

Exhibit honors black women's role in civil-rights movement

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CINCINNATI - A veteran civil-rights leader says the Democratic presidential field - featuring a woman and a black man - represents what she and others who have worked for equal rights have long anticipated.

Myrlie Evers-Williams was in Cincinnati to preview a new Smithsonian traveling exhibit called "Freedom's Sisters" that showcases the pivotal roles she and 19 other black women played in the struggle for civil rights.

Fellow civil-rights activists and honorees Dorothy Height, Sonia Sanchez and Charlayne Hunter-Gault also attended the ceremony at the Cincinnati Museum Center. The four, along with activist and professor Kathleen Cleaver, are the only living women among the 20 whose lives are chronicled in the exhibit, which runs until Sept. 14.

Evers-Williams' husband, NAACP leader Medgar Evers, was assassinated in 1963, and she continued her activism after his death. She served as chairwoman of the board of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and became the first black female commissioner of public works in Los Angeles.

Height was elected president of the National Council of Negro Women in 1957 and attended top civil-rights meetings in the 1950s and 1960s.

Poet and playwright Sanchez was a leading voice in the Black Power movement of the 1960s, while journalist Hunter-Gault and another student won a court case enabling them in 1961 to become the first black students at the University of Georgia.

The exhibit was created by the Cincinnati Museum Center in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. Among the honorees is Rosa Parks, whose refusal to give up her bus seat in 1955 helped spark the civil-rights movement. But also honored are lesser-known women such as Septima Poinsette Clark, who was fired in 1956 after 40 years as a South Carolina teacher because of her NAACP membership and later started the Citizenship Schools that taught adults skills required to pass voter literacy tests.



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