

Salva Magister:

The Service of Hazel Hainsworth Young

By Heather Butina-Sutton



Hazel Hainsworth Young with her students at Jack Yates High School, 1949. A lifelong educator, Young taught Latin at Yates for thirty-two years. Richard Hayes Sr. said, "The teachers like Mrs. [Hazel] Hainsworth and Mrs. Virginia Miller who taught me Latin...were the heroes, nuns of our time. They really made us."

Photo Courtesy of the Reverend Jack Yates Family and Antioch Baptist Church Collection, MSS 0281, box 2, folder 4, African American History Research Center at the Gregory School, Houston Public Library.

Hazel Anne Hainsworth was born to Harry Alvin Hainsworth and Beatrice Cornelia Morre Hainsworth on September 12, 1905, in Navasota, Texas. At five years old, Hazel's parents relocated her and her younger brother, Robert Wendell (1909-1981), to Houston's Fifth Ward, which housed twenty percent of the city's growing African American population. By the time her sister, Maye Frances (1913-2013), was born three years later, her father had begun his career with the U.S. Postal Service as a mail carrier. It was a time of transition in Houston, like other cities, when streetcars transported people around town and automobiles were just beginning to appear on city streets. Young recalled her father's work with the post office in a 2007 interview, saying, "They had him with a horse and wagon," adding, his "horse knew every stop on Main Street." Meanwhile, her mother stayed at home to raise Hazel and her siblings. Throughout

her life Hazel spoke fondly of her parents, especially when it came to education. "They sacrificed so much ... to send us to college, all three of us."¹

In 1921, Hazel graduated from Houston's Colored High School (later renamed Booker T. Washington High School) and moved to Washington, D.C. to study Latin at Howard University. She recalled how some of her classmates at Howard were surprised by her math, science, and language abilities. Despite being an underfunded school in the segregated South, Colored High was one of the oldest public African American schools in the United States and had focused its curriculum on both vocational training and liberal arts studies. The three-story, ten-room schoolhouse stood in the Fourth Ward at the intersection of San Felipe Street (now West Dallas) and Frederick Street.² When Hazel graduated from Howard, she chose to return to Houston where she began her teaching career.

Hazel's first position in Houston schools was as a substitute teacher at the newly built Jack Yates High School in 1926, but it was not long before administrators brought her on full-time to teach Latin. Hazel attributed the success of those early years to Third Ward's community. "Parents and teachers were very cooperative," she said. "We never would have just kept going ... had the parents not been wonderful." In addition to parental support, Hazel and her colleagues

Hazel Hainsworth Young graduated from Howard University where she excelled in languages, math, and science.

Photo courtesy of 1925 Howard University yearbook and Wikimedia Commons.





Hazel Young embodied the Alpha Kappa Alpha motto: "By Culture and By Merit." Hazel Hainsworth Young and Robert W. Hainsworth Papers, MSS 0031, box 1, folder 1, African American History Research Center, Houston Public Library.

helped each other avoid segregated transportation by carpooling. "I bought a car and transported my friends," she recalled. "They would pay me to take them to school and back, and I'd use that to buy the gas ... I had a nice group ... [but] this fella ... he'd be late every evening."³

Hazel later became the dean of girls at Yates before transferring to Wheatley High School in 1958. That year Houston Independent School District (HISD) opened a new Yates High School building and demoted Yates's principal, William Holland, rather than allow Holland to take his place as head of the new school. HISD replaced him with the principal of archrival Phillis Wheatley High School, John Codwell, and, in the process, shuffled several faculty members between the schools as well. After approximately forty-six years of service, Young retired from HISD in 1972, and upon her death, was the last surviving member of Yates's original faculty.⁴

Young's students included notables such as Texas Representative Harold Dutton, Harris County Commissioner El Franco Lee, Judge Andrew Jefferson Jr., Texas Southern University president Dr. Robert J. Terry, Houston City Councilmember Judson Robinson Jr., Congressman Mickey Leland, Reverend Robert Hayes Sr., and Katy Councilmember Marshherria Wilson.

Hazel Young's legacy reaches beyond her teaching career. While attending Howard University, Hazel pledged to Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first Greek letter sorority for African American women in the country. Hazel joined AKA in 1922 while a student at Howard. In 1928, she and five other members, Gladys Davis Simon, Anna Belle Stokes, Erma Sweatt Wallace, Lillie Vance Chester, and Marie Viola Butler Taylor, organized the first AKA graduate chapter in Texas, Alpha Kappa Omega, whose goal was to "[promote] self-esteem and

unity...[empower] chapter members to excel academically [and] to bring out the best in each individual." Hazel also served as the Basileus (president) of the chapter in its early years from 1932 to 1933.⁵

During her eighty-seven years as an active member, Hazel gave back to the community through her service, which often focused on education. Some of her projects included volunteering with the Social Justice and Human Rights Committee at the Houston Alumni Youth Center for children aging out of foster care, donating school supplies to the Angel Tree Project for children of incarcerated parents, hosting food drives, and many more acts of service to Houston's Black community.⁶

By the time Hazel Hainsworth Young passed away in 2009, she had been "given her flowers" by AKA, HISD, and the community that loved her. In 1993, the City of Houston awarded her an Outstanding Achievement Award for her service as a sixty-nine-year member of AKA. Her honors from HISD include Jack Yates High School renaming its library in her honor in 2005, receiving a formal award for her service to the district in 2008, and a Special Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009 for her work at Yates. In addition, in 2009 she received the prestigious "Living Legend Award" from the NAACP.⁷

Hazel saw Yates High School and Houston's Third Ward go through many changes during her 103 years of life, but she remained dedicated to her students, peers, and community. Between her teaching, advocacy, and philanthropy, the words of Billy Regan, former HISD superintendent, seem appropriate: "Her service to the community reached across Houston and the entire state of Texas. Maybe even the world."⁸ **HH**

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The last four surviving members of Yates's inaugural faculty, are shown left to right: Mr. Rieras, Hazel Hainsworth, Hazel Eldrige, and Mr. Fonzworth (n.d.).

Photo courtesy of the Hazel Hainsworth Young Photograph Collection, African American History Research Center, Houston Public Library, PH0002-022.