

CELEBRATE **BLACK** SWIMMING HISTORY

At their first encounter with sub-Saharan Africans in the 1400's, Europeans explorers found a culturally aquatic people who learned to swim in the coastal and river villages of west Africa, both men and women, as soon as they could walk. For centuries, Africans were regarded as the world's greatest swimmers and enslaved African swimmers and divers created enormous wealth for their masters by harvesting pearls, recovering sunken treasures and working in and around the water. Nineteenth and Twentieth Century racism excised this rich aquatic legacy from Black Culture with these tragic consequences. Today, as many as 80% of African Americans are not competent and comfortable swimmers, and African Americans are 3 to 4 times more likely to drown than whites. Celebrate Black History Month with the International Swimming Hall of Fame by learning about the rich history and inspirational stories of Black Swimmers of the past, present and future.

Twenty One Historic Black "Firsts" In Swimming History – Questions and answers International Swimming Hall of Fame 2009

1. Who was the slave that inspired the first usage of the term "Underground Railroad?"



Answer: In 1831 a runaway slave from Kentucky, Tice Davids, dove into the Ohio River with his owner in hot pursuit. Tice swam for his life across the great river while the other man sought out a boat to row after him. Tice disappeared from view and his owner, whose comments were reported in a local newspaper, reportedly said sarcastically, that Davids must have got where he was going on "an underground railroad," assuming Davids had drowned. Davids, however, made it to Ripley, Ohio and eventual freedom.

2. Who was the first swimmer of African descent to be a world champion in boxing?

Answer: Peter Jackson, born on St. Croix, USVI, won several swimming championships in Australia and taught swimming at the famed Cavill Swimming School in Sydney, before winning the "Colored" boxing champion of the world in San Francisco, in 1883. The "white" champion, John L. Sullivan, refused to cross the color line, denying Jackson the opportunity to unite the two titles, but most experts agreed Jackson was the better fighter. "If God wanted me to fight Jackson," said Sullivan, "he would have made him a white man." Another black swimmer, Jack Johnson, would become the first "colored" boxer to win the world boxing championship for all races, in 1908.

3. Who was the first black swimmer to win the Navy Medal for heroism?

Answer: Charles Jackson French, 23, a "Negro mess attendant" from Foreman, Arkansas, was commended by Admiral William Halsey, Jr. and awarded the Navy Medal in 1943 for swimming 6 – 8 hours in shark infested waters, towing a raft filled with 15 wounded (white) sailors to safety, after their ship was sunk by the Japanese off the Solomon Islands. The raft was drifting toward Japanese occupied territory and if it had washed ashore, the sailors would have either been taken prisoners of

war or killed. The raft was eventually rescued at sea by an American craft. "His conduct was in keeping with the highest traditions of the naval service," said Halsey.

4. Who was the first black swimmer to receive ISHOF's Gold Medallion Award?

Answer: Andrew Young, Howard University, 1952-56. Dr. Young was U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations in 1976. He was also mayor of Atlanta. Swimming's highest honor goes to a former competitive swimmer who has achieved national or international recognition in government, business, science, entertainment education or the arts.

5. Who was the first black swimmer to score in an NCAA Championship final?

Answer: Nate Clark, Ohio State sophomore from Pittsburgh, finished fifth in the 200 yard butterfly at the 1962 NCAA Championships.

6. Who was the first black swimmer to win a national collegiate championship?

Answer: Fred Evans, Washington D.C. and Chicago State, won the 100-yard breaststroke at the 1975 NAIA National Swimming Championships.

7. Who was the first swimmer of African descent to win an Olympic medal?

Answer: Holland's Enith Brigitha placed third at the 1976 Montreal Olympics in the 100 free (56.65) behind East Germany's Kornelia Ender (55.65 WR) and Petra Priemer (56.49). We now know that both East Germans were doped.

8. Who was the first black swimmer to make a U.S. national team?

Answer: Chris Silva, Los Angeles, CA and UCLA, was a member of the World University Games in Edmonton, Canada, in 1982. The charismatic Silva was elected team captain. Chris was an employee of ISHOF at the time of his tragic death in an auto accident in Fort Lauderdale in 1991.



9. Who was the first black swimmer to swim across the English Channel?

Answer: Charles Chapman, of Buffalo, NY, 1981. The first person to swim the Channel was English sailor, Mathew Webb, in 1875.

10. Who was the first female black swimmer to score in an NCAA final?

Answer: Sybil Smith, Boston University, 1988, 100-yard backstroke.

11. Who was the first swimmer of African descent to win an Olympic gold medal?

Answer: Anthony Nesty, of Suriname and the University of Florida, won the 100 fly at the 1988 Seoul Olympics. He also became the first swimmer of African descent to win an individual World Championship.

12. Who was the first male swimmer of African descent to win an NCAA Div. I Championship?

Answer: Same answer. Anthony Nesty won the 100-yard butterfly three times, 1990 – 92 and the 200 meter butterfly in 1992.

13. Who was the first black swimmer to set an American record?

Answer: Sabir Muhammad, Atlanta and Stanford University, 1997, 100-meter butterfly (short course meters).

14. Who was the first black female swimmer to make a U.S. national team?

Answer: Alison Terry, San Diego, CA, 1999, Pan American Games

15. Who was the first black swimmer to make a US Olympic swimming team?

Answer: Anthony Ervin, University of California and Phoenix Swim Club, in 2000. He was also the first to medal, winning gold in the 50-meter free and silver in the 400 free relay at the Sydney Games.

16. Who was the first black female swimmer to win a NCAA Division I Championship?

Answer: Maritza Correia, Tampa, FL and the University of Georgia, won both the 50-yard freestyle and 100 yard freestyle at the 2002 NCAA Championships.

17. Who was the first black female swimmer to set an American record?

Answer: Same answer. At the 2002 NCAA Championships, Maritza Correia broke two American and NCAA records. In the 50, she broke the record held by 4 time Olympic gold medalist Amy Van Dyken and in the 100, she broke the record held by Jenny Thompson, the most decorated American swimmer in Olympic history.

18. Who was the first black female swimmer to make a US Olympic Swimming team?

Answer: Same answer. Maritza Correia, 2004. She is also the first to win an Olympic medal, winning silver in the 400 free relay.

19. Who was the first black swimmer to make a US Olympic Water Polo Team?

Answer: Actually there were two. Genai Kerr, a goalkeeper from San Diego and UC Irvine, and Omar Amr, an attacker from Irvine and UC Irvine. Both were members of the 2004 U.S. team that competed in Athens' Olympics.

20. Who was the first African-American swimmer to hold a world record?

Answer: Cullen Jones, of Newark, N.J. and North Carolina State, was a member of the US team that set a world record in the 4 x 100 meter freestyle relay in 2006.

21. Whose life story is portrayed in the first major Hollywood film about black swimming?

Answer: Philadelphia swim coach Jim Ellis, whose life story and accomplishments were portrayed in the film *Pride*, released in 2007.

Courtesy of <https://ishof.org/black-history.html>