

# The Clerk's Black History Series



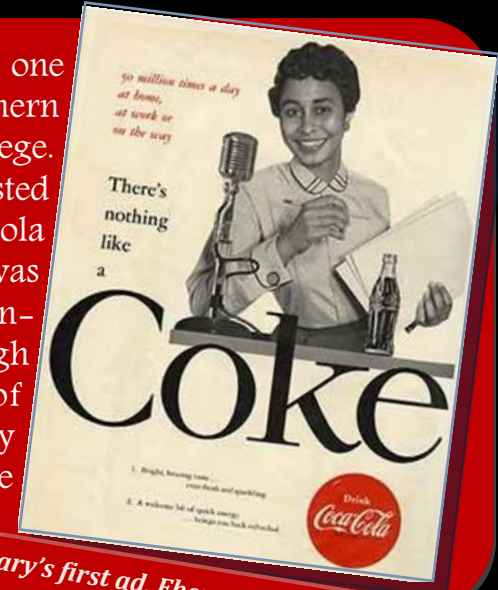
**Debra DeBerry**  
Clerk of Superior Court  
DeKalb County



# Mary Alexander

*First African-American Woman to Appear in Coca-Cola Advertising*

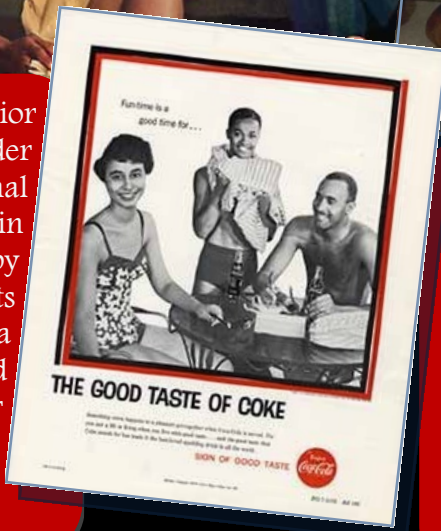
From humble beginnings on a farm in Ballplay, AL, Mary Alexander, one of 10 children, spent most of her days working the fields in the Southern heat. Mary was only the second person in her family to attend college. While at Clark College in Atlanta, GA, the dorm housemother suggested 21 year-old Mary try out for a new campaign by the Coca-Cola company to recruit African-American models. Although Mary was reluctant, she was selected and historically became the First African-American Woman to Appear in Coca-Cola Advertising. Although Mary's ads for Coca-Cola marked the beginning and the end of her modeling career, they were the first in a series of many more "firsts" accomplishments. After graduating from Clark, She moved to Detroit to pursue her Masters degree in Education.



Mary's first ad, Ebony Magazine, 1955



During her junior and senior years of college, Alexander was featured 15 additional ads, including several in which she was joined by two male college students as the trio portrayed a family. In all she earned about \$1,500 modeling for Coke, which she used to help pay tuition.



After college, Mary became the first African-American teacher of Mount Clemons High School and later, the first female African-American principal of Highland Park High School. To continue her legacy of "firsts" she then became the first female African-American director of Michigan's vocational education. She retired to Ocala, Florida.