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Viola McCoy

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Notable Black American Women

Jessie Carney Smith,
Editor

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metropolis. One of her primary interests was the McCoy Home for Colored Children, which she maintained as a major supporter. In addition to her club work, McCoy was active in the Women's Suffrage Movement, the NAACP, and the Democratic party. For her work with the Democratic party, she became flag bearer from Michigan in the Washington, D.C., parade of 1913 preceding the inauguration of President Woodrow Wilson.

Governor Woodbridge N. Ferris of Michigan appointed Mary McCoy to the highly-acclaimed Michigan Commission for the Half-Century Exposition of Freedmen's Progress. Several states came together for the exposition, held in Chicago, to recognize the progress of black Americans since the Emancipation Proclamation. The exposition was recorded in *Michigan Manual of Freedmen's Progress*.

The lynchings of black Americans during the first quarter of this century, particularly surrounding World War I, distressed McCoy. She wrote "An Appeal" in which she expressed her concern and called for relief:

To All Lovers of Humanity, Everywhere!

JUSTICE, where art thou? Thou Church of the Living God, why slumberest thou? Awake! Awake! and hear Ethiopia's cry for her people! Pray tell us, is there any premium on manhood? Is the Negro to educate himself and his children for citizenship only to be denied his rights? . . . How long can a Civilized Nation stand by a human fellow being hung by a tree 'til dead, or burned at the stake and have his fingers and various other portions of his body cut off and mutilated, and used as souvenirs! . . .

We beg of you, as followers of Christ and citizens of this, our great America, "the Land of the free, and the home of the brave!" to lend us your aid in eradicating this evil, and by so doing you will help forward this movement towards solving the great Negro Problem which is now attracting the attention of all great minds (Marshall, 23).

Mary McCoy died in 1923 and her husband, Elijah, in 1929.

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De Witt S. Dykes, Jr.

Viola McCoy

(c. 1900-c. 1956)

Entertainer, singer

Viola McCoy, also known as Amanda Brown, Daisy Cliff, Fannie Johnson, Gladys Johnson, Violet McCoy, Clara White, Bessie Williams, and Susan Williams, an entertainer and blues singer, was born circa 1900 in Memphis, Tennessee, and died circa 1956 in Albany, New York.

McCoy went to New York and worked in cabarets in the early 1920s. She also appeared in four shows at the Lafayette Theater that included *Frolickers Revue* (1923), *Who Stole the Money?* (1924), *Hidden Treasure* (1924), and *Setting the Pace Revue* (1927). She owned, operated, and performed in Jack's Cabaret in 1927. In 1928 she was in a *New York Revue* at the Lincoln Theater. Following this were appearances in twenty-one shows at New York's Alhambra Theater—*Flying High Revue* (1928), *Joyland Revue* (1928), *Happiness Revue* (1928), *Brownskin Brevities Revue* (1928), *Laughing Through Revue* (1928), *Southbound Revue* (1928), *The Surprise Party Revue* (1929), *Ready Money Revue*

(1929), *Egg Nog Revue* (1929), *Hop Off Revue* (1929), *Sweethearts on Parade Revue* (1929), *Pearls of India Revue* (1929), *The Conjure Man Revue* (1929), *The Crazy Hotel* (1929), *At the Barbecue Revue* (1930), *By the Moonlight Revue* (1930), *Snake Hips Revue* (1930), *Fashion Plate Frolics Revue* (1930), *In the Swim Revue* (1930), *Edith Wilson Revue* (1930), and *Troy "Bear" Brown, Baby's Birthday Revue* (1930).

McCoy recorded in 1923 with the Gennett, Columbia, and Ajax labels in New York. She recorded during 1923 and 1926 with the Vocalion label, also in New York. In the three years that she was recording most prolifically, she rarely made a bad record. Her masterpiece was considered "If Your Good Man Quits You, Don't Wear No Black," a fast blues accompanied by Fletcher Henderson's orchestral members. The opposite side of this recording was almost as impressive—"I Ain't Gonna Marry, Ain't Gonna Settle Down."

During 1930 McCoy opened her own nightclub in Saratoga. She also returned to the Lafayette for three shows—*Scramblin' Roun' Revue* (1930), *Sweet Papa Garbage Revue* (1931), and *Plenty of It Revue* (1932). In 1932 she also appeared with Fletcher Henderson's Orchestra in *Harlem High Steppers Revue* at the Public Theater in New York City. The following year she performed at the Harlem Opera House. In 1934 McCoy appeared in two revues—one with Gladys Bentley's Urbangi Club at the Lafayette Theater and the other with Tiny Bradshaw's Orchestra, *Walking On Air*, at the Apollo Theater. She then performed with Leroy Smith's band at the Harlem Opera House in 1935. After a year of frequent club and theater engagements in Philadelphia, McCoy retired to Albany, New York, in about 1938. She is believed to have died there in 1956.

McCoy was a fine singer who had a very active career for more than a decade, appearing in theatrical revues and musical comedies. She was a grand performer with a lovely contralto voice that she projected with fine diction. Although she was from the vaudeville tradition, she performed using strong jazz stylistic characteristics.

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Marva Griffin Carter

M. A. McCurdy

(1852- ?)

Editor, educator, temperance leader

After overcoming adversities in her own life, M. A. McCurdy turned her energies toward independent learning and humanitarian efforts. She taught for a brief period, then became active in temperance and as editor of the *Southern Recorder* and *The Woman's World*. She used these papers as an outlet for her fight for temperance causes, women's suffrage, and morality and became widely-known and respected for her work. Deeply religious, she also served the community through church missions and helped to feed, clothe, and attend to the needs of the sick.

Born in the village of Carthage, Indiana, on August 10, 1852, to Alexander and Martha Harris, M. A. McCurdy attended racially-mixed schools in Rush County, Indiana. After her father died, she was unable to continue her formal education, but she read widely to prepare herself to become a teacher. Before she was nineteen, she secured a teaching position in a county school near her home. After teaching for awhile, she married J. A. Mason and had four children. Within eight years her husband and children had died. Her desire to work for the uplift of humanity led her to join the temperance movement in Richmond, Indiana. In 1884 she



M. A. McCurdy