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# THE COALITION OF UNITED PROGRESSIVES CHARMECK CHRONICLE

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**Greetings!**

We truly appreciate everyone's involvement.  
This War on Oppression will only be won as one  
mass movement.

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## Our Mission Statement

The continual unification of as many organizations as possible, starting at the local level and branching out to both the state of North Carolina and then the entire nation.

# Spotlight

## Frederika “Freda” Washington



(December 23, 1903 – June 28, 1994)

**The Fair-Skinned Black Actress Who Refused to 'Pass'  
in 1930s Hollywood**

**By DonnaMarie Woodson**

## "Incredible Black Women You Should Know About"

Fredericka Carolyn "Fredi" Washington was an American stage and film actress, civil rights activist, performer, and writer. Washington was of African American descent. She was one of the first people of color to gain recognition for film and stage work in the 1920s and 1930s.



Louise Beavers and Fredi Washington, *Imitation of Life* (Universal Pictures, 1934)

Washington was active in the [Harlem Renaissance](#) (the 1920s–1930s), her best-known role being Peola in the 1934 film version of [Imitation of Life](#), where she plays a young light-skinned woman who decides to pass as white. Her last film role was in [One Mile from Heaven](#) (1937), after which she left Hollywood and returned to New York to work in theatre and civil rights activism.

*"...you don't have to be white to be good. I've spent most of my life proving to those who think otherwise ... I am a Negro, and I am proud of it." Fredi Washington*

Fredi Washington embraced her race at the height of Jim Crow.

Born in Savannah, Georgia, Ms. Washington moved to Harlem and her family during the [Great Migration](#), when Black families fled the [Jim Crow](#) South searching for new opportunities in Northern cities. The daughter of a postal worker and a dancer, Washington had green eyes and light skin that contradicted the era's common expectations of what an African American "looked like."



**Ms. Washington knew that regardless of her looks, the era's construction of the Black race belonged to anyone who had even a drop of Black heritage. This prejudice meant she would always be considered African American by white audiences...unless she simply "passed" as white.**

**But it also alienated people from others of their culture. A Black woman who passed might be considered white, but she ran the constant risk of losing her privilege once discovering that she was**

**really Black—and of being shunned by Black people once they learned she was claiming whiteness.**

**Racial "passing" allowed Black Americans to sidestep racism faced by Black people and claim the privilege of whiteness in public spaces. According to historian Robert Fikes, Jr., "the practice was seen by many African Americans as outwitting the system of oppression and making laughable fools of those who countenanced notions of white racial purity and supremacy."**

**Instead of turning her back on her race, Fredi immersed herself in the growing Harlem Renaissance, during which her neighborhood turned into a cultural oasis and a hotbed of African-Americans artistic production. Already a talented singer and dancer, she became a chorus girl, then an actress, traveling to Europe and starring in stage productions in New York. She also performed with Duke Ellington's band.**



Shuffle Along

Ms. Washington's entertainment career began in 1921 as a chorus girl in the Broadway musical *Shuffle Along*. Dancer Josephine Baker hired her as a member of the "Happy Honeysuckles," a cabaret group. Baker became a friend and mentored Fredi. Ms. Washington's collaboration with Baker led to her

discovery by producer Lee Shubert. And in 1926, recommended for a co-starring role on the Broadway stage with Paul Robeson in the play *Black Boy*.

She quickly became a famous, featured dancer and toured internationally with her dancing partner, Al Moiret.

Washington turned to acting in the late 1920s. Her first movie role was in *Black and Tan* (1929), in which she played a Cotton Club dancer who was dying. She played a small part in *The Emperor Jones* (1933), starring Robeson. Washington also played Cab Calloway's love interest in the short *Cab Calloway's Hi-De-Ho* (1934).

### **Imitation of Life: The Politics of Race**

In the '20s and 30s, Black actors had few opportunities in Hollywood. Most Black people on film could be seen only in "race films" designed for all-Black audiences. Those who did break into movies for white audiences were relegated to subservient or stereotypical roles.

But Washington broke through that barrier in *Imitation of Life*—ironically, in a film that explored the practice of "passing" that she

had declined to adopt in her own life. In 1934, she played the role of Peola, the daughter of a Black housekeeper (Louise Beavers) whose life is closely intertwined with that of a white widow and her daughter. Peola turns her back on her mother, who dies a dramatic death from her life of self-abnegation and sorrow over her daughter's betrayal.

The movie, which starred Claudette Colbert as the white friend, dealt frankly with interracial identity, passing, and the similarities and differences between Black and white women—themes that had never been thoroughly explored in mainstream Hollywood. And, unlike all films for white audiences that came before it, it essentially treated the stories of its Black and white characters as equally important.

This statement from Fredi Washington resonates with me. *“But to pass, for economic or other advantages, would have meant that I swallowed, whole hog, the idea of Black inferiority.”*

The concept of Black inferiority is a powerful tool. I see its effects in politics daily. Some Black folks buy into this idea of Black Inferiority and twist it to - if I can just get white people to accept me, it proves that I'm not inferior but superior to the average Black person. A total disconnect from reality.



Hershel Walker, Trump

Ironically, Washington's breakthrough role in *Imitation of Life* cut short her acting career. Since white Hollywood refused to cast Black women in romantic roles, she couldn't get leading roles; also, her skin was so light, many identified her as white, and she couldn't get more stereotypical roles as a maid. She became so identified with her character, Peola, that it was hard for her to receive other parts.

**She made her last movie appearance just three years after *Imitation of Life*.**

**But her career wasn't over yet though. In 1937, Washington helped found what would become the Negro Actors Guild of America, a group that advocated for less stereotypical roles and better working conditions for Black actors.**

Fredi Washington  
49 years old



**She also became a drama critic, writing theatrical reviews for African American newspapers, and served as a casting consultant for films and theatrical productions that concerned race.**

### **Personal Life**

**In 1933, Washington married Lawrence Brown, the trombonist in Duke Ellington's jazz orchestra. That marriage ended in divorce. In 1952, Washington married a Stamford dentist, Hugh Anthony Bell, and moved to Greenwich, Connecticut.**

### **Death**

**Fredi Washington Bell died, age 90, on June 28, 1994. She died from pneumonia following a series of strokes at St. Joseph Medical Center in Stamford, Connecticut.**

### **Legacy and honors**

- In 1975, Washington was inducted into the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame.**
- In 1979, Washington received the CIRCA Award for lifetime achievement in the performing arts.**
- In 1981, Washington received an award from the Audience Development Company (AUDELCO), a New York-based nonprofit group devoted to preserving and promoting African American theater.**

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[Fredi Washington Wiki, Biography, Age, Career, Relationship, Net Worth ...](#) <https://wikitrusted.com/fredi-washington-wikipedia/>

## Editorial

# Facing the Reality of Gun Violence in America

By

Tarik Kiley

May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022

### Introduction

The mass shootings that have become so prevalent in our news headlines



in the USA have forced us to take a sobering look at our culture and underlying reasons for gun violence. This article aims to examine the cultural underpinnings of gun violence in America with a scientific approach. Here rhetoric is challenged, and

scientific and evidence-based practice is adopted, particularly in investigating US gun culture.

### Toxic Masculinity

The idea of toxic masculinity suggests that men are encouraged and socialized to be aggressive in our society. It also indicates that men are to be tough and that men are to show no emotion except for anger if even allowed to express this emotion.

By extension, you could argue that the process of socializing our boys into “toxic masculinity” stunts the growth of our boys, who grow up with an inability to process, express, and understand their own emotions. According to [verywellmind.com](http://verywellmind.com), toxic masculinity consists of the following:

- “Toughness: This is the notion that men should be physically strong, emotionally callous, and behaviorally aggressive.”
- “Antifemininity: This involves the idea that men should reject anything considered feminine, such as showing emotion or accepting help.”
- “Power: This is the assumption that men must work toward obtaining power and status (social and financial) to gain the respect of others.”



If you examine the fact that boys in the USA are raised to be aggressive, then you can see how boys turn into men who consider the use of violence as a primary tool to settle and resolve conflict.

Using violence becomes a way to express power and dominion. Also, those who don't use aggression or who don't seek to dominate others are equated with being feminine.

This way of socializing boys can lead to men who are desensitized to the emotions of others and who lack empathy and compassion. Without empathy and compassion, it becomes easy to dehumanize others. Also, without a clear toolbox for processing emotion, men will access the only emotion they are allowed to express—anger. This reaction could lead to cruelty and then criminal behavior.

## **John Wayne, Cowboys, and “Real Men”**



Nothing is as American as the myth of the cowboy. Based on the idea of Manifest Destiny, the American cowboy in cinema represented the heroism found in the taming of the wild west and the frontier spirit which had come to define

the United States of America. The cowboy was the tough guy, a gunslinger with a code of honor, taming the wilds of the western frontier. John Wayne was the iconic slow-talking, action-oriented cowboy depicted on the big screen.

This tough-guy image is uniquely definitive of American values. John Wayne is the most notable tough guy who graced the big screen, but others played tough-guy roles, such as the actors Clint Eastwood and Sylvester Stallone.

These popularized “cowboys” were considered to be “real men.” Instead of talking out their problems, they acted. They acted swiftly and with violence.

### **The Pervasiveness of Gun Culture**

In this article, western cinema has been mentioned to illustrate that the USA has a gun culture. The use of guns is prominent in the USA’s movies, and the use of violence is a primary component in how we socialize young boys into becoming men. Real men are tough and take action to solve their problems using violence.

Mass shootings are an example of the existing, underlying culture of guns in this country. According to the Washington Post, “The US is one of three countries to include gun-ownership rights in its constitution. (Mexico and Guatemala are the others.)”

The right “of the people to keep and bear arms” enshrined in the



Second Amendment was established in the 18th century to allow states to form militias to protect themselves against oppression by the federal government. In 2008, the US Supreme Court ruled that the Amendment also protects the gun rights of individuals... Gun

ownership in America is considered a constitutional right. Gun owners, many of whom live in rural areas, view gun controls as an attack on their way of life.”

### **The Rhetoric of Mental Illness**

The argument here is that the gun violence problem in America is *cultural*. Toxic masculinity and the idea of being a “real man” are found in how the USA socializes our boys and in our media. Some would say that those who commit mass gun atrocities are “mentally ill.” In this author’s opinion, this is just rhetoric.

According to medpagetoday.com, “If you look specifically at mass shootings, the percentage of people who have a diagnosed mental health condition is quite small. So [mental illness] is not a factor in mass shootings, but it's a straightforward explanation for people and stigmatizing.” In other words, mental illness doesn’t necessarily cause violence. Blaming violence on mental illness is just an easy way to avoid the cultural discussion that needs to take place around gun violence in the USA.

We still are not dealing with the fact of how people, particularly men, in our society are taught to express their anger and hatred. Hate is not a mental illness. Calling violent people mentally ill just stigmatizes people with actual mental illness and plays into stereotypes.

## Reexamining the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment



The 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution of the United States says, “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be

infringed.” While I’m not arguing as a legal scholar, a few things should be considered when applying the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment to today’s gun culture.

First, a well-regulated militia implies discipline and organization. A militia is a type of army that would be armed to protect the rights of the people against a tyrannical government. While people have various opinions of the US government, we still live in a democracy. We don’t live in a dictatorship, so there is no real reason for people to keep arms to fight the government. Also, in contemporary society, we settle disagreements in government through the courts and the rule of law.

Also, we must consider the caliber of arms in contemporary society. At the time of the writing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment in 1791, the caliber of

weapons was extremely different than today. At that time, some muskets were very slow to load and shot one “bullet” at a time. Today, automatic weapons shoot hundreds of rounds in a brief period. These assault rifles are extreme weapons of war and seem unnecessary for individual self-defense.



Additionally, today, many mass shootings and gun-related crimes are *not* committed through militias. Although domestic terrorists, and white nationalists, have organized to fight their government often, for the most part, mass shootings and gun deaths are done by individuals with varying motivations. For the most part, gun violence today is *not* in response to an all-powerful and unchecked federal government.

### **Conclusion**

Let's examine our culture in the USA and find the underlying motivations as to why people, particularly men, are expressing their anger and hatred with gun violence. Let's not make excuses for behavior and use false rhetoric. Only when we confront our gun culture can we start to change that culture by examining underlying causation.

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# Announcements



## Cheri Beasley Healthcare Event

Thursday, June 2<sup>nd</sup> at 6:00 PM

Freedom Park, Shelter #3

908 East Blvd, Charlotte 28203

RSVP

Link: <https://docs.google.com/.../1FAIpQLSepVpGjbVhtpm.../viewform>

## Democrats of North Mecklenburg:

Monthly Meeting

Thursday, June 2nd at 7:00 PM

Speaker: District Attorney Spencer Merriweather

David B. Waymer Center

14008 Holbrooks Rd., Huntersville

# **Announcements**



**Democratic Women of North Mecklenburg County**  
**Membership Meeting - Wednesday, June 8th**  
**6:30 PM Candidate/Officials Reception**  
**7:00 PM Program**  
**Program: “Homeless to Hopeful”**  
**Innovative Solutions for Charlotte’s Housing Crisis**  
**RSVP Facebook Link**

**Senior Democrats of Mecklenburg County**  
**Monthly Meeting**  
**Friday, June 10<sup>th</sup> at 11:30 AM**  
**Speaker: Justice Sam Ervin**  
**Zoom**

# Announcements



## N. Meck Progressives

Monthly Meeting

June 14<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 PM

Former Mayor Jennifer Roberts

Carter Center's Initiative

Old Town Public House

21314 Catawba Ave., Cornelius

RSVP [n.meck.progressives@gmail.com](mailto:n.meck.progressives@gmail.com)

## Equality NC

A Celebration of Equality in Charlotte

Wednesday, June 15, from 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

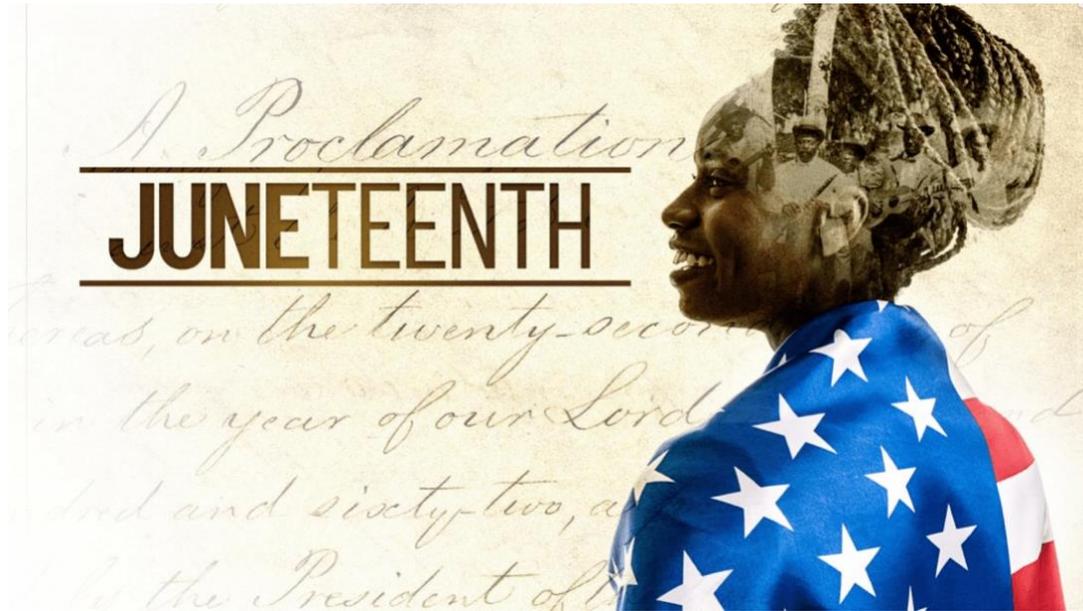
Element Uptown Clubhouse

355 W Martin Luther King Jr Blvd



Please submit your group events to [donnamarie93@gmail.com](mailto:donnamarie93@gmail.com)  
by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month for inclusion in the Announcements.

# Happenings Gallery!



**The Executive Corner:**

**Executive Director - Jade X. Jackson**

**Rev Rodney Sadler, Joel Segal, DonnaMarie Woodson**

**Rev Glencie Rhedrick**

**Coalition of United Progressives-CharMeck Chronicle**

**Editor: DonnaMarie Woodson**

**Contributor: Tarik Kiley**