

## **Honoring Black History Month: Female Swimmer Edition**

By Brendan Farrar 18 February 2021

<https://www.swimmingworldmagazine.com/news/honoring-black-history-month-female-swimmer-edition/>

Every February brings a month full of reflection, gratitude and a chance to honor some of the nation's most inspiring black leaders and their contributions. In the world of swimming, there is no debating the excellence and accomplishments of several, prominent black swimmers who have opened doors for future generations of swimmers yet to come. With the constant push to create an environment that is all-inclusive and diverse, learning about some of the most prominent swimmers of the past and present is crucial in understanding the significance everyone brings to the pool. It's also important to embrace our differences while focusing on the betterment of the sport and society in general.

Black women are important to highlight during this month of reflection and honor. In the sport of swimming, we have only ever seen but a handful of black females on the big stage in terms of national and global events. It was not until just four years ago that the first black female won a swimming event at the Olympic Games. Black women in society have been extremely marginalized and their time to be recognized and celebrated extends beyond this month. Here are some notable black, female swimmers who have changed the scope of the sport:

### **Enith Brigitha**

Beginning with a true trailblazer, Enith Brigitha's career was only the beginning of black female excellence in swimming. As a member of the Dutch National Team in the 1970s, Brigitha faced very fierce competition as the first African woman to compete at an Olympic Games. Brigitha competed at the 1972 Munich Games, as well as the 1976 Games in Montreal. She was a four-time finalist at the '72 Games and earned two bronze medals at the '76 Games, becoming the first African woman to win Olympic medals in swimming. Most notably, she swam in a time when the women of East Germany dominated almost every race due to systematic doping. Had this not been the circumstances she was faced with, Enith had the potential of earning several gold medals in her races. Alongside her Olympic accomplishments, she raced to five world records, as well as earned a silver and two bronze medals between the 1973 and 1975 World Championships. She also earned a silver medal at the 1977 European Championships. She was inducted into the International

Swimming Hall of Fame (ISHOF) in 2015 and will always be credited with setting the pathway for future black female swimmers to be successful.

## **Natalie Hinds**

Natalie Hinds is a prime example of how swimmers can be talented on and off the pool deck. Hinds has a great list of accomplishments, as she raced for the Florida Gators in her collegiate career, becoming the SEC Freshman of the Year in 2013. She was a 20-time All-American and a member of the trio of African American women that swept the top three spots at the 2015 NCAA Championships in the 100 freestyle, alongside Simone Manuel and Lia Neal. Recently, she became a member of the inaugural Cali Condors ISL team. Hinds launched her own small business called **Loominary Design**, where she handcrafts designer tapestries. You can visit her site by searching [www.loominarydesign.com](http://www.loominarydesign.com).

## **Simone Manuel**

Simone Manuel has opened many doors in the sport of swimming. She made her [Olympic](#) debut in 2016, walking away with four medals, snatching a silver in the 4×100 freestyle relay and 50 freestyle, as well as golds in the 4×100 medley relay and 100 freestyle. In her astounding 100 freestyle, she became the first black woman to win a swimming event at the Olympic Games. She has competed in four different World Championships, winning two bronzes, three silvers, and a whopping ten gold medals. Manuel completed her collegiate career at Stanford University, where she trained under the direction of Greg Meehan. During her time as a Cardinal, she helped lead Stanford to two Pac-12 Championships as well as two NCAA championships. She was a 13-time Pac-12 champion as well as a 14-time NCAA champion. Finishing her career, she held six American records and seven NCAA records, most notably becoming the first woman under 46 seconds in the 100-yard freestyle. Besides her work in the pool, Manuel is an inspiration for all swimmers as she has shown resiliency and determination in her fight for equality within the sport and society. Simone's mark on swimming will forever be embraced by future athletes, coaches, and swimming fanatics alike.

## **Maritza Correia McClendon**

After posting a successful age group and high school career, Maritza McClendon began to pave the way for black female swimmers. A University of Georgia alum, Maritza is a three-time world champion, two-time Pan-American champion, and

was the first African American to compete for the U.S. Olympic Swim Team. McClendon is also the first African American woman to hold an American and world record. Maritza now works with the organization **Swim 1922**, an organization that partners with USA Swimming and Sigma Gamma Rho, with the goal of teaching African Americans and members of other minority groups how to swim. McClendon has left a huge mark on the sport of swimming and continues to share her experiences and stories of hope with others across the country.

## **Lia Neal**

Another notable, [Lia Neal](#) is a force to be reckoned with. Neal was a member of both the 2012 and 2016 Olympic Games where she managed to bring home a bronze medal in 2012 and silver medal in 2016 as a member of the 4×100 freestyle relay. Alongside Manuel, Neal was also a member of the 2017 Pac-12 championships team, as well as a member of the 2017 NCAA championship team. She is an eight-time Pac-12 Champion and a nine-time NCAA Champion, as Neal served a crucial role in each relay during some point of her collegiate career. Neal has recently partnered with USA National Team Member **Jacob Pebley** in leading **Swimmers for Change**. Per the organization's website, their mission statement concludes by stating, **"Their long-term goal is to ignite lasting change in our country through educating, empowering and setting the example for the next generation of swimmers."** You can learn more about **Swimmers for Change** by visiting the website at [www.swimmersforchange.org](http://www.swimmersforchange.org). You can also follow them on Instagram using the handle **@swimmersforchange**.

These women have opened the doors for change and continue to fight for equality in sport and society. Representation in the sport matters to thousands of swimmers and athletes across the country. We owe it to these athletes for championing the way for future black athletes and leaders within the sport. We must remind ourselves that one month celebrating black history is not enough. For their entire lives, these women have been at the forefront of breaking barriers and standing up for what they believe in. While the future of swimming holds promise, there is still work to be done.