

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Xernona Clayton

PERSON

Clayton, Xernona , 1930-

Alternative Names: Clayton, Xernona , 1930-;

Life Dates: August 30, 1930-

Place of Birth: Muskogee, Oklahoma

Residence: Atlanta, Georgia

Occupations: Broadcast Executive; Foundation Chief Executive; Nonprofit Executive; Television Host; Television Producer

Biographical Note

Broadcast executive, foundation chief executive, nonprofit executive, television host, and television producer Xernona Clayton and her twin sister, Xenobia, were born August 30, 1930 in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Clayton's parents, Reverend James M. and Lillie Brewster, were actively engaged in the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Muskogee. In 1952, Clayton earned her B.A. degree from Tennessee State Agricultural and Industrial College, now Tennessee State University. She later earned a scholarship and pursued graduate studies at the University of Chicago. In 1957, Clayton married noted journalist and civil rights activist Edward Clayton, who died in 1966. She later married jurist Paul L. Brady, the first African American appointed as a Federal Administrative Law judge.

Clayton's civic involvement and participation in the Civil Rights Movement was informed by the Chicago Urban League, where she worked to investigate discrimination in employment. As an activist, Clayton was instrumental in coordinating activities for the Doctor's Committee for Implementation project, which culminated with the desegregation of hospital facilities in Atlanta, Georgia. Clayton also worked closely with Dr. and Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr., helping to organize fundraising initiatives for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). By the mid-1960s, Clayton was writing for the "Atlanta Voice," and in 1968, she became the first black woman in the South to host a regularly scheduled prime-time talk show, "Variations," which became "The Xernona Clayton Show" on WAGA-TV in Atlanta. Her guests included Harry Belafonte and Lena Horne. Later that year, Clayton successfully convinced the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan to renounce the Klan. In 1982, Clayton began her long standing and impressive career with Turner Broadcasting System (TBS). At TBS, she assumed many roles throughout the years,

including producing documentaries, hosting a public affairs program entitled "Open Up" and serving as director and vice-president of public affairs in the early 1980s. Ted Turner, founder of TBS, promoted Clayton to assistant corporate vice-president for urban affairs in 1988. In 1993, Clayton created the Trumpet Awards for Turner Broadcasting to honor African American achievements. The program is seen in over 185 countries.

As Governor of Georgia, former President Jimmy Carter appointed Clayton to the State Motion Picture and Television Commission. She is a member of the Academy for Television Arts and Sciences, the National Urban League, among other civic and professional organizations. Clayton is also a board member of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change and served as chairman of the Atlanta University Board of Trustees. The recipient of numerous accolades, Clayton received the Leadership and Dedication to Civil Rights Award and the Drum Major for Justice Award from SCLC in 2004. In her honor, the Atlanta Chapter of the Association of Black Journalists established the Xernona Clayton Scholarship. Clayton's autobiography, "I've Been Marching All the Time" was published in 1991.

Xernona Clayton was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on June 22, 2005.

Related Entries

Clayton, Xenobia [SIBLINGOF]
Sister

Brewster, James M. [CHILDOF]
Father

Brewster, Lillie Brewster [CHILDOF]
Mother

Brady, Paul J. [SPOUSEOF]
Husband

Clayton, Edward [SPOUSEOF]
Husband

Tennessee State University [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to 1952]

B.A.

University of Chicago [STUDENTOF]
[from ? to ?]

Chicago Urban League [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from ? to ?]

Investigator/Undercover Agent

WAGA-TV (Television station: Atlanta,Ga.) [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1967 to ?]

Host of "The Xernona Clayton Show"

Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. [EMPLOYEEOF]
[from 1979 to ?]

Executive Vice President of Urban Affairs

State Motion Picture and Television Commission [MEMBEROF]
Delegate

Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences [MEMBEROF]
Member

National Urban League [MEMBEROF]
Member

Southern Christian Leadership Conference [MEMBEROF]
Event Planning and Fundraising

Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change [MEMBEROF]
Board Member

Sickle Cell Disease Association of America [MEMBEROF]
Member

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority [MEMBEROF]
Member