

# Kansas City Black History 2017

## "Midwest Luminaries"



Taylor



Gaines



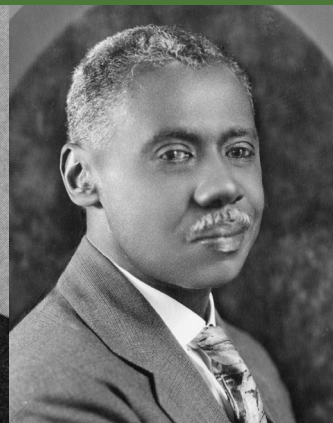
Miner



Thomas



Bland



Perry

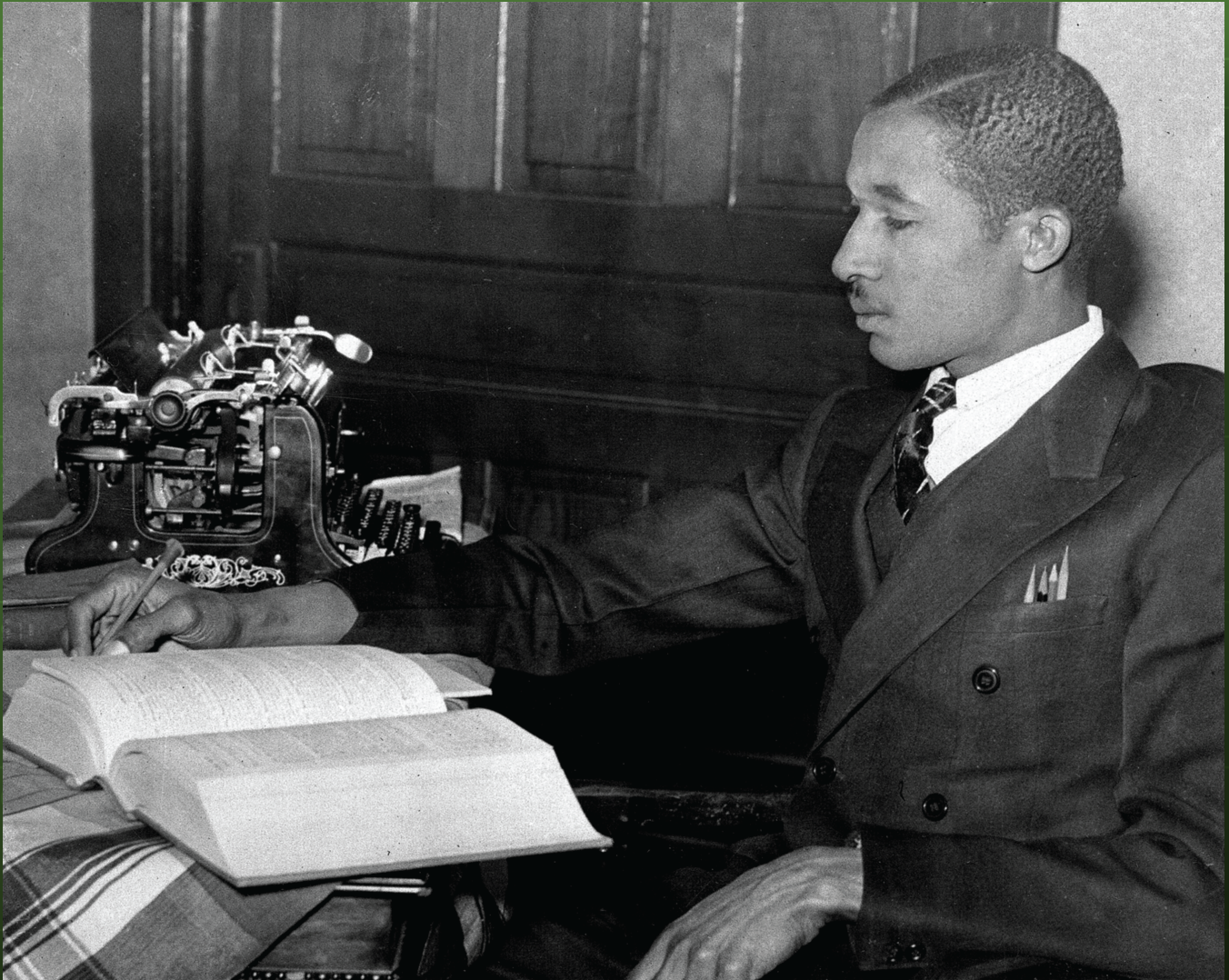
The six African Americans honored in this year's Black History Month project represent the best and the brightest in the areas of entertainment, medicine, politics, civil rights, and the military. During segregation, their strengths illuminated and inspired their community. While they may have considered their lives ordinary, they accomplished extraordinary things that helped usher Kansas City toward a brighter future. Civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer often sang the simple but powerful lyric "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." As we continue into the 21st century, we should remember those whose lights continue to shine brightly in the Midwest.

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# Lloyd Gaines



1911 - Unknown

Sixteen years before the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* ended legal segregation in schools, Lloyd Gaines fought a court battle to attend the University of Missouri. Gaines was born in Oxford, Mississippi, but moved with his family to St. Louis, Missouri, at age 14. He was valedictorian of his high school class and graduated with a bachelor's degree in history from Lincoln University. In 1935, Gaines applied for admission to the University of Missouri Law School, but was denied because of his race. With the aid of the NAACP, he sued the university to admit him. After the county court and Missouri Supreme Court ruled in favor of the university, his case was brought before the U.S. Supreme Court. In a 6-2 decision, the court ruled that Gaines be admitted or a separate law school for African Americans be established. Following the decision, Gaines traveled to Chicago and was staying at a fraternity house when, on March 19, 1939, he left to run an errand and was never heard from again. While Gaines never realized his dream of studying law at the University of Missouri, his case established the principle of "equality of education" and influenced other legislation leading up to school desegregation.

*Photo: Associated Press*



# Mary Groves Bland

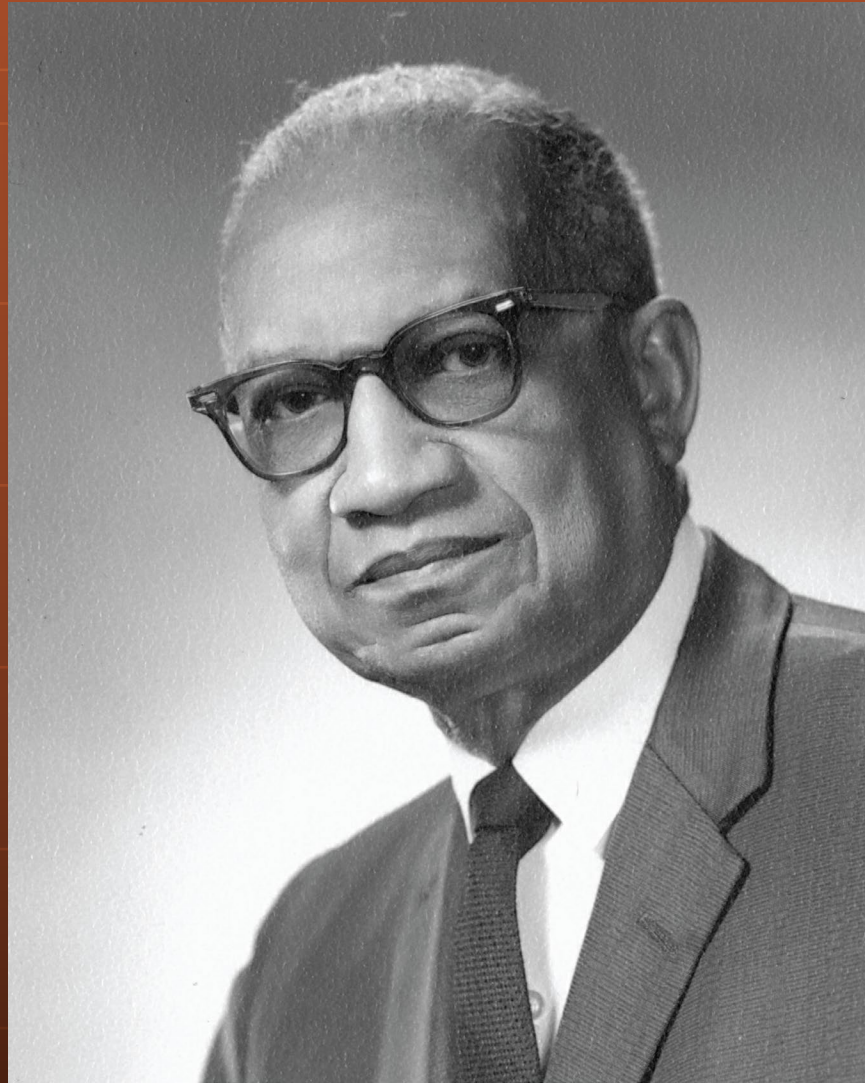


1936 - 2016

During her more than two decades in the Missouri State Legislature as a Democratic representative, Mary Groves Bland was an advocate for the rights of minorities and a champion of equality and social justice. Bland was born in Kansas City, Missouri, and graduated from R.T. Coles High School. She received a certificate in community relations from Ottawa University and later furthered her education at Penn Valley Community College, Webster University, and Harvard University. Bland's life in public service began in the 1960s when she helped spearhead urban renewal initiatives. She turned to politics, and was elected in 1980 to the Missouri House of Representatives. In 1998, she was elected to the Missouri Senate and held that office until 2005. Over the course of her 25-year political career, Bland helped advance legislation for improved public health, education, housing, and social services. She received honors from the Missouri Black Leadership Association, Missouri Department of Health, National Black Caucus of State Legislators, and other organizations. She was also the first woman to serve as president of the political action committee Freedom, Inc. Bland's legacy is one of a dedicated public servant who encouraged young people to further their education and participate in public service.

*Photo: Official Manual of the State of Missouri, 1989-90*

# Earl Thomas



1897 - 1985

Dr. Earl D. Thomas dedicated his life to education and public service. Born in Kansas City, Kansas, he graduated from Sumner High School and later earned B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of Chicago and a doctorate in education from the University of Kansas. Thomas served as a teacher and administrator in the Kansas City, Missouri, school district for 35 years. A proponent of vocational arts, he became the first principal of the R.T. Coles Junior and Vocational High School when it opened in 1936. Thomas later served as principal of Lincoln High School, stepping down in 1963 to run for city council. He won the third district seat, becoming the first African American to be elected councilman-at-large in the city's history. After retiring from political life in 1971, Thomas remained active in community affairs. He served as president of the Kansas City Urban League, was a charter member of the Kansas City Human Rights Commission, and was an active member of St. Augustine's Episcopal Church. A skilled craftsman who built his own home, Thomas also led efforts to construct affordable housing in the city's urban core.

*Photo: The Kansas City Star*



# Wayne Miner

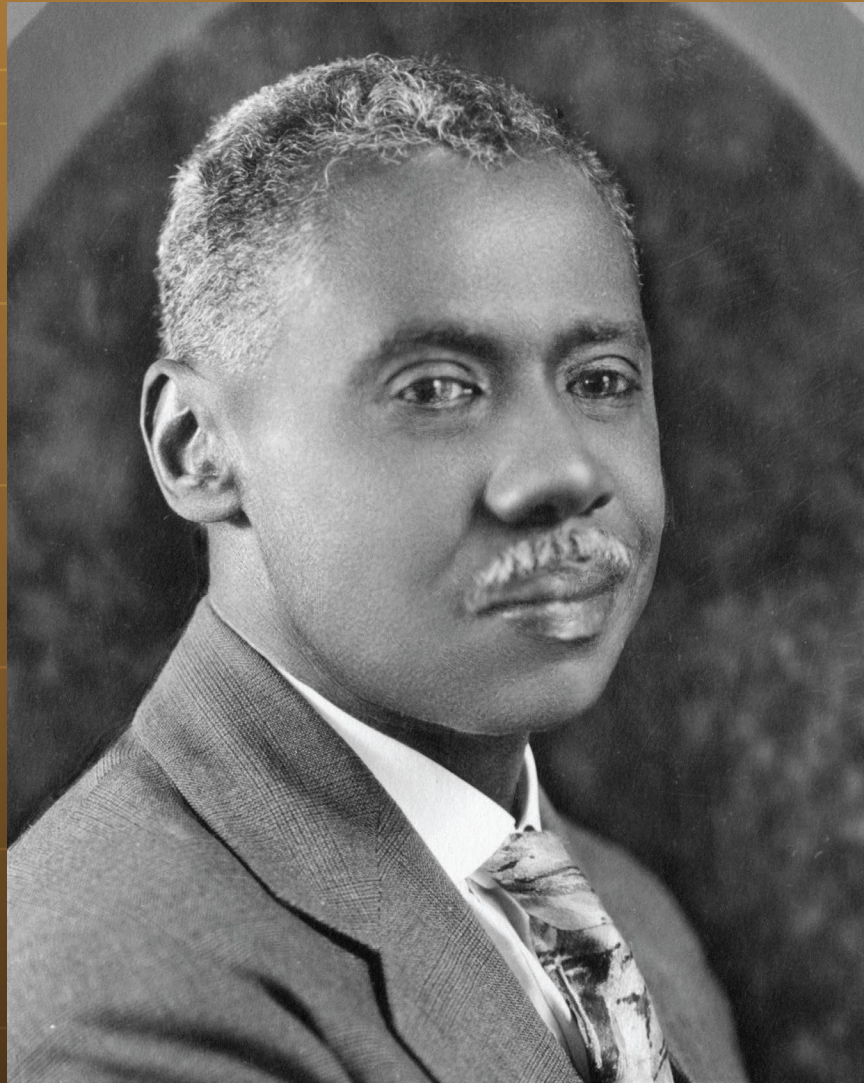


1890 - 1918

The brief yet distinguished life of Wayne Miner was defined by sacrifice and valor. The son of former slaves, Miner was born in 1890 in Henry County, Missouri. He later moved to Appanoose County, Iowa, and was working as a coal miner when called to serve in the First World War in 1917. He was part of the 92nd Division, an African American fighting force nicknamed the "Buffalo Soldiers," when it deployed to France in August 1918. During the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, the last major engagement of World War I, Miner volunteered to deliver ammunition to an outpost when no others would step forward. Private Miner was killed in action on November, 11, 1918, just a few hours before the signing of the armistice that ended the war. The following year, the American Legion Wayne Miner Post 149 was formed in honor of the fallen soldier. The Wayne Miner Court housing development and Wayne Miner Health Center were also named for him. Miner is recognized as a hero and one of the last Americans to die in World War I. He is buried in St. Mihiel American Cemetery in Thiaucourt, France.

*Photo: Iowa State Historical Society*

# John Edward Perry



1870 - 1962

Dr. J. Edward Perry dedicated his adult life to providing quality health care to Kansas City's African American community and advancing opportunities for black physicians and nurses. Perry was born in Clarksville, Texas, the son of former slaves. So intent were his parents that he receive a formal education that his father walked four miles and cut 40 cords of wood per day to pay for his initial schooling. An advanced student, Perry attended Bishop College at age 15 and held a teaching position by age 21. In 1892 he enrolled in Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, and later completed his post-graduate studies in Chicago. Perry opened an office in Kansas City in 1903. Recognizing the need for a professional hospital catering to African Americans, he campaigned with another black physician, Thomas Unthank, to establish General Hospital No. 2 in 1908. Two years later he opened the Perry Sanitarium and Training School for Nurses. The institution was renamed Wheatley-Provident Hospital in 1917 and expanded to a larger facility at 18th & Forest streets. Dr. Perry continued to practice medicine until his retirement in 1945. Through his vision, African Americans in Kansas City had better access to health care services and training.

*Photo: Black Archives of Mid America*



# Myra Taylor



1917 - 2011

Singer Myra Taylor is recognized as one of the last great performers from Kansas City's jazz heyday of the 1930s. Taylor was born in Bonner Springs, Kansas, but spent her childhood living in the 18th and Vine area of Kansas City. A natural singer and dancer, she was performing in nightclubs by the age of 15. In Taylor's own words, "I got the jobs because I could dance, but kept the jobs because I could sing." Her career took off in the 1930s when she toured the U.S. as a vocalist with the Clarence Love Orchestra and Harlan Leonard and His Rockets. From 1937-1940, she lived in Chicago and collaborated with several legendary jazz musicians. For the next four decades she toured worldwide, performing in 30 countries, and entertained troops during World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars. Over that time, she wrote and recorded several songs, but is best known for "The Spider and the Fly" and "Still Blue Water." Taylor's career came full circle when she returned to Kansas City in the early 1990s, performing in local nightclubs and starting a jazz group called the Wild Women of Kansas City. She continued to entertain audiences until her death at age 94.

*Photo: The Kansas City Call*





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