



**NOAAH *Prime***  
A National Housing Newsletter

Women's History Month Edition  
March 2024

**D**ear **R**eaders:

**For Women's History Month: A Celebration of Black Divine Brilliance**

This Women's History Month, we honor the trailblazing spirit of Black women in Housing. Their stories, etched in resilience and innovation are a testament to the boundless power they hold within.

To Black women who birth nations, the architects of change, the weavers of dreams, givers of life, who carry a legacy of strength in the melody of screams. It's time we uplift one another and uphold our divine creation of dreams. From scientists to artists, leaders, and scholars untold, Our unwavering spirits continue to shape and mold our history. Brazen and bold we are because everything we touch turns to gold!

Let these stories be a chorus that resonates with your soul, a celebration of Black Women that infinitely unfolds.

**This edition is dedicated to Black women who continue to break barriers and redefine what's possible as our personal and unified stories continue to be told.**

**NOAAH *Prime* Editor  
Channon Shanell Ingram**

# **Four Black Women in Housing: Trailblazers and Innovators**

# A Woman of Many Firsts: Patricia Roberts Harris



*Patricia Roberts Harris*  
*U.S. Secretary of Housing*

In the annals of history, certain individuals emerge as beacons of progress, resilience, and unwavering commitment. Patricia Roberts Harris, a trailblazer in her own right, etched her name into the fabric of American achievement. Her legacy reverberates through time, inspiring generations to come.

Patricia Roberts Harris dedicated her life to public service, civil rights, and the promotion of social justice. As a woman of many firsts, she shattered glass ceilings, leaving an indelible mark on our nation's narrative. She served as an ambassador, became the dean of a law school, and held a position in a presidential cabinet.

Patricia's journey began at Howard University, where she excelled academically. Her scholarship paved the way for groundbreaking achievements. Encouraged by her husband, she embarked on a legal odyssey. Armed with a law degree from George Washington University, she gained admission to the District of Columbia Bar and the United States Supreme Court.

Harris was appointed co-chair of the National Women's Committee for Civil Rights by President John F. Kennedy. She returned to Howard University as an associate Dean of Students and lecturer in the law school and became a full professor in 1963. In 1965, Harris accepted an appointment as Ambassador to Luxemburg. She then served briefly as Dean of Howard Law School in 1969.

***In 1977, Harris was appointed as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. At her confirmation hearing, she was queried as to her ability to represent the interests of the poor. Her response was: "I am one of them. You do not seem to understand who I am. I am a Black woman, daughter of a dining-car worker. I am a Black woman who could not buy a house eight years ago in parts of the District of Columbia. I did not start out as a member of a prestigious law firm, but as a woman who needed a scholarship to go to school. If you think that I have forgotten that you are wrong."***

In 1980, Harris was appointed Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Secretary Harris passed away in 1985. Patricia Roberts Harris's legacy isn't confined to accolades. It lives in the hearts of those who continue the fight for equity. Her story reminds us that progress is forged by those who dare to be first, who break barriers, and who leave a path for others to follow.

# Dorothy Height: A Trailblazer for Women's Rights and Empowerment



*Dorothy Height  
President of the National Council of Negro Women*

*Dorothy Height was a leader in addressing the rights of both women and African Americans as the president of the National Council of Negro Women. In the 1990s, she drew young people into her cause in the war against drugs, illiteracy and unemployment. The numerous honors bestowed upon her include the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1994) and the Congressional Gold Medal (2004).*

Born on March 24, 1912, in Richmond, Virginia, Height spent her life fighting for civil rights and women's rights. The daughter of a building contractor and a nurse, Height moved with her family to Rankin, Pennsylvania, in her youth. There, she attended racially integrated schools.

In high school, Height showed great talent as an orator. She also became socially and politically active, participating in anti-lynching campaigns. Height's skills as a speaker took her all the way to a national oratory competition. Winning the event, she was awarded a college scholarship.

Height had applied to and been accepted to Barnard College in New York, but as the start of school neared, the college changed its mind about her admittance, telling Height that they had already met their quota for Black students. Undeterred, she applied to New York University, where she would earn two degrees: a bachelor's degree in education in 1930, and a master's degree in psychology in 1932.

After working for a time as a social worker, Height joined the staff of the Harlem YWCA in 1937. She had a life-changing encounter not long after starting work there. Height met educator and founder of the National Council of Negro Women Mary McLeod Bethune when Bethune and U.S. first lady Eleanor Roosevelt came to visit her facility. Height soon volunteered with the NCNW and became close to Bethune.

One of Height's major accomplishments at the YWCA was directing the integration of all of its centers in 1946. She also established its Center for Racial Justice in 1965, which she ran until 1977. In 1957, Height became the president of the National Council of Negro Women. Through the center and the council, she became one of the leading figures of the civil rights movement.

One of the initiatives Height spearheaded with NOAAH and the Sherwin-Williams HomeWork program which taught residents of affordable housing interior painting skills. Indeed, graduates of the program painted the offices of the National Council of Negro Women headquarters' offices in Washington, DC.

# Special Report: The Story of Dearfield, Colorado and the Dearfield Fund for Black Wealth

Dearfield was the largest Black homesteading settlement in Colorado, located in Weld County, about 70 miles northeast of Denver. Dearfield was established by [Oliver Toussaint Jackson](#) Dearfield in 1910, inspired by the white colony in Greeley, Colorado. Jackson formed the Negro Townsite and Land Company, but it was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, he persisted, and in 1911, nineteen settlers trekked to Dearfield. [James Monroe Thomas](#) was among the early settlers, and some lived in dugouts and burned cow chips for fuel. By 1915, the Dearfield settlers had constructed 44 wooden cabins on their homestead claims.

During World War I, the demand for Dearfield's agricultural products boomed, creating growing prosperity. More settlers arrived, boosting its population, and at its peak between 1917 to 1921, Dearfield may have housed as many as 300 residents. In 1918, the Dearfield homesteaders harvested their first significant marketable crops, netting them over \$50,000. This allowed them to buy new farm equipment, upgrade their stock, and make home improvements. Many homesteaders also worked for white ranchers and in the town of Greeley.

As the town grew, it began to attract businesses, including a company to manufacture concrete blocks, a lumber and coal yard, a boarding house and store, and a hotel. The community's cultural life grew as well, with two churches providing regular services. O.T. Jackson built the Dearfield Lunchroom, which became a kind of community center where residents gathered. Residents opened a school, and the community hosted an annual festival and carnival. The town even attracted prominent speakers, including Colorado Governor George Carlson.

However, the postwar period was harsh, and the relatively wet 1910s gave way to the drier 1920s and the extreme drought of the 1930s. The prices for their crops collapsed, and fewer new settlers arrived. By 1925, Dearfield was home to a tiny fraction of its 1921 level. The Dust Bowl forced most Dearfield homesteaders to seek work in the city. Jackson tried rebranding Dearfield as a "Valley Resort" for African Americans from Denver. He later offered to sell Dearfield to the federal government for use as an internment camp for Japanese Americans. Both plans failed, and most of the town was torn down, with the lumber reused.

Today, a few deserted buildings remain in Dearfield, including a gas station, a diner, and the founder's home. In 1995, the town was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and a 2010 monument next to one of the remaining buildings contains information about the history of the site.

# Empowering Black Wealth: Aisha T. Weeks Spearheads the Dearfield Fund's Mission to Bridge the Racial Wealth Gap



**Aisha T. Weeks**  
*Managing Director of the Dearfield Fund for Black Wealth*

**A**isha T. Weeks has stepped into the role of Managing Director of the [Dearfield Fund for Black Wealth](#), as a part of the [Gary Community Ventures](#) team. Aisha is set to spearhead the growth of the Dearfield Fund, working with our partners to transform it into the leading platform in the nation for Black and African American homeownership and wealth generation. The Dearfield Fund has seen significant growth recently, assisting over 150 homebuyers in securing their homes and providing \$9 million in down-payment support to our community members. With Aisha at the helm, we anticipate the Fund to enhance our impact further and evolve into a lasting Black-led institution dedicated to narrowing the racial wealth divide.

As a Brooklyn, New York native, Aisha brings a wealth of experience from the City of Cleveland, where she oversaw community reinvestment and cross-sector partnership initiatives. Her extensive background spans consumer and small business lending, housing policy advocacy, equity planning, and the development and execution of financial inclusion strategies. A proud alumna of the National Urban Fellow program, Aisha has previously held positions at Citibank and served as an adjunct professor at Cleveland State University. She has contributed to several boards, social service impact committees, and micro-loan funds.

In her leadership role, Aisha will collaborate with local and national leaders in housing stability, formulate our wraparound services strategy, establish criteria for lender vetting and an onboarding process, and expand the Dearfield Fund team.

Ms. Weeks states loud and clear where she has been and where she is going in the recent [Dearfield Annual Impact Report](#):

“I have spent my career at the intersection of lending, racial equity, financial inclusion, and housing development. Today, as the Managing Director of the Dearfield Fund, I am motivated by the understanding that **existing federal policy interventions, race-neutral solutions, and charitable donations alone will not close the racial wealth gap**....When I accepted the Ivory Prize for Housing Affordability on behalf of the Dearfield Fund in May, I spoke about the **need to shift the narrative of racial equity from solely a moral imperative to one that acknowledges the economic impact of and business case for dismantling systemic barriers to financial inclusion**. When investors activate their balance sheets and invest in Black communities they see a financial return and meaningful social impact. Together we can catalyze economic development that dismantles long-standing barriers to racial equity and financial inclusion.”

# Adrienne Todman: Pioneering Leadership in Housing and Urban Development



*Adrienne Todman,  
Deputy Secretary at Housing and Urban Development (HUD)*

Adrienne Todman was the first Black woman CEO of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO). And the first Black woman to have served as the Executive Director of the District of Columbia Housing Authority (DCHA). Housing insiders will tell you that the DCHA is one of the most demanding positions in the public housing field.

Before becoming HUD's deputy secretary (COO), she served in several career positions at HUD. First, as a manager of HUD's multibillion grant competition that focused on the redevelopment of distressed public housing sites and agencies, then as a chief policy aide in both the Office of Public and Indian Housing and the Office of the Secretary where she worked with staff across HUD's programs on policy solutions and streamlining implementation. She is widely recognized for her accomplishments in the affordable housing industry.

She also served as a legislative director in then-Congressman Ron de Lugo's office, a long-serving delegate representing the U.S. Virgin Islands where Todman was born and raised. Further, Todman was a founding member of NOAAH. She is a graduate of Smith College and serves as a Trustee. She lives in Washington, D.C.

## The Beatless Train to Black Homeownership

Like rivers, we know trains.  
We know the underground railroads.  
And the elevated ones in the northern cities  
Tracks that led to invisibleness, humble tunnels of despair.  
Shortly after the American Civil War, not yet free,  
former slaves to Pullman porters on the railroads  
Mythmaking John Henry's hands to drill a nation.  
But the gravity road did not take him home.  
Immortalize he is, now statued in the rain.  
The American Railroad, no dream you are.  
Sleeper's dream, we know trains, the powerful ones.  
The ones that will carry us to equality, fairness and homeward.  
We know the tracks better than most.  
Yes, over the trussells through the gaps, breaking barriers.  
The beatless train to expanding Black Homeownership.



Anonymous

## **NOAAH Prime Book Review**



*Citizen* is a book you'll sometimes encounter on lists of essays, but its subtitle, 'An American Lyric', firmly sets it into the world of poetry. Rankine's brilliant 2014 book takes a deeply incisive look at modern society's racism by directing the reader's attention to singular moments that add up to a breathtaking totality. Powerful and devastating, *Citizen* shines a light on daily microaggressions and wider social phenomena alike. It leaves readers with a new and unsettling clarity — the mark of a masterpiece.

NOAAH *Prime* Staff Selection

## Publisher's Page

Last weekend two housing events occurred that I would like to share with NOAAH *Primer* readers. While the events weren't totally housing, they captured something special in Denver's African American Communities.

The first event was a Saturday community housing conference which was led by Denver's chapter of NAREB, local banks, neighborhood leaders, and most importantly, people seeking information about home ownership.

One of the presenters, Greg Brown, captured the attention attendees with a straightforward statement "This is what you need to do," as you think about homeownership. The attendees, mostly Black, were intensely captivated by his every sentence, slide, graphic, and his tone of voice. He was giving a seminar for their potential futures.

Later that same Saturday evening, in a spacious ballroom filled with Denver NAACP gala goers, Greg delivered the same straightforward presentation. Again, he commanded their attention. Not many clanks of silverware or stirring of drinks were heard. Some people were seen taking notes.

I started my housing career as a CHFA intern (1978), held various positions while there, and eventually came back as a board member. This year marks the 50th anniversary of CHFA's service to Colorado and is best typified by folks like Greg working on behalf of all of us.



GREG BROWN

### **Business Development Specialist at Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA)**

Meet Greg Brown, a Business Development Specialist at Colorado Housing and Finance Authority (CHFA). With over 15 years of experience in the lending and housing industry, Greg works on CHFA's home finance business development team. His role involves providing outreach and training opportunities for lenders, real estate agents, nonprofit groups, and consumers in the African American communities of Colorado. This helps potential homeowners learn more about CHFA's homebuyer programs and services.

Before joining CHFA, Greg held both lending and operational positions at several top lenders in the state. He earned a bachelor's degree in communications with a minor in English from Fort Lewis College. In his spare time, Greg serves as a member of the African Leadership Group Financial Committee and enjoys attending sporting events in Colorado with his wife and two children. If you're interested in [CHFA's Down Payment Assistance Program](#), Greg is the person to talk to.

Kevin Emanuel Marchman  
NOAAH *Prime* Publisher

***"Living Globally, Thinking Nationally, Acting Locally"***