

Speaker Bios - Black History Month

Victor Blackwell

Victor Blackwell joined CNN August 2012 and anchors the weekend editions of New Day and CNN Newsroom from the network's global headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia.

Blackwell has reported and anchored on-the-scene for many breaking news stories, including Hurricanes Harvey and Irma (2017), the Orlando shooting at Pulse Nightclub (2016), protests in his hometown of Baltimore following the death of Freddie Gray (2015), his exclusive reporting on the death of Georgia teen Kendrick Johnson (2013) and Superstorm Sandy recovery (2012).



In 2018 Blackwell marked the 50 year anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death by coordinating an exclusive interview with civil rights icons Ambassador Andrew Young and Reverend Jesse Jackson at the Memphis motel where King was gunned down. This was the first time the two visited together since King's death.

Blackwell came to CNN from WPBF 25 News in West Palm Beach, Fla., where he served as an anchor for the 5 p.m., 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. newscasts. He has been honored with an Emmy award, several regional Emmy nominations, two Telly awards, several Associated Press awards and honors from the Society of Professional Journalists. He also earned the prestigious Edward R. Murrow Award and the UNITY Award, both from the Radio Television Digital News Association, for a special report on the disproportionate drop out rate amongst young black men.

Prior to his tenure at WPBF, Blackwell worked for WTLV/WJXX in Jacksonville, Fla. He broke into journalism writing for the Community Times newspaper in Columbia, Md. He worked as a producer for Radio11 WBAL in Baltimore and as a co-producer for WHUT-TV in Washington. He also worked for WPMT-TV in York, Penn., and WHAG-TV in Hagerstown, Md.

He earned a B.A. in Broadcast Journalism from Howard University in Washington D.C. and in 2016 was named one of the University's Top 150 Distinguished Alumni.

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Aaron Johnson

Aaron Johnson serves as the District Director for Congresswoman Nikema Williams of Georgia's 5th District. Born and raised in South Georgia, Aaron is a graduate of Morris Brown College where he majored in Legal Studies.

Aaron represents the citizens of Fulton County as a member of the Board of Registration and Elections. He has worked under former GA Governor Roy Barnes, and former Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin. Aaron was the Director of Constituent Services for Fulton County Commission Chairman John Eaves. Additionally, Aaron served as the Governmental Affairs Director for the Atlanta REALTORS® Association.

Service and civic duty has always been in the forefront of his life. He is a proud member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. He serves on both the State and Local Political Action Committees. He has assisted as a parent volunteer with Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts of America and Chair of the Stonewall Tell Elementary School's "All Pro Dads" program. He was the PTSA Advocacy Chair and Academic Affairs Chair at Westlake High School.

Aaron is married to Dr. Alanna Johnson and they have one adult daughter, Cierra, and two sons Aaron Miles and Austin.



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Melody Maddox

MELODY M. MADDUX

DeKalb County Sheriff



Sheriff Melody M. Maddox is the 50th Sheriff of DeKalb County, Georgia and makes history as being the first woman to hold the office. As a 28-year law enforcement veteran, Sheriff Maddox is a respected leader and dedicated public servant who is deeply committed to the profession, her family, her faith and the community. As a lifelong resident of DeKalb County, her vision is to create a safer environment for DeKalb County's adults, seniors and young people. Sheriff Maddox is dedicated to the fundamental principles of integrity, excellence, accountability and respect.

Sheriff Maddox's distinguished career in law enforcement includes experience with various law enforcement agencies serving the metropolitan area. Sheriff Maddox began her career with the DeKalb County Sheriff's Office, going on to serve with both the City of Atlanta and the DeKalb County Police Departments. In 2008, Sheriff Maddox applied that experience to the creation of the public safety office for the rapidly expanding DeKalb Technical College - now Georgia Piedmont Technical College (GPTC), where she became the Assistant Chief of Police and, subsequently, making history as the college's first female Chief of Police. She was the only woman in that position within the Technical College System of Georgia's 22 colleges statewide. In 2013, Sheriff Maddox relinquished that position to pursue her longtime goal to become an elected official in law enforcement. She was the only female among seven candidates seeking election as DeKalb County Sheriff in 2014.

Earlier in 2019, Sheriff Maddox returned to the DeKalb County Sheriff's Office as Chief of Administration. On July 1, 2019, then Sheriff Jeffery Mann appointed her Chief Deputy. In this position, she held the highest-ranking non-elected position in the agency and was responsible for the planning and administration of the jail, courts, field and training operations. Sheriff Maddox is P.O.S.T. (Peace Officer Standard Training) certified and is certified as a defensive tactics instructor and received a certificate in hostage negotiation. Sheriff Maddox's professional affiliations include the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police (GACP), International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), Women in Public Safety, DeKalb County Chief's Association, National Sheriffs' Association, and the National Organization for Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE).

Sheriff Maddox earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from Morris Brown College, a Master of Arts degree in General Administration from Central Michigan University, and a Master's

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degree in African-American Ministries from the Newburgh Theological Seminary/Newburgh College of the Bible. She is a graduate of J. E. Brown High School.

A tireless community service advocate, Sheriff Maddox is a 2017 graduate of Leadership DeKalb. As CEO of Woman-2-Woman Personal Awareness and Safety Training (W2W P.A.S.T.), Sheriff Maddox has an established reputation throughout the community as an expert in women's self-defense training and personal safety. Through her W2W P.A.S.T. Prom Sponsorship program, she encourages academic excellence that awards DeKalb high school seniors with a cash gift and prom essentials. She is a member of the DeKalb County NAACP, National Council of Negro Women, Women for Morris Brown College, Saint Philip A.M.E. Church and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

Sheriff Maddox is the recipient of numerous community awards and has been recognized for her exemplary community service on the Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN), and in The Ivy Leaf, the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. national magazine, local television and radio outlets, as well as featured on the cover of numerous magazines and newspapers. In 2019, Women Looking Ahead newsmagazine named her as one of Georgia's Most Powerful and Influential Law Enforcement Officials. A DeKalb County resident, Sheriff Maddox has a daughter, Indira, three grandchildren, and one God-grandchild.

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Donna McLeod

Donna McLeod was born in the island of Jamaica, grew up in Canada. She moved to Georgia in 1998 and became a US citizen in 2012.

Donna McLeod is a Chemical Engineer with over 20 years' experience in Quality Assurance Management/ Engineering, she is now the President/CEO of Enviroqual, LLC a Quality Assurance/Regulatory Consulting company specializing in Medical Devices, Food, Plastics and Pharmaceuticals. Ms. McLeod is the mother of a grown daughter and she is also a very proud grandmother.

Ms. McLeod recognizes knowledge as the ultimate power that enables more highly informed people to make better decisions that ultimately improve their lives in every respect.



She believes that every individual should be actively involved in the decision-making processes of the people they empower to lead, those who make the rules and regulations through which we are governed. Passionate about civic responsibility and civic engagement, she emphasizes that through our VOTE we have a say in the decisions that affect virtually every aspect of our daily lives.

Through her involvement in many grassroots and her direct interaction with her community, Ms. McLeod has realized that many people remain unaware of the full duties and privileges of citizenship. She is dedicated to educating the electorate on the importance of their roles in society and the power of the VOTE as a vital force in constructively changing our communities and our country. She is on the Executive Committee for the Gwinnett County Democratic Party.

Ms. McLeod was a grassroots organizer for Senator Obama's 2008 campaign. In 2012, she was National Director for Voter Outreach for Black Women for Obama in President Obama re-election campaign.

In 2016, she ran for State House Representative, District 105, in Gwinnett County, GA. Ms. McLeod was endorsed by President Barack Obama. She lost the race by 222 votes (less than 1%) in a gerrymandered district. Ms. McLeod ran again for State House Representative, District 105 in 2018. On November 6, 2018 she was elected State Representative for District 105, winning with over 4000 votes. In 2018, she also earned the endorsements of both President Barack Obama and Attorney General Eric Holder. In 2020, Representative McLeod sought re-election with her "Let's Do It Again" campaign, the campaign ended in a landslide victory.

During the 2019-2020 Legislative Session, Representative McLeod worked with the Department of Corrections and the Department of Community Services to update their release documents to ensure

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that Ex-Felons that have served their time will be informed that their Voting Rights are restored. Representative McLeod has also made an impact on the State of Georgia when she worked with the Secretary of State to update the MVP (My Voter Page) with commissioner and school board districts so that every registered voter would know what districts they live in at the County level of government. Representative McLeod is working with Legislative Council to determine the best way to update an outdated, 1987, QBE (Quality Basic Education) formula to better fund all Georgia schools. She introduced legislation to legalize small amounts of marijuana and expunging the criminal records of those affected by these outdated laws.

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Cora Miller

Cora Miller is the Co-Founder and CEO of Young King Hair Care, the first multicultural beauty and wellness brand for young men. Inspired by her son, she and her husband launched this company in December 2019 with the mission to redefine male grooming for the next generation. Cora has nearly 10 years of experience as a leader in corporate social responsibility, program development and communications. Previously, she was the VP of External Affairs for UnitedHealth Group where she managed strategic partnerships and evaluation of community investment outcomes.



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Tabitha Ponder (Judge)

Judge Ponder earned a BS degree in Psychology from Albany State University in 1996; and a JD from Mercer University School of Law in 1999. She is the Founder and Managing Attorney of the Ponder Law Group, LLC & Ponder-Solomon Law Group, PC, where she practices throughout the State of Georgia. She was recently appointed to serve as part-time Magistrate Judge in Cobb County and she also serves as the contracted staff attorney for Georgia Judicial Council's Access to Justice Committee under the leadership of Justice Charlie Bethel. Judge Ponder was appointed to staff the new Judicial Council's Ad Hoc Committee on Improving Community Access to Legal Resources in 2020, and she was appointed to serve as Special Master for Cobb County Superior Court in 2017. Lastly, she served as an Adjunct Professor for 7 years at Albany State University.



She is a member of the GA Bar Association; Georgia Association for Black Women Attorneys; a Board Member of the Georgia Association of Women Lawyers as VP of the Leadership Academy; Cobb Bar; Gate City Bar; and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

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Toni Washington

Toni Washington joined the City of Decatur in January 2009 as the first African American and first female to serve as the Fire Chief/Emergency Manager. Her work involves planning and managing the operations of the fire department in fire prevention, fire suppression, emergency management, and emergency medical services. Chief Washington has worked diligently to educate the public on fire safety. She began her public safety career at State Fire Marshal's Office; and then to a Metro Atlanta fire department where she worked her way to the position of Deputy Fire Chief.

Before beginning her tenure in the public safety field, Toni attended Savannah State University where she received her Bachelor of Business Administration in Marketing and Management. After mapping her career path, she expanded her education and received a Master of Science in Managerial Leadership from National Louis University. Her corporate background includes employment with the Turner Home Entertainment Marketing and Public Relations Team, serving on the staff of actress Jane Fonda, and working with the Cobb Microenterprise Council where she assisted low to moderate-income individuals in achieving self-sufficiency. Toni's other professional achievements consist of holding a wide variety of fire operations and public education certifications and trainings.

