



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

Celebrating African American Olympians

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As the world watches its best winter sport athletes compete in the Olympics, we celebrate the achievements of African American competitors in Olympics past and present.

At the 2002 Winter Olympics, Vonetta Flowers won a gold medal in the first women's Olympic bobsled event as a brakewoman and was the first African American athlete to win a gold medal in the Winter Olympics.

Elana Meyers Taylor is currently competing at her fourth Olympics, the 2022 Olympic Winter Games in Beijing, where she is scheduled to compete in the women's monobob and two-woman bobsled events. She won an Olympic bronze medal as a brakewoman at the 2010 Winter Games, then won silver medals in 2014 and 2018.

At the 2006 Olympic Winter Games in Turin, Italy, speed skater Shani Davis became the first African American athlete to win a gold medal in an individual event, the 1,000m. The fourtime Olympic medalist also earned silver for the 1,500m. Four years later in Vancouver, he won gold and silver again.

Maame Biney made history as the youngest and first African American woman to qualify for the U.S. Olympic speed-skating team, competing at the 2018 Winter Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea. Biney, a short-track speed skater from Reston, Virginia, is competing in her second Olympics at the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing in the 500-meter, 1,000-meter and 1,500-meter events. She is also appearing in television commercials for VISA.

Many Black athletes were on Team USA at the Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo, Japan last summer. Alexandria's own Noah Lyles won a bronze medal in the men's 200-meter dash. His mother, Keisha Caine Bishop, president of the Lyles Brothers Foundation, was the keynote speaker at Alexandria's Martin Luther King, Jr. Day staff program. Bishop stressed that while the achievement is laudable, the content of one's character is even more important.

The Moss H. Kendrix Collection at the Alexandria Black History Museum includes photographs, letters, newspaper clippings and other printed material showcasing people of character who also achieved success in their fields, including a variety of Olympians, such as Alice Coachman and Muhammad Ali.

Coachman made history twice, once when she became the first African American woman to win an Olympic gold medal for high jump in 1948, and again when she became the first African American female athlete to endorse an international consumer product, appearing in a Moss Kendrix advertising campaign for Coca-Cola in 1952.

While still known as Cassius Clay, Ali competed in the light heavyweight division at the 1960 Olympic Summer Games in Rome, Italy, winning the gold medal. In 1996, he had the honor of lighting the Olympic cauldron at the Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, Georgia and in retirement, Ali dedicated himself to philanthropy, supporting organizations such as the Special Olympics and the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

The Moss H. Kendrix Collection is currently being digitized as part of a project partly funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.



Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

Historic Alexandria celebrates Black History Month throughout the month of February. For a listing of virtual events and celebrations, please visit alexandriava.gov/historic.

"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria and invited guests.