

BY JIM MERRITT

Special to Newsday

'Black Resistance in the Past, Present and Future," is the theme of this February's celebration of Black History Month, according to the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. This week's clergy discuss notable African Americans from their faith backgrounds who were paragons of resistance in centuries past.

The Rev. Natalie M. Fenimore

Lead minister and minister of Lifespan Religious Education, Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, Manhasset

There are many significant Black Unitarian Universalists, among them poet and abolitionist Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911) and the Rev. Hope Johnson, the minister emerita at the UU Congregation of Central Nassau, in Garden City, and a national conflict resolution and social justice advocate until her death in 2020.

Another important figure is Lewis Howard Latimer (1848-1928), the son of enslaved people and an inventor who worked with Thomas Alva Edison on the invention of the light bulb and Alexander Graham Bell on the development of the telephone. Latimer was a creative and intellectually curious person who never received the same recognition or pay as non-Black inventors. Latimer insisted on pushing past imposed boundaries. He bought a large house in Flushing, Queens, when few Black people were allowed to live there and in 1908 was a founder of the Unitarian Church in Flushing.

Latimer's poetic soul shows through in his description of incandescent lighting: "Like the light of the sun, it beauti-



Natalie M. Fenimore

UU CONGREGATION AT SHELTER ROCK



Zainab Bey

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Lisa M. Williams

HY-SYNC MEDIA

ASKING THE CLERGY

Who are your faith's significant Black figures?

fies all things on which it shines, and is no less welcome in the palace than in the humblest home." In his heart, his work and his faith, Latimer sought light, beauty and equality. He was true to Unitarian Universalism's inclusive message of worth and dignity for all.

Sister Zainab Bey

Executive board member, Interfaith Institute of Long Island, Jericho, and board member, Islamic Center of Long Island, Westbury

Malcolm X was one of the most captivating figures of the 20th century. He was a minister and leader in the Civil Rights Movement. Exceptionally confident and poised, he spoke



eloquently and boldly about racial injustice against Black people in this country.

With the help of powerful and supportive mentors, Malcolm X overcame a delin-

quent youth to become one of the world's most iconic figures. A prominent face in the Nation of Islam, he encouraged Black Americans to embrace Islam and support Black nationalism. Having studied the entire dictionary, he was masterful with words and used provocative phrases and quotes that are still relevant. Although some considered him controversial, his words provided hope to many disenfranchised Blacks in America, who, like Malcolm, were seeking respect as human beings.

As a Muslim on a pilgrimage to

Mecca, Malcolm X witnessed that people of all races came together as brethren in Islam to please the Creator. Hence, his tone regarding white America tempered, but never his stance for justice. Malcolm X's personal transformation and selfless drive to help his people is a significant part of American history. I pray that the memory of his inspiring work is continuously shared.

The Rev. Lisa M. Williams

Pastor, Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Setauket

Bishop Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is inarguably our faith's most significant Black history figure. Although born into slavery on Feb. 14, 1760, he purchased his freedom in 1783 and became a Methodist preacher.

In 1786, Allen began preaching a 5 a.m. service to a racially mixed congregation at St. George's United Methodist Church in Philadelphia. When the number of Black congregants increased, however, discriminatory practices were implemented. In 1787, in response to being pulled off their knees while praying, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones left and founded the Free African Society, an association that offered mutual aid and fellowship to whomever needed it.

It was from this base that the A.M.E. Church would be born and become the first independent Protestant denomination founded by people of African descent and heritage — although it gladly welcomes and has members of all ethnicities. Today, the church has congregations in 39 countries spanning five continents. Every second Sunday in February, Founders Day is celebrated in honor and recognition of Bishop Richard Allen, a social activist, advocate of racial equality, visionary, preacher and founder of our great Zion.