



Yates Alumni in the Spotlight

By Ana C. Parker and A'Viyon Robinson

From its founding in 1926, Jack Yates High School in Houston, Texas, has seen thousands of students enter its doors and walk its storied halls, going on to graduate in pursuit of varied lives and careers. Of these graduates, many have gone on to be notable figures, and a host of other

Yates alumni have distinguished themselves across the fields of entertainment, education, law, broadcasting, and civic activism, to name a few. The people listed here, and those who appear in other articles throughout this issue, are but a small sample of the distinguished Yates Lions. **HH**



Hobart Taylor Jr. (1920-1981) graduated from Yates in 1936 and went on to earn BA and MA degrees before receiving his JD from the University of Michigan in 1943. He and his father supported Lyndon Johnson, and in 1961, President Kennedy appointed Taylor special counsel to the President's Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, where he is credited with coining the phrase, "affirmative action."¹

Photo courtesy of Texas History Collection, Portal to Texas History, [ark:/67531/metapht1741](https://www.texas.gov/ark:/67531/metapht1741).

Ana C. Parker is an art and education major at the University of Houston with plans to teach art upon graduation. She is in her second year interning at *Houston History* magazine.

A'Viyon Robinson is a third-year history student at the University of Houston. As a native Houstonian, her interests include community enrichment and preservation, as well as archiving and actuating the oral histories of the city's more marginalized communities.



Jewel Brown (1937-2024) began singing at age nine, and by twelve years old was singing at the Eldorado Ballroom in Third Ward, and with her brother's band in Galveston. Brown toured the world performing with Louis Armstrong throughout the 1960s and returned to performing in the 2000s. Here she sings "en spectacle avec Louis Armstrong à la Place des Nations," on September 8, 1968.²

Photo by Gordon Beck, courtesy of Archives de la Ville de Montréal and Flickr.



Third Ward native **Carroll Parrott Blue** (1943-2019) graduated from Yates in 1960, feeling the full effects of the new school leadership and desegregation. Blue became a noted documentary filmmaker giving voice to people of color and joining the L.A. Rebellion film movement calling for an end to discrimination in the industry. Her book, *The Dawn at My Back: A Memoir of a Black Texas Upbringing*, chronicles life in Third Ward under Jim Crow and the challenges of breaking away from its legacy.³

Photo courtesy of the University of Houston.



Born in Austin in 1948, **Michelle Barnes** and her family moved to Houston in 1951 where she attended and graduated from Yates High School in 1966. She went on to become an alumnus of the University of Houston in 1970. Barnes is a Houston-based artist, educator and arts administrator, known for her role as co-founder and executive director of The Community Artists' collective.⁴

Photo courtesy of Black Lunch Table and Wikimedia Commons.

Yates



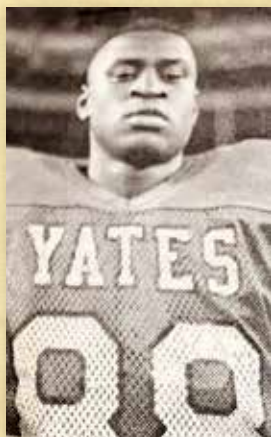
Carolyn Evans-Shabazz, Ed.D., graduated from Yates in 1972. A third generation educator, she earned degrees from Spellman and Texas Southern University and served as teacher and Lead Evaluation Specialist with HISD until she retired in 2009. An active member of the NAACP, she became the first African American woman to head the Houston Community College board, where she worked to make education more accessible. Since 2020, she has served as the Houston City Council Member for District D, where she prioritizes education, quality of life, and providing resources and information to community members.

Photo courtesy of Carolyn Evans-Shabazz.



Majorettes and sisters **Phylicia (now Rashad)** and **Debbie Allen** do "The Java" during a halftime show in 1965. Both sisters went on to award-winning careers in television, stage, and film. Both have also been actively engaged in education.⁵

Photo courtesy of *The Lion* yearbook, 1966.



George Floyd, born in Fayetteville, North Carolina, attended Jack Yates High School where he played on the 1992 District 5A Championship football team. After Floyd's murder at the hands of Minneapolis police in 2020, members of the Yates community gathered at the school for a memorial service to honor his life and speak out against injustice.

Photos courtesy of the *The Lion*, 1993, and Wikimedia Commons, 2C2K Photography.

Alumni



A 1979 Yates graduate, **Garnet Coleman** earned his BA at the University of St. Thomas and completed Harvard University's Senior Executive Program for State and Local Government. He served as a Texas state representative from 1991 to 2022, when health issues forced him to retire. He has fought against illegal drugs and championed education, health reform, housing, the arts, and protection from gentrification.⁶

Photo courtesy of Tipowell0403 and Wikimedia Commons.



In 2023, HISD named 2002 Yates graduate and former teacher, **Stephanie Square** as the school's principal. The Houston native and daughter of Nicaraguan immigrants grew up in Cuney Homes and played six sports at Yates. Currently, Yates is one of 85 HISD schools in the New Education System (NES) to turn around underperforming campuses. Having served the previous six years as principal of an A-rated school, Square plans to build "a culture of excellence" to lead Yates into the future.⁷

Photo courtesy of Houston Independents School District.