

The Clerk's Black History Series



Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



Xernona Clayton

First Southern African-American Television Show Host
Founder of the Trumpet Awards
(b. August 30, 1930)

Xernona Clayton was born August 30, 1930, in Muskogee, Oklahoma to Reverend James and Elliott (Lillie) Brewster, who were both administrators of Indian affairs in Muskogee, Oklahoma. In 1952, she graduated with honors from Tennessee State Agricultural and Industrial College in Nashville, Tennessee where she majored in music and minored in education. At TSU, Clayton became a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. She later earned a scholarship and pursued graduate studies at the University of Chicago. In 1957, Clayton married Edward Clayton, a noted journalist and associate of Dr. King with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. She later co-authored a revised edition of her late husband's biography of Martin Luther King Jr., called "The Peaceful Warrior". Clayton began her career in the Civil Rights

Movement with the National Urban League in Chicago, working undercover to investigate racial discrimination committed against African-Americans by employers. After moving to Atlanta, she began working with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) under the direction of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She developed a deep friendship with Coretta Scott King and played a significant role in the organizing, planning and funding of Dr. King's marches. In 1966, Clayton coordinated the Doctors' Committee for Implementation, a group of African-American doctors who worked on the desegregation of all Atlanta hospitals. The Doctors' Committee served as a model for nationwide hospital desegregation and was honored by the National Medical Association. After Ed Clayton's death in 1966, Xernona married jurist Paul L. Brady, the first African-American appointed as a Federal Administrative Law judge. By the mid-1960s, Clayton was writing for the Atlanta Voice, and in 1968, she became the first black woman in the South to host a regularly scheduled prime-time talk show, "Variations", which became "The Xernona Clayton Show" on WAGA-TV in Atlanta. Her guests included Harry Belafonte and Lena Horne. Later that year, Clayton successfully convinced the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan to renounce the Klan.

In 1982, Clayton began her long and impressive work with Turner Broadcasting, working as the first black female corporate executive and in 1988, as the Corporate Vice President of Urban Affairs with Turner Broadcasting, Inc. In 1993, Clayton, with Turner Broadcasting, created the Trumpet Awards to honor achievements of African-Americans. The program is seen in over 185 countries. She serves as the Chair, President and CEO of the Trumpet Awards Foundation which was formed in late 2004. In early 2004, Clayton created the International Civil Rights Walk of Fame. Clayton's footprints were added to the International Civil Rights Walk of Fame in 2006. In recognition of Xernona's contribution to broadcasting, her community and the nation, the American Intercultural Student Exchange (AISE) has created a scholarship in her honor. Each year, since 1987, Ms. Clayton chooses an outstanding minority high school student to spend a year living abroad with a European family, all expenses paid. The Xernona Clayton Scholarship is dedicated to increasing open relationships, internationally, through a global high school student exchange program. Additionally, the Atlanta Association of Black Journalists named its scholarship in her honor and annually presents the Xernona Clayton Scholarship to a student pursuing a career in communications. Xernona Clayton's autobiography, "I've Been Marching All the Time", was published in 1991. On September 2011, the Atlanta City Council renamed a street and park plaza at the intersection of Peachtree Street and Baker Street in downtown Atlanta in Clayton's honor.

