

Elizabeth Hobbs Keckly

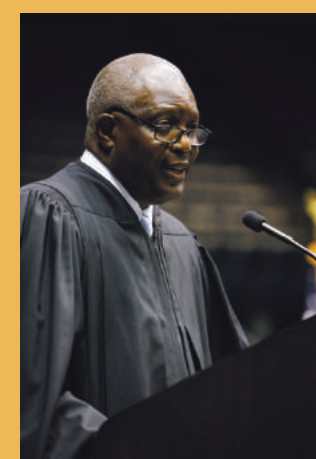
1818–1907 | Dinwiddie County
SEAMSTRESS AND AUTHOR

Born a slave in Dinwiddie County, **Elizabeth Hobbs Keckly** (February 1818–May 26, 1907), did not discover until later in life that her biological father was her mother’s white owner. She experienced slavery’s hardships early when her mother’s enslaved husband was separated from the family, and she suffered physical abuse at the hands of her owners. After moving to St. Louis with her owner’s daughter, she married James Keckly and began to earn money as a seamstress. By 1855 her many patrons had raised enough money to purchase the freedom of Keckly and her son. They relocated to Washington, D.C., where she developed a clientele that included many prominent women.

Keckly came to the attention of Mary Todd Lincoln and in 1861 became not only her personal dressmaker, but also a confidante. During the Civil War, Keckly helped establish the Contraband Relief Association to provide assistance for black refugees. After Abraham Lincoln’s assassination, Keckly resumed her career in Washington. To help raise money for the indebted Mrs. Lincoln, Keckly wrote *Behind the Scenes, Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (1868). The publisher misspelled her name as Keckley, which subsequently became the most commonly used spelling. The Lincoln family was incensed at the revealing personal details it contained, and the book did not sell many copies. Keckly continued sewing, trained young dressmakers, and in the 1890s taught sewing and domestic arts at Wilberforce University, in Ohio. She died at the National Home for Destitute Colored Women and Children, in Washington, D.C., which she had helped establish in 1863.

James Randolph Spencer

1949– | Richmond
FEDERAL JUDGE



A native of Florence, South Carolina, **James Randolph Spencer** graduated from Clark College, in Atlanta, in 1971. After working for the civil rights activist and attorney Marian Wright Edelman, Spencer earned a law degree from Harvard University in 1974. He served in the U.S. Army and, from 1975 to 1978, was in the Judge Advocate General’s Corps. He was an assistant U.S. attorney for the

District of Columbia from 1978 to 1983 and for the Eastern District of Virginia from 1983 to 1986.

In September 1986 President Ronald Reagan appointed him U.S. district judge for the Eastern District of Virginia. At the time Spencer was the first African American from Virginia to receive an appointment as a federal judge. As chief judge from December 2004 to December 2011, he had administrative responsibility for the district court’s divisions in Alexandria, Newport News, Norfolk, and Richmond.

By appointment of the chief justice of the United States, Spencer has served on the Defender Services Committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States and was chairman of the conference’s Subcommittee on Federal Death Penalty Prosecutions and its Subcommittee on Budget and Grants. He has also taught at the University of Virginia School of Law. Spencer earned a divinity degree from Howard University in 1985 and served as an associate minister at his church until becoming a judge.

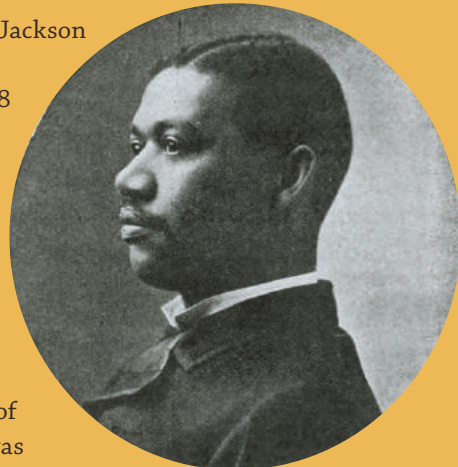
John Mitchell, Jr.

1863–1929 | Richmond
NEWSPAPER EDITOR

Born enslaved in Henrico County, **John Mitchell, Jr.**, (July 11, 1863–December 3, 1929) spent his early years working as a servant in the home of a Richmond attorney. After graduating as valedictorian from the Richmond Colored Normal School and teaching in Fredericksburg, Mitchell became editor in 1884 of the fledgling *Richmond Planet*, which he published until his death. Known as the “fighting editor,” Mitchell assisted in organizing a black boycott of the Richmond trolley system, spoke out against the disfranchisement of African Americans, and gained notoriety for promoting the *Planet’s* strong anti-lynching stance.

Mitchell represented Jackson Ward on Richmond’s city council from 1888 to 1896. He served as president of the national Afro-American Press Association during the 1890s, and in 1894 became the grand chancellor of the Virginia Knights of Pythias. In 1901 he was the founding president of the Mechanics’ Savings Bank, established to protect the financial interests of the local African-American community. In protest of the all-white Republican slate of statewide officers in 1921, Mitchell ran for governor on the party’s “lily black” ticket.

The legacy of Mitchell and the *Richmond Planet* endures. His countless editorials and articles exposed and condemned racial injustice long before the beginning of the civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century. In 2012, a new grave marker was dedicated at Mitchell’s burial site at Evergreen Cemetery, in Richmond. It reads, fittingly, “A man who would walk into the jaws of death to serve his race.”



William Darnell “Bill” Euille

1950– | Alexandria
MAYOR

Born in Alexandria, **William Darnell “Bill” Euille** graduated from T. C. Williams High School before attending Quinnipiac University, in Hamden, Connecticut. Graduating with a bachelor’s degree in accounting in 1972, he returned to Alexandria, where he joined a local construction company as an accountant. Within eight years he had become vice president and controller, in charge of administration, finance, and contracts. In 1987 he formed Wm. D. Euille and Associates, a construction services firm, and serves as its president, chief executive officer, and chairman of the board.

Taking an interest in local affairs, Euille sat on the Alexandria School Board from 1974 to 1984 and on the Alexandria City Council from 1994 to 2003, serving as vice mayor from 1997 to 2000. He won election as the first African-American mayor in Alexandria in 2003. He was reelected in 2006, 2009, and 2012. Euille has been involved in many charitable and business organizations, such as the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, the Alexandria Boys and Girls Club, the Northern Virginia Urban League, the Alexandria United Way Campaign, and his own William D. Euille Foundation. He has received numerous awards for his contributions to the community from such organizations as the Alexandria and Virginia chapters of the NAACP, the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the *Washington Post*, the Alexandria Sportsman Club, and the U.S. Small Business Administration.

James Heyward Blackwell

ca. 1864–1931 | Richmond
EDUCATOR AND COMMUNITY ADVOCATE

Born, probably enslaved, in Marion, Virginia, **James Heyward Blackwell** (ca. February 1864–October 14, 1931) grew up in Manchester, across the James River from Richmond. Although his parents could not read or write, they encouraged him to obtain an education. After being tutored by the local pastor of the First Baptist Church, Blackwell graduated in 1880 from Richmond Theological Institute (now Virginia Union University). He taught in New Kent County for two years before returning to Manchester when its segregated public schools began hiring African-American teachers. In 1888 he became principal and initiated a high school curriculum.

After the consolidation of Manchester and Richmond in 1910, his school was named the Maury School. Richmond law forbade Blackwell from being principal, so he returned to teaching. He remained the de facto chief administrator of the Maury School until 1916, when a white principal was hired for the renamed Dunbar School. Blackwell retired in 1922, after more than forty years in public education. Throughout his career he was also a leader in fraternal orders and Baptist Sunday school organizations. Devoted to expanding opportunities in the African-American community, Blackwell helped establish a building and loan association, an insurance company, and real estate businesses. He also managed two employment agencies, including one for African-American teachers.

In 1951 the Dunbar School became a combined elementary and junior high school, and the following year the Richmond School Board renamed it the James H. Blackwell School. An elementary school alone since 1970, it has given its name to the surrounding neighborhood.

Nominated by Barbara Sookins-Goode, James H. Blackwell Elementary School, Richmond.

Marcellus Spencer “Boo” Williams, Jr.

1958– | Hampton
YOUTH SPORTS MENTOR

A basketball star at Hampton’s Phoebus High School, **Marcellus Spencer “Boo” Williams, Jr.** left for Philadelphia to become a college standout at Saint Joseph’s University. After playing professional basketball in Europe, Williams returned to Hampton to work as an insurance agent. Inspired by a Philadelphia youth basketball league, in 1982 he created the Boo Williams Summer League with only \$400 and forty-six players. The league, now known as the Boo Williams Nike Invitational, has grown to include more than 200 teams and more than 2,000 male and female participants from across the country. Over the years his teams have won multiple national Amateur Athletic Union Championships and many players have gone into the college, Olympic, and professional ranks.

Envisioning a major youth sports facility for Hampton, in 2008 he opened the Boo Williams Sportsplex, a 135,000-square-foot, 4,000-seat, \$13.5 million facility with eight basketball courts, twelve volleyball courts, eight indoor hockey fields, and an indoor track and field.

Operating what the *Philadelphia Inquirer* has called “the nation’s premier youth organization,” Williams has been the AAU chairman of Boys Basketball and a member of the USA/ABA Cadet Committee for Development of Future Olympians. A member of Saint Joseph’s Hall of Fame, Williams was the Walt Disney Wide World of Sports Volunteer of the Year in 2001, and a member of the inaugural class of the Hampton Roads Sports Hall of Fame. In 2013 the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame named Williams one of its three winners of the Mannie Jackson–Basketball’s Human Spirit Award.



Mary Alice Franklin Hatwood Futrell

1940– | Lynchburg
EDUCATOR AND ORGANIZATION LEADER

Growing up in Lynchburg, **Mary Alice Franklin Hatwood Futrell** attended segregated public schools before earning a degree in business education at Virginia State College (now Virginia State University) in 1962. She soon began teaching at an Alexandria high school and joined a group of teachers working for the successful desegregation of the city’s schools. Active in the Virginia Education Association, Futrell served two terms as its president, from 1976 to 1978. In 1983 she was elected to the first of an unprecedented three terms as president of the National Education Association. During her six-year tenure she stressed the importance of professional development for teachers to ensure high-quality public education for every child.

Futrell earned a doctorate in education in 1992 and joined the faculty of The George Washington University, where she served as dean of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development from 1995 to 2010. Committed to strengthening public schools and establishing high standards for teachers and students, she is a faculty member of GWU’s Education Policy Studies Program and is codirector of the Center for Curriculum, Standards, and Technology. In 1993, she was the founding president of Education International, which promotes quality education and human rights worldwide.

In 2004 Futrell received UNESCO’s Jan Amos Comenius Medal for her continuing efforts to ensure that children around the world have access to education. Since 2005, Education International has granted an annual award named for Futrell that honors educators whose efforts have significantly influenced education and equal opportunities, especially for girls and women.



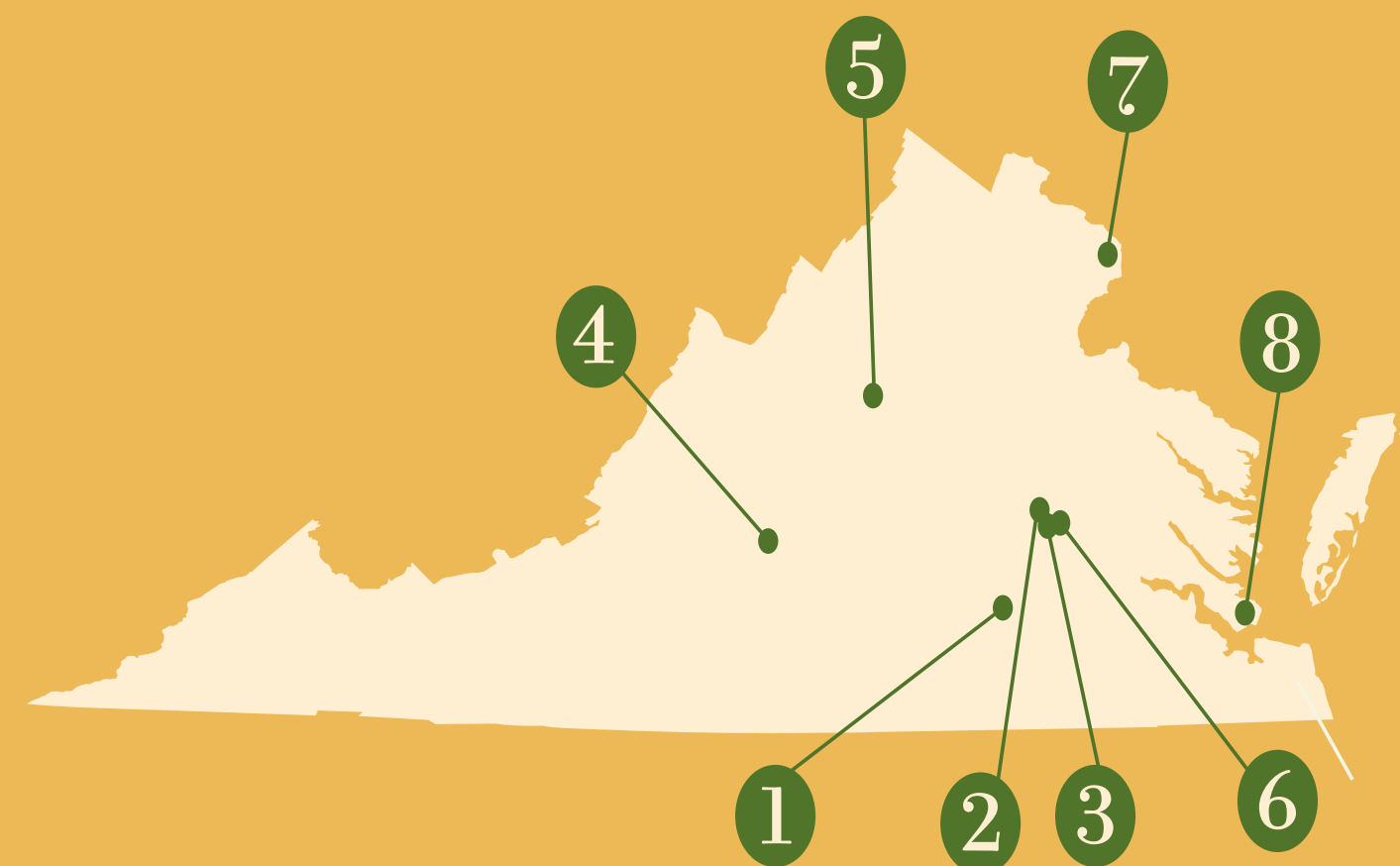
Olivia Ferguson McQueen

1942– | Charlottesville
CIVIL RIGHTS PIONEER

In 1958 **Olivia Ferguson McQueen**, a sixteen-year-old rising senior at the all-black Jackson P. Burley High School, led a group of students in challenging school segregation in Charlottesville. After a federal district court judge ruled in the students’ favor, the governor closed the all-white Lane High School, where McQueen was to attend, rather than integrate. In January 1959, state and federal courts simultaneously ruled that closing the schools violated Virginia’s constitution. After failing to force McQueen to complete the school year at Burley, the city’s school board provided tutors in its office for her and other plaintiffs in the suit.

Despite encouragement from teachers and activists, her senior year was difficult because she was isolated from her peers and did not get to enjoy the many activities available to her counterparts. While McQueen watched her friends from Burley High receive their diplomas in June 1959, she had no ceremony and received only a makeshift certificate indicating the classes she had completed. She persevered, however, and in 1963 earned a bachelor’s degree in childhood education from Hampton Institute (now Hampton University). She later earned a master’s degree in education from Trinity College, in Washington, D.C.

After spending her career as an educator outside Virginia, McQueen received her official high school diploma from the Charlottesville Public Schools on May 25, 2013. Decades after her challenge of segregation and personal sacrifice, she became a symbol of resilience and hope for the cause of equal access to education for all children.



1. Elizabeth Hobbs Keckly*
2. John Mitchell, Jr.*
3. James Heyward Blackwell*
4. Mary Alice Franklin Hatwood Futrell

5. Olivia Ferguson McQueen
6. James Randolph Spencer
7. William Darnell “Bill” Euille
8. Marcellus Spencer “Boo” Williams, Jr.

*deceased

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A joint project of the Library of Virginia and Dominion.

Learn more about distinguished African Americans from Virginia in the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography* (Richmond: Library of Virginia, 1998–2006) and on the Library of Virginia’s websites, www.lva.virginia.gov and virginiamemory.com. Instructional materials, classroom activities, and nomination forms for the 2015 project are available at www.lva.virginia.gov/smw.



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MEN &
WOMEN**
IN VIRGINIA HISTORY

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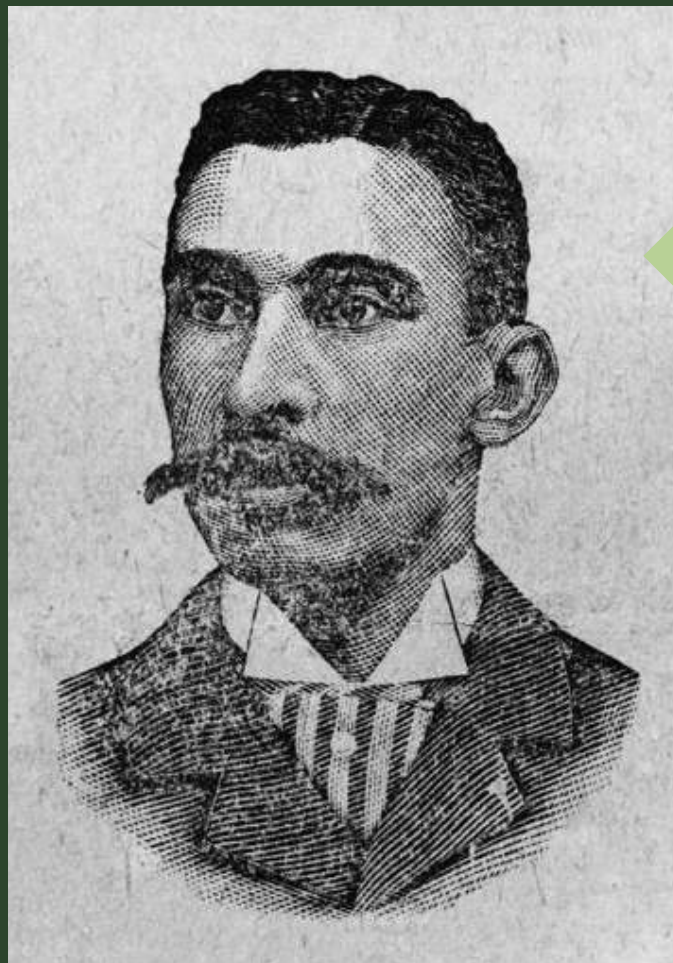


Elizabeth Hobbs Keckly

(1818–1907)
Dinwiddie County
SEAMSTRESS AND AUTHOR
Seamstress and confidante of Mary Todd Lincoln, former slave Elizabeth Hobbs Keckly wrote a book detailing her life and experiences in the White House.

John Mitchell, Jr.

(1863–1929)
Richmond
NEWSPAPER EDITOR
As editor of the *Richmond Planet*, John Mitchell, Jr., fought against racism and for African-American advancement in politics, business, and education.



James Heyward Blackwell

(ca. 1864–1931)
Richmond
EDUCATOR AND COMMUNITY ADVOCATE
James Heyward Blackwell advanced the cause of African-American public education in Richmond for more than forty years.

Mary Alice Franklin Hatwood Futrell

(1940–)
Lynchburg
EDUCATOR AND ORGANIZATION LEADER
Educator and organization leader Mary Alice Franklin Hatwood Futrell is an advocate for teachers and students in the United States and around the world.

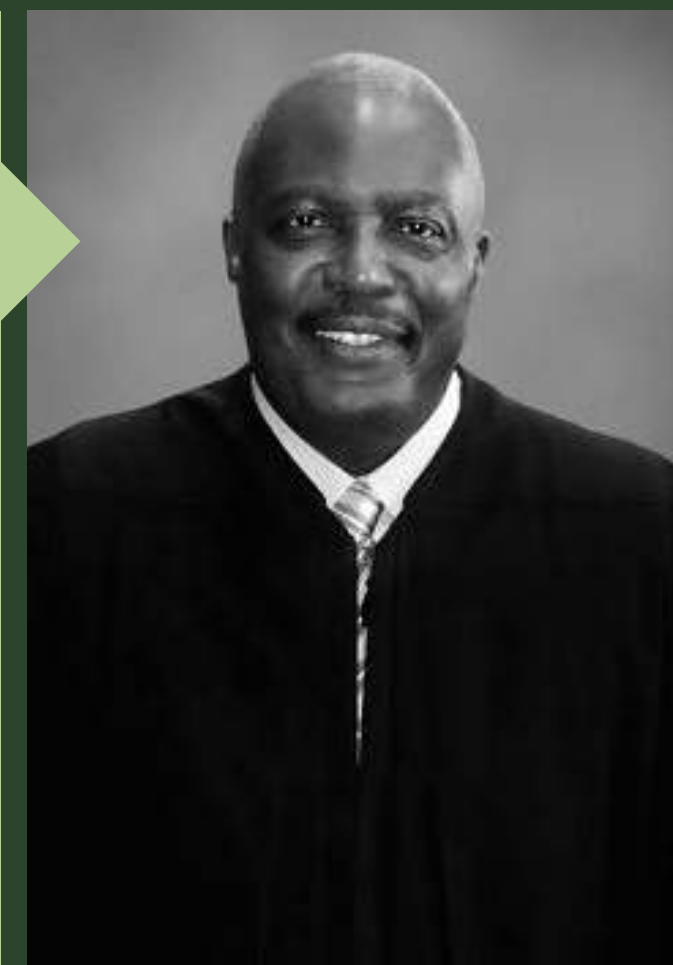


Olivia Ferguson McQueen

(1942–)
Charlottesville
CIVIL RIGHTS PIONEER
Civil rights pioneer Olivia Ferguson McQueen successfully challenged school segregation in 1959, but did not receive her diploma for another fifty-four years.

James Randolph Spencer

(1949–)
Richmond
FEDERAL JUDGE
James Randolph Spencer is the first African-American federal judge appointed from Virginia.



William Darnell "Bill" Euille

(1950–)
Alexandria
MAYOR
A leader in the political, cultural, and civic life of Alexandria, William Darnell "Bill" Euille became the first African-American mayor of the city.

Marcellus Spencer "Boo" Williams, Jr.

(1958–)
Hampton
YOUTH SPORTS MENTOR
Marcellus Spencer "Boo" Williams, Jr., created a nationally known summer youth basketball program and led the way in developing a state-of-the-art community sports facility in Hampton.



2014

STRONG MEN & WOMEN

IN VIRGINIA HISTORY

People of African descent have been a part of Virginia's—and America's—story since European colonization of the North American continent began. Yet the contributions of African Americans have often been ignored, obscured, or underappreciated by those who recorded history. In observance of Black History Month, the Library of Virginia and Dominion honor eight distinguished Virginians, past and present, as *Strong Men & Women in Virginia History* for their important contributions to the state, the nation, or their professions.

These men and women offer powerful examples of individuals who refused to be defined by their circumstances. Their biographies are a testament to the determination and perseverance displayed by extraordinary people during challenging times. These individuals demonstrate how African Americans have actively campaigned through education and advocacy for better lives for themselves, their people, and all Americans. It is these many contributions that the *Strong Men & Women in Virginia History* program seeks to recognize and share.

To learn more about these extraordinary men and women, all of whom have used their talents and creativity to push for equality and inclusion in American society, visit our website at:

www.lva.virginia.gov/smw

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