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ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND AT&T PARTNER FOR 2017 AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY CALENDAR
Honorees Include Civil Rights Activists, Educators, Athletes, and Musicians

Montgomery, Ala. – The Alabama State Department of Education and AT&T are once again teaming up for a publication that highlights social justice advocates, medical pioneers, entrepreneurs, and entertainers whose contributions have made a lasting impact on Alabama and beyond.

The 2017 edition of the Alabama African American History Calendar will be unveiled at 6 p.m. Thursday, November 10, 2016, at the Dorothy Jemison Day Theater at the Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham. Many of the honorees featured in the edition will be recognized at the ceremony and will sign copies of the calendar beginning at 7:30 p.m.

This is the seventh year for the calendar, which was created to identify role models for youth and honor notable African American achievers with ties to Alabama. The publication is distributed to schools across the state as a resource tool for educators and students. Previous editions are accessible online, as are links to additional helpful study materials.

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The 2017 honorees are:

Arthur Alexander: An American country songwriter and soul singer, Alexander wrote songs publicized by such stars as the Beatles, Elvis Presley, the Rolling Stones, Otis Redding, Tina Turner, and Jerry Lee Lewis.

“The Montgomery Four” – Aurelia Browder, Claudette Colvin, Mary Louise Smith, and Sue McDonald: These four brave African American women served as plaintiffs in Browder v. Gayle, the case that struck down Montgomery’s segregated public transportation system and ended bus segregation throughout the land.

James Herbert Finley, Sr.: Owned and operated the first chain of African American drug stores in the state of Alabama. He was also a dedicated civil rights advocate during the 1960s and 1970s, serving as Vice-President of the Neighborhood Organized Workers (NOW), a grassroots organization that utilized Dr. Martin Luther King’s nonviolent strategies of boycotting, picketing, and marching.

Dr. Charles Gomillion: The son of a former slave, Dr. Gomillion was an educator and community activist who worked at Tuskegee Institute from 1928-1971. A tireless activist for voting rights, he was the lead plaintiff in Gomillion v. Lightfoot, the landmark case that outlawed racial gerrymandering and helped pave the way for passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Judge Vanzetta Penn McPherson: Devoted a 30-year career as a civil rights lawyer and a federal magistrate judge to the passionate pursuit of equal justice for all. Retirement ushered in her avocation as a widely acclaimed columnist for The Montgomery Advertiser, writing a bi-weekly commentary on public affairs.

Dr. C. Eric Lincoln: Best known as a distinguished scholar, author, and lecturer on the Sociology of African American Religion, Race, and Ethnic Relations in the United States. He authored, co-authored, or edited numerous books and articles about the African American experience.

Dr. James Alexander Franklin, Sr.: As an African American physician practicing in the segregated Deep South, early in his career Dr. Franklin barely made enough to pay his rent. However, he never turned a patient away and would accept “in kind” payments of food and supplies from those who could not pay in cash.
Cleveland Josephus Eaton II: A legendary jazz bassist who began his musical studies when he was only 5 years-old. Eaton played with the Ramsey Lewis Trio and later with the Count Basie Orchestra. Eaton was dubbed “the Count’s Bassist” during his 16-year stint with the Count Basie Orchestra. His 1975 recording, “Plenty Good Eaton,” is considered a classic in the funk music genre.

Aurtherine Lucy Foster: The first African-American student to attend The University of Alabama. On February 6, 1956, riots broke out on the campus and a mob of more than a thousand men pelted the car in which the Dean of Women drove Lucy between classes. After the riots, the university suspended Lucy for her own safety. In April 1988, Lucy’s expulsion was officially annulled, and she enrolled in the graduate program in Education the following year. She received an M.A. degree from The University of Alabama in May 1992.

John Calhoun Bishop, Sr.: Also known as “Big Daddy,” Bishop opened his first Dreamland Café in the Jerusalem Heights neighborhood near Tuscaloosa in 1958. Legend has it that God told him in a dream that night to build a café on the land next to his home, and on October 3, 1958, Bishop made that dream a reality.

Dr. Frederick D. Reese: A member of Selma’s “Courageous Eight,” Reese was the president of the Dallas County Voters League (DCVL) when that organization invited the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King Jr. to come to Selma to amplify the city’s local voting rights campaign. This campaign gave birth to the Selma to Montgomery marches, which later led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

Rickey Smiley: An American stand-up comedian, television host, actor, philanthropist, and radio personality, he is the host of the nationally syndicated Rickey Smiley Morning Show based in Atlanta. The Birmingham native also in the sitcom The Rickey Smiley Show on TV One and is a featured columnist on the Fox-produced tabloid nationally-syndicated show Dish Nation.

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