

American Bridge Association (ABA) Members and Black History

By Delores Turner, member University Bridge Club, Atlanta and Chairperson of ABA's History/Archives Committee

American Bridge Association (ABA) members are such an interesting group, or family. Although zero tolerance is in effect during bridge games, players sometimes still get to learn interesting facets about one another before or after completing hands/boards. At the recent Summer National in Chicago, I met a former teacher who had taught singer Michael Jackson. She was from Gary, Indiana, the hometown of the Jackson family. I have never had the privilege of playing with **Benny Patton**, a member of **South Metro Bridge Club**. However, I have played opposite him on many occasions where he demonstrated his prowess at the bridge table. On one such occasion he casually mentioned that he was perhaps the last person to speak with Civil Rights icon Medgar Evers before he was assassinated. Benny and Medgar Evers were neighbors, and he was Mr. Evers' newspaper distributor. On that fateful evening, when Mr. Evers pulled into his driveway, Benny Patton exchanged pleasantries with him and then went on his way. Patton later learned of Medgar Evers' death.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s sister-in-law, **Naomi King**, is a member of the **M&M Defenders Bridge Club**, but she is so unassuming that many players have no idea who she is, especially players who do not reside in Atlanta. **Laura Kate Mitchell**, a member of the **University Bridge Club** (UBC) in Atlanta, is the mother of comedian Finesse Mitchell, who spent several years as a cast member on the **Saturday Night Live** television show, is an author, and also was a football player for the **Miami Hurricanes**. **East Metro Bridge Club** member **Christine Callier** is the mother of U.S. Congressman Henry "Hank" Johnson, who represents DeKalb County's Fourth Congressional District.

Author Tayari Jones's recent novel, **An American Marriage**, is now Oprah Winfrey's newest book club selection. Tayari's mother is **Barbara B. Jones**, a **South Metro Bridge Club** member. Barbara Jones also happens to be the mother of ESPN sportscaster **Bomani Jones**.

One of Hollywood's more prominent African-American movie executives is **Charles D. King**. He is responsible for a recent boon in multicultural media, with movies like *Fences*, *Mudbound* and *Roman J. Israel, Esq.* **King** is the son of **East Metro Bridge Club** members **Dr. Winton and Leslie King**.

Undoubtedly, these interesting facts and accomplishments in the entertainment, publishing, and political arena are made possible because of many firsts African Americans have achieved before them. The ABA has many pioneers among its members as well. Of note are the following historical achievements:

- **Metropolitan Bridge Unit** member **Dr. Gwendolyn Middlebrooks** was an original participant in Atlanta's student sit-in movement.
- **M&M Defenders** member **Henrie Treadwell** integrated the University of South Carolina.
- **UBC's Nan Lindsey** was one of the first blacks to enter the University of Tennessee (at Chattanooga).
- **Alyce Ware**, also a member of the **UBC** is co-owner of the **Atlanta Voice** newspaper and was one of the first black women to integrate Georgia Tech.
- **UBC's Elaine McCray** was the first black registered nurse hired at the Naval Hospital at Corpus Christi, Texas in 1956.

ABA members represent a vast array of professions: doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses, retired executives, military service personnel, authors, business owners and everyday people who participate in this game that we love! During Black History month and all through the year let's remember that ABA members have made major contributions to American society. Let's also continue to acquaint ourselves with each other beyond the bridge table because we have some interesting history of our own!