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CELEBRATING THE WOMEN OF BLACK HISTORY

Notes from a conversation with Eugenia Kutsch-Stanton and Bridget Cravens-Neely

It's tough to imagine being something you have never seen. This is why the recent inauguration of Vice President Kamala Harris – a woman of Black and Asian heritage – is so meaningful. She has become part of our history and a powerful and inspiring icon.

Our new vice president continues the legacy of Black women whose contributions have been essential to our democracy. She follows the trail built by thousands of women over the decades – breaking barriers, challenging the status quo, fighting for equality – who must be recognized and revered.

And Black History Month is the perfect time to recognize the accomplishments of these women, who organized, boycotted, strategized and built coalitions. Yet they remain largely overlooked in our history books, which tend to chronicle the accomplishments of more well-known Black men.

Some of us learned about **Sojourner Truth** and her dedication to abolition and women's rights. We know of **Harriet Tubman's** rescue of slaves through the Underground Railroad. Some of our studies may have included the social and racial justice work of **Dr. Angela Davis**. Many of us remember **Shirley Chisholm's** 1972 bid for the Democratic presidential nomination.

But how many of us know **Amelia Boynton**, who organized the 1965 march to the capital of Montgomery, Alabama, infamously known as Bloody Sunday? Do we remember **Ella Baker**, director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), who helped found the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in 1960? How about **Dorothy Cotton**, who prepared the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King's *I Have A Dream* speech in 1963 and trained activists in non-violent protest? Did our studies include **Dr. Dorothy Height**, regarded by President Barack Obama as "the godmother of the civil rights movement" and the women's movement? In 1946, she was instrumental in the integration of all YWCAs.

As Iowans, we can be proud of local Black women leaders who left their mark on our communities. **Edna Griffin** protested discrimination at Katz Drug Store's lunch counter, while **Willie Stevenson Glanton** made her mark as Iowa's first Black female legislator. **Evelyn Davis** founded Tiny Tots Child Care and Education Center, and **LaMetta Wynn** was Iowa's first Black mayor. These are a few of the remarkable Black women in Iowa's history whose stories are not widely known or celebrated.

There are thousands of Black women who continue to dedicate their lives to the common good; they have encouraged, included, supported, and led others. They have shed blood, sweat, and tears in their work to ensure social justice and civil rights for all. All deserve our recognition and gratitude for the many ways they have changed and improved our lives and communities.

While the historic investiture of Kamala Harris is a significant milestone and reason for celebration, it's also a reminder that the fight for social justice, racial equality, and gender equity is far from over. For the Chrysalis Foundation, Vice President Harris's words echo our belief that you *cannot be what you cannot see*: "Every little girl sees that this is a country of possibilities. ... Dream with ambition, lead with conviction, and see yourselves in a way that others may not, simply because they have never seen it before."

This is the work of Chrysalis, our partners, and supporters. Together, we will continue to help all girls and women see the potential in their own lives, and we will provide the resources and support they need to succeed. We'll help move them from *possibility* to *probability*, knowing they have the power to do so much more...*because they have seen it.*

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Chrysalis recognizes the important role of Black women in our history. We invite you to learn more about each of the women in this article, and about many other Black women whose lives inspire us today.

We hope you will take time to read and share the stories of these women as we celebrate Black History Month.

