

**HAZEL JOHNSON FREEMAN**  
**Community Leader**

by  
**Valerie Jackson Jones, Executive Director**  
**Community Association for the Welfare of School Children**

Due to her lifetime commitment to and far-reaching community service, please note below, the various reasons why Mrs. Hazel Johnson Freeman is to be honored and admired. Born December 22, 1913, Mrs. Freeman grew up, and lived most of her adult life in Baton Rouge. She was 93 years old last December and is the daughter of David V. Johnson and Lubirda Davis Johnson. She comes from a long line of community servants. Her maternal grandparents (Harriett Florida Davis and Alex Davis) were born in slavery, came up the Comite River docked near Dyer Road and established the Davis - Dyer Community where they launched a church and later a school. Her paternal grandparents (Lee and Mary Johnson) established Johnson Town below Baton Rouge. Hazel Freeman grew up attending one of the first funded Rosenwald Schools in Louisiana that was built on her parents' property. She, her siblings, and a few of her neighbors lived in a house her parents built while they attended classes at Southern University's high school. Mrs. Freeman graduated from Southern University Laboratory School in 1931.

She has a B.A. (Elementary Education) from Southern University in Baton Rouge and a M.A. (Guidance and Personnel Administration) from Columbia University in New York. She is and was a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Mount Zion First Baptist Church, Louisiana Women's Political Caucus, and numerous other organizations. After joining Delta Sigma Theta Sorority in 1945 she has held many offices and positions. Mrs. Freeman is the founder and former president of the Mount Zion



First Baptist Church Sisterhood. She has been a member of the Second Ward Voters League for more than 20 years and served as Secretary for a number of years.

While working for the community, Hazel Freeman married and had two loving children, a son Elwyn Pate, Jr. of Baton Rouge, and daughter, who precede her in death, Joy Eileen Freeman Hampton, formerly of Settle, Washington. She is the proud and headstrong grandmother of five grandsons and three granddaughters.

Mrs. Freeman has served as a principal in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System. She was the second black women hired as a Supervisor for East Baton Rouge Parish School System Child Welfare and Attendance Division.

She has worked to strengthen the community by encouraging and enabling individuals from all walks of life and from all age groups, to perform meaningful, constructive volunteer services and to gain employment. Her early influence on the Baton Rouge community took place during the 1950's and 1960's, where during her 30's she took part in the Civil Rights movement, and the Bus Boycott in the Baton Rouge, community headed by Rev. Jemison. She was a part of the nightly meetings held at Mount Zion during June of 1953. The boycott was successful. It was a model for the Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott of 1955. You can see and hear Mrs. Freeman in the documentary from Louisiana Public Broadcasting "*Signpost to Freedom: The 1953 Baton Rouge Bus Boycott*". This is a one hour documentary that recounts the circumstances and events that led to the nation's first large-scale boycott, protesting segregation. It examines its impact on the evolution of grassroots civil rights activism across the country during the early years of America's Civil Rights Movement. She also took part in the "*Voices of Civil Rights*"



*Bus Tour*”, for the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act. The American Association of Retired People (AARP), the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR) and the Library of Congress collected and archived the largest collection of first hand civil rights accounts ever compiled.

During the early 1950’s, segregation in the south was rampant. It was a time when Welfare reform was attempted in the state of Louisiana. When the state reduced the budget welfare mothers had to seek employment to support their families. Many school-aged children stayed home to watch the younger children while mothers could work. In order for children to stay in school, they needed clothing. Volunteers of America did not want the blacks to come in the front door of the agency to receive garments. This created a problem. Mrs. Freeman and a life long friend, Mildred Moore Clark, decided to establish their own organization to fulfill the needs of African Americans in the community.

To solve the racial problem a group was formed called The Advisory Committee for the Welfare of School Children. Mrs. Hazel Freeman served as the first Recording Secretary. The Committee incorporated later as the Community Association for the Welfare of School Children (CAWSC) is now a 48 year old agency and a member of the Capitol Area United Way. In addition to being one of the founders of CAWSC, Mrs. Freeman has used her personal funds to support the agency. She has served in various capacities from Sanitation Engineer to Board of Directors president, including several other positions on the Board. Through her fund raising and proposal writing efforts, CAWSC became the first Head Start unit in Baton Rouge. CAWSC is considered the first black operated private non-profit social service agency in the Baton Rouge area.



In the 1960's, Mrs. Freeman helped to make political change in Louisiana. Women in Louisiana were called to jury duty, only if they volunteered. They could not purchase or sell property without their husband's consent in writing, nether could they have credit in their own names. The Louisiana legislature did not pass the women's suffrage bill until 1976. (Though women here could vote, they did so under Amendment 19 to the Constitution.) Mrs. Freeman worked on behalf of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Her photo can be seen in the "*Voices From The Louisiana Movement: An Exhibition*" (Exhibit item 9).



During the 1980's, Mrs. Freeman took an active role in the first Red and White day at the Louisiana Capitol wherein members of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority met with state legislators. The movement has grown to a statewide level and national level. Members from across the nation meet in Washington, DC at the Capitol to discuss and influence policy with legislators.

Mrs. Freeman also traveled to Washington, D.C. during the 1990's to meet with President William "Bill" Jefferson Clinton at the White

House regarding Health Care for the citizens of Louisiana. The Hazel J. Freeman Community Service Award was established by the Baton Rouge Delta Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated. The award is



given each year to organizations with outstanding community performance. During 2006 CAWSC became permanent recipient of the Award. Mrs. Freeman can also be heard discussing African American Churches in the tape (4700.0849 tape #1223) of the "*McKinley High School Oral History Project Series*" housed at the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History at

Louisiana State University (LSU). Also during the 1990's Mrs. Freeman was a part of case No. 95-1710 in the Supreme Court of the United States October Term, 1995 *United States of America, Appellant v. Ray Hays*, et al regarding whether the State of Louisiana's congressional redistricting plan should have been subjected to strict scrutiny.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2001 the Executive Director of CAWSC, Valerie Jackson Jones, former and active members of the organization named the CAWSC Center student library “*The Clark-Freeman Library*” in honor of Mrs. Mildred Moore Clark and Mrs. Hazel Johnson Freeman. You can read more details regarding the library and Mrs. Freeman in the *InRegister Magazine* February 2002 issue.



Mrs. Freeman continues help to develop young people in the Baton Rouge area. She co-sponsored Sylvia A. Jones as a debutante for Baton Rouge Delta Sorority in the summer of 2005 and attended the first ever held Medieval Tea celebrating the 600 year history of her family.

During the course of her life, Mrs. Freeman has received a number of awards and proclamations, including but not limited to: the J.C. Penny Golden Rule Award, the Women's Council of Greater Baton Rouge, Silver Magnolia Award, Outstanding Community Service Award from the Capital Area United Way, and a proclamation for Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco naming Hazel Freeman Day in the State of Louisiana. She also received awards from the National Social Action Commission of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, The Southwest Region Social Action Award, and a decoration from the local Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta (Baton Rouge Delta) toward support and financial effort for the construction of the Baton Rouge Delta Sorority House. Mrs. Freeman was a runner up for the Ageless Hero Award from Blue Cross BlueShield of Louisiana. She won second place trophy for her card playing skills.

Over time, Mrs. Freeman has emerged as a good follower and a gifted leader. She has worked tirelessly as a volunteer at the local, state, and national level to assess, plan, improve and to monitor the service and political systems. She continues to promote the cultural, health, and well being of women, children, and families. During times when faced with a complex set of new challenges and opportunities that required focused skills, and leadership, she has provided such leadership.

Mrs. Freeman has seen barriers and boundaries not as obstacles, but as something to border, push to the side, or simply overcome in an effort to improve the community. It is with great pleasure that I honor Mrs. Hazel Johnson Freeman for her awareness, kindness, and turning her thoughts and words into positive action to help strengthen the ties that bind us together as a people and community.