

March 12, 2015

Women quietly do extraordinary things every day. To help shed light on the resilience and strength of Hoosier women and celebrate their accomplishments and contributions to history we are releasing an article every day in the month of March. These articles showcase how women have moved Indiana and our country forward and who inspire others to do great things in their own lives.

Women in Indiana have an important role to play. You can make a difference by:

- Learning more about the issues affecting women in Indiana.
- Voicing your opinion on issues important to you
- Serving as an advocate for women
- Mentoring another woman
- Join ICW's mailing list or social media outlets to be notified of upcoming events, programs and resources available to women

Go to www.in.gov/icw to learn more about the Indiana Commission for Women and their current initiatives.

Sources:

- **Almanac of American Politics (1998)**
Washington, DC: National Journal Inc.
- **Indiana Civil Rights Commission**
(http://www.in.gov/icrc/files/FY_2014_Annual_Report.pdf)
- "Julia Carson," (1999) *Contemporary Black Biography*, Volume 23
- **Julia May Porter Carson**, Indiana Department of Administration
(<http://www.in.gov/idoa/2923.htm>)
- "The Quotable Julia Carson," (15 December 2007), *Indianapolis Star*.
- **Ruthhart, Bill**, (22 December 2007), "Farewell, Friend," *Indianapolis Star*; Ken Kusner, (22 December 2007), "Mourners Bid Adieu to 'People's Champ,'" *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*.
- **United States House of Representatives, History, Art & Archives**
([http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/C/CARSON,-Julia-May-\(C000191\)/](http://history.house.gov/People/Listing/C/CARSON,-Julia-May-(C000191)/))

INDIANA
COMMISSION
for women

100 N Senate Avenue, Room N103
Indianapolis, IN 46204

(317) 232-6720-direct
(317) 232-7485-fax

info@icw.in.gov
www.in.gov/icw

Women's History Month 2015

Telling 31 stories in 31 days this March.

Julia May Carson (1938-2007)

A graduate of Crispus Attucks High School, Julia May Carson was elected to the Indiana House of Representatives in November 1972 and served two terms. From 1973 to 1977, Carson served as the assistant minority caucus chair. In 1976, she and Katie Hall were elected to the Indiana Senate – the first African American women in that house – where she served for the next fourteen years. There, she served until 1990, sitting on its finance committee and eventually holding the minority whip position. Throughout her service in the state legislature, Carson was employed as the human resources director at an electric company—a job she held from 1973 to 1996.

In 1991, Carson won election as a Center Township trustee, serving until 1996. She administered welfare payments in central Indianapolis, earning a reputation for defending the poor. During her tenure, Carson successfully erased the agency's debt of \$20 million, leaving \$7 million in the bank prior to winning her seat in Congress. In 1996, she was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, becoming the first African American and the first woman to represent Indiana's state Capitol, Indianapolis, in the U.S. House of Representatives. However, during her first campaign with her opponent, Virginia Blankenbaker, Carson sought to deflect any attention from racial issues, insisting that,

I am not your African American candidate. I am the Democratic candidate for Congress. I don't allow my opponents to stereotype me and confine me to a certain segment of the population.

Shortly after her election, Carson underwent heart surgery and was sworn into office from her hospital bed. She was unable to travel to Washington, DC, until early March, which led to speculation that she would not return for re-election in 1998. However, she went on to win the next four consecutive reelection campaigns. In late 2007, Carson's health again became a concern. She took a two-week leave of absence in October and announced one month later that she had been diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. Two months later on December 15, she died in her Indianapolis home.

Throughout her life, Julia May Carson worked to help those less fortunate. She worked to overcome barriers imposed on her and on others by racism and sexism. Her grandson, André Carson, who took her place as U.S. Representative, said in memorial to her legacy,

Let's remember Congresswoman Carson by doing the people's work and fighting for those who don't have a voice. When you talk about Julia Carson, you're talking about an American icon. The people's champ.

She left behind a legacy showing what heights can be reached and what barriers can be overcome through kind hearted hard work and dedication. As testament of her public service, a bronze bust of Carson was unveiled at the annual Martin Luther King, Jr., Indiana Holiday Celebration on January 16, 2014. This public art legacy project was spearheaded by the Indiana Department of Administration, Indiana Historical Bureau and Indiana Black Legislative Caucus in order to bring more diversity to the Indiana State House sculpture collection. Her impact will continue to endure in Indiana and beyond.