



MARVA COLLINS

Biography

Marva Collins grew up in Atmore, Alabama at a time when segregation was the rule. Black people were not permitted to use the public library, and her schools had few books, and no indoor plumbing. Nonetheless, her family instilled in her an awareness of the family's historical excellence and helped develop her strong desire for learning, achievement and independence. After graduating from Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia, she taught school in Alabama for two years. She moved to Chicago and taught in Chicago's public school system for fourteen years.

Her experiences in that system, coupled with her dissatisfaction with the quality of education that her two youngest children were receiving in prestigious private schools, convinced her that children deserved better than what was passing for acceptable education. That conviction led to her decision to open her own school on the second floor of her home. She took the \$5,000 balance in her school pension fund and began her educational program with an enrollment of her own two children and four other neighborhood youngsters.

Thus, Westside preparatory School was founded in 1975 in Garfield Park, a Chicago inner-city area. During the first year, Marva took in learning disabled, problem children and even one child who had been labeled by Chicago public school authorities as borderline retarded. At the end of the first year, every child scored at least five grades higher proving that the previous labels placed on these children were misguided. The CBS program, **60 Minutes**, visited her school for the second time in 1996. That little girl who had been labeled as border line retarded, graduated in 1976 from college **Summa Cum Laude**. It was documented on the **60 Minutes** programs in 1996. Marva's graduates have entered some of the nation's finest colleges and universities, such as Harvard, Yale, and Stanford, to mention just a few. And, they have become physicians, lawyers, engineers, educators, and entered other professions.

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Ms. Collins has received many accolades in recognition of her outstanding work with children. She was featured on ***Good Morning America, 20/20, Fox News***, and many more programs too numerous to list. A made-for-television movie titled, ***The Marva Collins Story*** starred Cicely Tyson and Morgan Freeman first aired in 1982, and is still presented on television.

Some of her awards include:

- The Jefferson Award for Benefiting the Disadvantaged
- The Humanitarian Award for Excellence
- Legendary Women of the World Award
- Many honorary doctoral degrees from universities such as Amherst, Dartmouth, Notre Dame, and Clark University
- The prestigious National Humanities Medal from President Bush in 2004

She has turned the responsibilities of running her school over to her daughter, Cynthia B. Collins, who was one of the first students in the Westside Preparatory School. Today, Marva Collins trains teachers in her educational program and methodology. Her curriculum is based on classical literature, and other subject material that contain ideas, lofty thoughts, and abstract concepts. The purpose is to teach children the values that hold societies together and that present to students thoughts that may be interpreted differently. Fourth graders in her school, for example, read Plato's dialogue, ***The Republic***. In it, Plato asks, "What is justice?" Justice has different meaning, according to one's viewpoint or interpretations. The students are encouraged to express their own opinion. And, as any observer of Ms. Collins classes will attest, the children are eager to participate in classroom discussions, and their verbal skills are outstanding as are their reasoning abilities. Her students are taught to appreciate the nuances of language, how to analyze and challenge what they read, and to express their opinions. They learn to contrast their own ideas with the differing ones as expressed by the other students.

Ms. Collins has spoken to many major corporations including The National Girl Scouts, The National Retailers Association, The National Dairy Association, The European Division of IBM, Xerox Corporation, The Million Dollar Roundtable, The Young President's Organization (YPO), The National Bankers' Association, Anheuser-Busch, Coors, and she has trained executives of Long John Silvers. Corporations have accurately discerned that the same skills Ms. Collins develops in her students are applicable in successful business entities.