



SAN FRANCISCO

# African American Historical & Cultural Society

**SAN FRANCISCO  
AFRICAN AMERICAN  
HISTORICAL &  
CULTURAL SOCIETY**

762 Fulton St., 2<sup>nd</sup> fl.  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
415.292.7162  
sfaahcs.org  
[info@sfaahcs.org](mailto:info@sfaahcs.org)

Eldoris Cameron & Ginger  
Smyly, Co-editors

Al Williams, President  
William Hoskins,  
Executive Director

Photos: Eldoris Cameron,  
Ginger Smyly, David  
Johnson, unattributed

- *The Board of  
Directors*

*We continue to grieve violence-related deaths, the ongoing toll of COVID and the impact of weather-related loss around the world. We deplore violence and hate of any kind. When we say **BLACK LIVES MATTER**, we mean **ALL LIVES MATTER**.*

The Society is on the job despite the long wait to re-enter the office and gallery at the African American Arts and Culture Complex (AAACC.)

- The Board has identified ways to streamline work, aiming to be more efficient and to economize.
- The Society has met and consulted with a panel of scholars, including SF- born, Dr. Albert Broussard, working with the National Parks Service in its endeavor to expand the “Freedom Trail,” to the West. The “Trail” describes and preserves the Underground Railroad and related civil rights movements and events, many which occurred in the West.
- Board members are working with Citizen Film, the AAACC, and other community groups on the revitalization of the Buchanan Mall. The Society is particularly focused on the history of the Western Addition, the Fillmore and the Buchanan Mall. Society members will have an opportunity to provide input on this project in the future.
- Planning for **Black History Month 2023** is now in motion. The theme is: **Black Resistance**. Please contact the Society (see below) if you are interested in working on 2023 Black History Month.
- The Board is continuously recruiting new directors to serve on the Board.

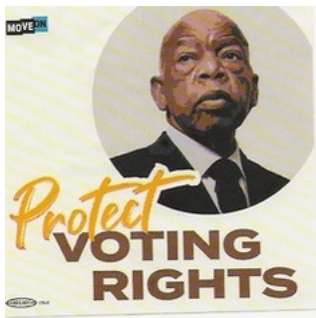
... Without leadership and volunteers, the Society can not sustain the organization, conduct educational programs and maintain a library and archive; still happening despite COVID restrictions. Please consider serving on the Board or taking leadership on a committee alongside current Board members. Or, if you know of someone particularly suited to serve, please promote it with him, her or they. Contact Al Williams, President, at [info@sfaahcs.org](mailto:info@sfaahcs.org) or call 415-292-6172.

**PRAISESINGER**

In this issue:

- ✓ Society Leadership, Happenings and Board Recruitment
- ✓ The Executive Director Speaks on the Vote
- ✓ Shirley Herndon Dances with the Ancestors
- ✓ Stuart Toussaint Davison, 1<sup>st</sup> Black graduate of UC Medical School, Berkeley
- ✓ African American art at the DeYoung Museum and beyond
- ✓ Technology Tips
- ✓ Events

VOTE: WE THE PEOPLE



As I write, our democracy is suffering from vicious attacks on voting rights and fair elections by right-wing legislators across the country. These efforts to deny inalienable rights can be seen in dozens of state legislatures. Voter suppression laws are being introduced in statehouses across the country with 34 new bills proposed as of this May alone. The implications of these efforts are to obstruct the rights of Black, Latino, and other communities by creating barriers that make it virtually impossible to vote.

Some of these laws make it possible for partisans to remove independent election administration officials, taking control of all aspects of voting and vote counting, providing them with an opportunity to sabotage the entire election process. Other laws impose criminal penalties on election officials for simply doing their job. Some elected officials have been falsely accused, faced death threats and racist attacks. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, in 2021, 733 hate groups and 488 antigovernment extremists were identified.

One of the more important challenges has been over the renewal of the **Voting Rights Act**. The law was originally passed in 1965 in the aftermath of Black Sunday. The Voting Rights Act, signed by President Johnson in August 1965, prohibited racial discrimination in voting practices. It outlawed the literacy test and other measures that unfairly targeted blacks. Martin Luther King, ACLU civil rights leaders and activists from across the country all contributed to the **Voting Rights Act** becoming a reality.

After the Civil War, the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, ratified in 1870, prohibited states from denying a male citizen the right to vote based on race, color or previous conditions of servitude. However, in the ensuing decades various discriminatory practices were used to prevent African Americans from exercising their right to vote. It is also noteworthy that the right to vote for women did not happen until 1920. In 1964, the 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment made poll taxes illegal in federal elections; poll taxes in state elections were banned in 1965 by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The recent Supreme Court decision that rendered the **Voting Rights Act** unenforceable has unleashed large numbers of discriminatory and burdensome voting changes across the country. Gerrymandering, closing polling places, voter purges and limiting absentee voting is already impacting our lives. Since the 2020 election cycle, over 250 bills to suppress the vote have been introduced. Alabama, Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi have been in the forefront of this effort; however, many other states are supporting similar activities.

As concerned citizens, we must stand strong and work diligently to protect our right to vote. Let our voices be heard here and across the country, emphasizing the interconnectedness of our democratic rights and how our democracy depends on it. **We Must Vote.**

- William Hoskins,  
Executive Director



More on voting and our democracy, pg. 5

**SHIRLEY HERNDON  
WITH THE ANCESTORS**



- *Corinne Vega,  
Society member*

Shirley Herndon (née Keith,) early supporter of the Society, passed away on March 13, 2022 in San Francisco, CA surrounded by family. During the 1950's alongside her husband James Herndon, co-founder of the SFAAHCS, Shirley served as a dedicated friend and volunteer to the Society.

Shirley was born in 1931 in Chicago, Illinois, to immigrant parents who toiled in garment industry sweatshops amidst economic struggle and hardship. She grew up among a large extended family of humble working class people. Her upbringing laid the foundation for an unwavering lifelong commitment to fair labor practices, equality, civil rights and public education. She moved to San Francisco in 1953 where she met and later married James Herndon. Over the years, the Herndons frequently opened their home as a meeting place for community organizations, as well as for fundraising efforts in support of liberation movements in Zaire and Kenya, the Society, and the Angela Davis Legal Defense Fund to name a few.

An ardent-proponent of labor unions and fair labor practices locally and globally, she served as shop steward for SEIU Local 790. She worked in the San Francisco Unified School District as a school secretary for over thirty years and was a beloved and integral staff member of Argonne Elementary School, where she was renowned for her reassuring presence and ability to manage any crisis.

Shirley held a deep abiding love for her family and was a devoted mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. Her pride and joy were her grandchildren in whom she instilled a passion for the arts and ideals of social justice. Always willing to help others and known for her kindness, compassion and generosity, she was cherished by her wide circle of friends and extended family from diverse cultural backgrounds. She remained vivacious, intellectually astute, energetic and enjoyed traveling, social gatherings and exercising at the YMCA well into her late eighties. She is survived by her daughters, Corinne Vega and Julia Sobalvarro, both educators in SFUSD, her son-in-law Eduardo Sobalvarro, four grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, brother, Paul Keith, and a large extended family.

May she dance, rejoice and rest with the ancestors!

**DAVID JOHNSON  
EXHIBIT**



The San Francisco Arts Commission graces the galleries of City Hall with David Johnson's photographs from 1945-1965. An exhibit kickoff was held on May 25th. These black and white photographs depict Black San Francisco life during the era and wane of the Harlem West to the start of redevelopment in the Western Addition.

Johnson is a long-time LIFE member of the Society and is one of the few remaining artists of the Harlem West Era. Be sure to visit the galleries at City Hall.

**Happy 96<sup>th</sup> Birthday, David!**

IN THE ARCHIVES /  
BLACK HEALTH &  
WELLNESS



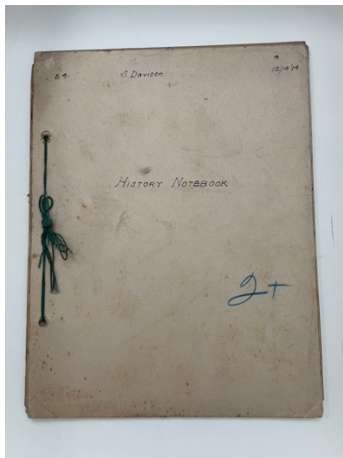
Society's Black History logo  
2020

- Ginger Smyly

Who was Stuart Toussaint Davison, MD? Berlinda Davison, a distinguished African American educator of the 1920s and 30s was mentioned in an earlier *Praisesinger*. A graduate of UC Berkeley with a B.A. and M.A. in Education, she was likely a trained pianist and vocalist and traveled extensively in Europe prior to WWII. Stuart and Ophelia were her siblings; all were born in San Francisco and spent their early years in Alaska. Father, Samuel, Mother, Carrie, and the children returned to San Francisco, where Stuart, the youngest, graduated from Polytechnic High School with grades recommending entrance to UC Berkeley. This was around 1914. In 1918, he enrolled in the Medical School, located at Berkeley.

The objects in the Society's Stuart T. Davison Collection, including his obituary, indicate that Stuart entered into the Army Medical Corps during WWI as a Lieutenant, but may not have served overseas. He was a longshoreman during his early college days and flunked or had to repeat a German language course. He also took an Anthropology course which may have been influenced by the presence of young Alfred Kroeber (of *Ishi* fame/infamy.) Stuart T. Davison was the first African American to graduate from the UC Medical School.

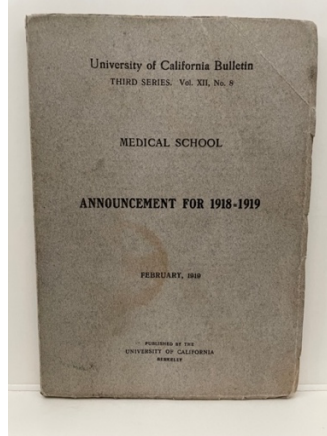
Mike Hines, Associate Professor of Education at Stanford, is studying early education of African Americans in the West. To do so, he will be delving into the archives of the Davisons and other early 20<sup>th</sup> century well-educated San Francisco African Americans. The Society still serves its mission to educate and be a resource!



"S. Davison, History Notebook,  
12/14/14"



"Stuart Davison Anthropology  
18"



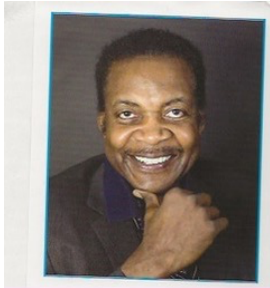
"University of California  
Bulletin... Medical School...  
1918-1919"



Miscellaneous: Address book,  
longshoremen's card, notice from  
the Medical School Registrar,  
exam receipt, med school notes,  
poems

**TECHNOLOGY TIP #1...** Be a friend to the Society; ensure that Society emails arrive in your inbox. Create a contact in your email address book for [info@sfaahcs.org](mailto:info@sfaahcs.org). Society emails will arrive directly in your inbox.

**VOTE:  
DEMOCRACY, IF WE CAN  
KEEP IT**

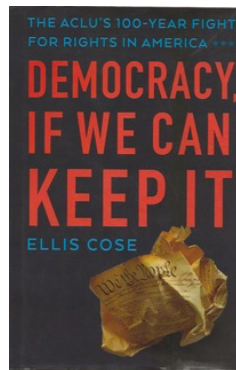


Continued from page 2

For an important overview of the civil rights struggle and the vote, consider the book by Ellis Cose, **Democracy, If We Can Keep It**, the ACLU’s 100-year fight for rights in America. A vivid work of history and journalism, **Democracy, If We Can Keep It** is not just the definitive story of the ACLU but an essential account of America’s rediscovery of rights it had granted but long denied. This narrative begins with World War I and extends through to the phenomenon of Donald Trump.

Ellis Cose is a former columnist for Newsweek, chairman of the editorial board of the *New York Daily News*, contributor and critic for *Times* and columnist for *USA Today*. He is the author of numerous books, including the bestselling, *The Rage of a Privilege Class*.

Please watch for the live re-opening of the Society’s exhibits, ***Voting*** and ***Obama: Legacy of Hope***.



Above: author Eric Cose

Left: Cover of Ellis Cose’s book

Right: President Barack Obama



**ANNUAL FESTIVAL**

The National Association of Black Storytellers holds its 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Festival and conference in Baltimore, MD, November 9-13, 2022. For more information and to register. ([www.nabsinc.org](http://www.nabsinc.org)) Or, call 415-947-1117.

**REV. “G” RECEIVES  
JEFFERSON AWARD**

The Rev. Roland Gordon, M.Div., long time pastor of San Francisco’s Ingleside Presbyterian Church, and his work have been uplifted by the community in receipt of the coveted Bay Area Jefferson Award. Rev. “G” showcases “The Great Cloud of Witnesses,” a collage and mural that honors Black history and the community. See and read the CBS Bay Area report.

**TECHNOLOGY TIP #2** Annoying, recurring emails? Eliminate those emails by UNSUBSCRIBING. Find the latest email from any vendor, say “Gordon’s.” At the bottom of the email, find and click on, “unsubscribe.” You may receive a website message, “You have successfully unsubscribed.” Refrain from answering anything else! Close the message window and return to email. It takes a few weeks to “take.”

**AFRICAN & AFRICAN AMERICAN ART AT THE DEYOUNG**

On a recent visit to the DeYoung Museum in Golden Gate Park and in the latest *Fine Arts* magazine, I found new and rediscovered old works of art by African American artists. In the latest edition of *Fine Arts* is a homage to Society member Frankie Gillette, who passed away earlier this year. Citing the Maxwells’ avid interest in art and their generous donation of *Morning Still Life* by Jacob Lawrence, it goes on to recount Mrs. Gillette’s support of the Museum and her work toward its acquisition of Aaron Douglas’ *Aspiration* and *Stepping Out* by Elizabeth Catlett. The Gillettes supported the recent *Soul of A Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power, 1963-1983* and *Revelations: Art from the African American South* exhibits. Mrs. Gillette stood for inclusion and diversity at the Museum; an initiative that the arts world is embracing.

In our last *Praisesinger*, we noted the exhibition of the official portraits of our first African American President and first lady, Barack and Michele Obama, at the De Young. We hope you will view these colorful and emotional portraits, both created by African American artists..... Another “can’t miss” is the forthcoming, “American People,” works by Faith Ringgold. Best known for her colorful storytelling art quilts, this exhibit showcases quilts, lithographs and other works of art. The exhibit runs through November 27..... If you are an Egyptian buff, don’t miss *Ramses the Great and the Gold of the Pharaohs*, through February 12.

- Ginger Smyly

New works of art, created by Afro-Americans have been acquired, including *Diaspora’s Spirit* by Betye Saar, *90S Dejeuner* by Didier William (Haitian) and *Laure (new General Chart for the West Indies of E. Wright’s Project)* by Firelei Baez (Dominican-Haitian.) If you can’t make it to the Museum, [search](#) the collections by entering a name or title. Here are some pics I took on my last visit:



I. to r. Works at the DeYoung by artists, Aaron Douglas, Sargent Johnson, Betye Saar, Jacob Lawrence

**SFPL CALLS ATTENTION TOO!**

In the late 1970s, the Society and partners conducted oral interviews with “Afro Americans Residing in San Francisco Prior to WWII.” See the San Francisco Public Library’s [website](#) to read these oral interviews. The Society had the foresight to conduct and preserve these personal histories and points of view. Thanks.

**TECHNOLOGY TIP #3**

Eliminate SPAM. Find on the menu, a “Spam” function to mark an email “SPAM” (“JUNK.”) May be an icon. Highlight the email, go to the SPAM function and mark that email as SPAM. That email will go to the SPAM folder. All subsequent emails from that address will go directly to the SPAM folder.

**JAMES P. DYER  
19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY  
PIONEER**

James P. Dyer was born in 1819. The Dyers owned a soap factory and boarding house in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Made rich by the worldwide demand for whale oil, New Bedford was also a center for the abolitionist movement and a place of refuge for people who had escaped enslavement, including Frederick Douglass. Dyer’s parents, James and Mary, ran the boarding house catering to Hawaiian sailors. Following a terrifying outbreak of cholera at their residence, Dyer joined the 25-man crew of the whaler *Minerva* in 1839 and went on a three-year voyage to Brazil, Australia and New Zealand. He married Sabina Taylor of Fairhaven in 1847; their daughter, Ann, was born soon after. News of the discovery of gold in California reached the East Coast in 1848.

- Peter Linenthal,  
Director, Potrero  
Hill Archives  
Project

The Dyer family came to California around 1850 as California was entering the union as a “free” state, probably taking the sea route around South America. He joined San Francisco’s Black community, many, like him, from New England cities, to successfully fight structural racism. Mr. Dyer represented San Francisco in the Colored Conventions and became president of the San Francisco Literary Institute near his home, which had 800 volumes in its library and held lectures and debates. The San Francisco Athenaeum and Literary Association was likely the first public lending library in San Francisco and is a predecessor of the Society. Mr. Dyer was an active member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and supported the city’s African American newspapers.

James P. Dyer established a soap and candle factory high on the sandy slopes of Nob (then Fern) Hill in the 1852, at the time, the edge of the rapidly growing city. The neighborhood was called Spring Valley, a name later adopted by Cow Hollow, and was home to many African American, Chilean, and Hispanic residents. As the neighborhood became residential, smells from the soap factory became a problem. Neighbors complained. In 1865, Mr. Dyer moved his factory to the Potrero district, once the pasture for Mission Dolores’ cattle, the new edge of town, where soap, gunpowder and glue factories were located. Dyer’s Soap Factory was known as the New England Soap Factory, the Queen Lily Soap Factory, and Fischbeck & Gloom Soap Factory into the 1950s. James P. Dyer died at age 50 in 1869 and was remembered as, “...just in all his dealings, strictly honest, temperate in his habits, generous to a fault, his heart was ever open to the calls of distress, and his hand followed his heart. Every enterprise which had for its object the progress of our people found in him a steady supporter.”

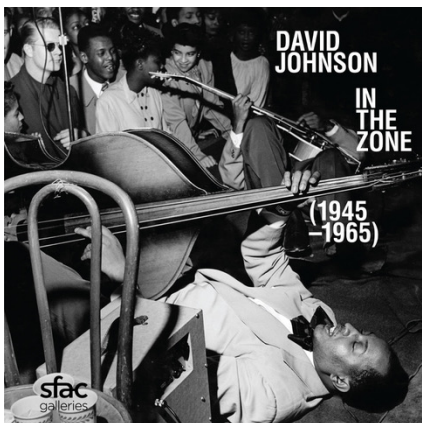
*Excerpted from an article  
that was featured on the  
Society’s website*

Dyer is cited as the only Black antebellum manufacturer in the West and is included in the San Francisco Planning Department’s “African American Citywide Historic Context Statement.”

**SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS & OTHER INFO**

Visit us at [www.sfaahcs.org](http://www.sfaahcs.org) The Society’s first virtual exhibit, “The Black Family Through Artists Eyes” is still available to view at <https://sfaahcs-vs.org>.

- ✓ Society Library & Gallery Reopening, no date yet
- ✓ David Johnson, “In the Zone, 1945-1965” at City Hall, May 19, 2022 - June 6, 2023
- ✓ Faith Ringgold, “American People,” at the DeYoung Museum, through November 27, 2022
- ✓ Changemakers, African Americans in San Francisco Who Made a Difference, panel, SFPL, SEPTEMBER 18, 2 pm in person, register at SFPL



Breaking News! Breaking News! Breaking News!



Mildred Thompson sculpture at new Southeast Community (Commission) Center on Third and Evans has been installed

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL**

(Your annual membership term is January 1 through December 31.)

**LIFE** members, your donation is appreciated

**NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDRESS** \_\_\_\_\_

**CITY/STATE/ZIP** \_\_\_\_\_

**PHONE** \_\_\_\_\_ **CELL** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-MAIL ADDRESS** \_\_\_\_\_

Please sign me up as a:

_____ Student	\$15	_____ Organizations	\$2
			50
_____ Senior	\$25	_____ Small Business	\$3
			50
_____ Adult	\$50	_____ Large Business	\$7
			00
_____ Family	\$100	_____ Donor	

\*\*If you do not plan to be an active member, please make a donation

**Donation:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Total:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Membership fees and contributions are tax deductible

**Make Your Check Payable/Mail To:**

**San Francisco African American Historical & Cultural Society**

762 Fulton Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
 San Francisco, CA 94102  
 415.292.6172

I am interested in serving on the  committee(s):

- |                           |                        |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| _____ Development         | _____ Library/archives |
| _____ Membership          | _____ Programs         |
| _____ Black History Month | _____ Communications   |
| _____ Volunteer/Reception | _____ Other            |