaining the quality of life that residents value. With rapid development often overshadowing thoughtful planning, Dixon's patience and foresight are a rare and valuable quality.

But perhaps what's most remarkable about Bryant isn't just his professional accomplishments. Community members and city officials alike have marveled at his ability to remain calm, composed, and professional during council meetings, even in the face of tough questions. It's a skill that's as much a part of his legacy as any zoning decision. His patience, paired with his sharp intellect, has made him a respected leader whose impact goes beyond maps and zoning ordinances.

For Black History Month, it's fitting to honor leaders like Bryant Dixon who bring both innovation and integrity to their work. By embracing technology, championing transparency, and leading with grace, Dixon is shaping Zachary's future, one well-planned step at a time.

Dixon graduated from LSU with a double major in Anthropology and Sociology before earning his Master's in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of New Orleans in 2014.



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