



legendary ladies

10 WOMEN WHO CHANGED THE FACE OF MARYLAND

BY JENNIFER KEATS CURTIS

Last year, with help from the Maryland Women's Heritage Center (MWHC) and an outstanding nominating committee, *Maryland Life* started a new tradition by identifying "10 Women Who Changed the Face of Maryland."

This year, 10 more women were selected by an impressive array of female committee members who scrutinized Marylanders past and present and then came together to whittle the list down to the final number.

Although not every woman chosen was born in the Free State, each honoree embodies a strong element of "Maryland." And while their accomplishments are individual and unique, these legendary ladies all share dedication and drive, boundless energy, persistence, and sheer will.

HERE ARE THEIR STORIES.

legendary

JUANITA JACKSON MITCHELL (1913-1992)



AS JUANITA JACKSON MITCHELL grew up in Baltimore, her city was segregated block by block. African Americans were treated as second-class citizens. Discriminative and restrictive covenants against them were enforced by state law.

Witnessing this, Mitchell was determined to make a difference.

After earning a master's degree in sociology from the University of Pennsylvania, she became the first African-American woman to

graduate from the University of Maryland School of Law, in 1950, and the first African-American woman to practice law in this state.

Active in the NAACP in the late 1930s, Mitchell created programs for that organization's youth and college divisions. Years later, she served as president of the Baltimore City branch, during which time she lobbied alongside Thurgood Marshall to ensure Maryland would become the first Southern state to integrate its schools.

A woman of many firsts, this tough attorney filed numerous cases to help desegregate parks, restaurants, and pools. It was Mitchell, in fact, who ensured that Sandy Point State Park and Fort Smallwood Park became integrated in 1955.

As she became well-known as a political crusader and "the Freedom Fighter," Mitchell gained national recognition.

In 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed her to the White House Conference on Children. During the 1960s, she was appointed to the White House Conference on Civil Rights by both John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.

In 1987, Mitchell and her mother, Dr. Lillie Jackson, were inducted into the Maryland Women's Hall of Fame. In honor of Mitchell's accomplishments as an African-American woman in the legal industry, the NAACP created a "Juanita Jackson Mitchell Award for Legal Activism."

"When I was growing up, she was an icon in the community," says Sharon Pinder, president and CEO of the Pinder Group.

"When you think about the sacrifices people made during the Civil Rights Era, she leads the list.

"Mitchell came from a family of believers [in] equality, and that kind of background transformed her life as an advocate and as a leader," adds Pinder, who is herself the recipient of numerous leadership awards.

"As a woman pioneer in the legal industry, there is no one else who we could attribute opening doors not only for African-American women, but women overall."

During the early 1980s, Mitchell, who was then in her 70s, continued her community work in Baltimore. She even organized the Stop the Killing Campaign in 1985, after African-American teens were shot to death.

The mother of former state senators and grandmother of Keiffer J. Mitchell Jr., who ran for mayor of Baltimore in 2007, Mitchell suffered a paralyzing accident in 1989. She died in Baltimore in 1992.