

“MOTHER EVER JEAN IVEY AND THE MAKING OF GREAT NURSES IN FLORIDA”

By

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Mother Ever Jean Ivey (1939 – 2025)

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Special Thanks to Marilyn J. Holifield, Esq.	3
A New England Educator: Influences of a Great Nursing Professor.....	4
University of Kentucky Nursing Degree	6
Acknowledgement Letter from Marilyn J. Holifield, Esq.	9



Introduction

The year was 2003.

While litigating a federal civil rights case, I was then pitted against an opposing African American female lawyer who was a 1972 Harvard law graduate and a respected partner in the law firm Holland & Knight!¹

While discussing my litigation war stories against this lady, with my stepfather and my mom, Mother Ever Jean, I happened to mention the last name of this attorney: i.e., “**Holifield**.”

Mother Ever Jean immediately recognized the name “Holifield,” because Attorney Holifield’s mother – **the great nursing pioneer Mrs. Millicent Holifield** – had **taught my mom** during the late 1950s at a local all-black nursing program in Tallahassee, Florida!

Afterwards, Attorney Holifield and I both connected the dots: her mother, Mrs. Millicent Holifield, had taught my mother at a small nursing school in Tallahassee, Florida during the 1950s!

Wow – this was an extraordinary connection!

Heretofore, I had loathed Attorney Holifield’s fierce litigation tactics.

Suddenly, Attorney Holifield’s fierceness thawed; and our professional communications became much more personable and friendlier.

Attorney Holifield and I – and Mother Ever Jean and I – continued to compare notes!

Suddenly, the *storied history* of black nursing in Florida was revealed to me – first by my mom, Mother Ever Jean – and, secondly, by Attorney Marilyn Holifield.

¹ That case was *Anthonio Vazquez v. J. P. Morgan Chase*, 8:03-cv-00011-RAL (USMD Fla. 2003).

Now that my mom has passed away, all of this is coming back to me.

From all of those conversations with Attorney Holifield about her mom, and with my mom about her mom, I could then understand where Mother Ever Jean attained her professional drive for nursing excellence — from **the great nursing pioneer Mrs. Millicent Holifield**.

Mother Ever Jean was the beneficiary of what some historians have called **THE NEW ENGLAND EDUCATION INFLUENCE** upon black Southern colleges and universities during the period 1880 and 1960!² This explains the reason for the great influence that Mrs. Millicent Holifield had upon my mom, Mother Ever Jean, during the late 1950s and beyond.

Mrs. Holifield, who was originally of West Indian origins, was from Boston, Massachusetts. She moved to Florida — along with many other New England teachers before her — with the distinct objective of elevating the Black race *through education*.

Mrs. Holifield's "New England" discipline and sophistication had a great and profound impact upon Mother Ever Jean's development in every aspect of her character — *these are not my words*, but they are repeated testimonial of Mother Ever Jean herself.

Moreover, through her affiliation with Mrs. Holifield's nursing program, Mother Ever Jean became a part of the industrial history of the nursing profession in the State of Florida.

What next follows are brief summaries of precisely how Mrs. Holifield became a positive influence upon Mother Ever Jean.

² See, e.g., "The New England Teacher Project," [FTP-Article-20220630](https://www.abhmuseum.org/education-for-blacks-in-the-jim-crow-south/); "Education of Black Children in the Jim Crow South," <https://www.abhmuseum.org/education-for-blacks-in-the-jim-crow-south/>; and W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Souls of Black Folk," *Writings* (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 1986), p. 432 (" 'In Grateful Memory of Their Former Teacher and Friend And of the Unselfish Life He Lived, And the Noble Work He Wrought; That They, Their Children, and Their Children's Children Might be Blessed.' This was **the gift of New England** to the freed Negro: **not alms, but a friend; not cash, but character.**")



A NEW ENGLAND EDUCATOR

“INFLUENCES OF A GREAT NURSING PROFESSOR”



Nursing Professor Millicent Clark Holifield (1916 - 2003)

“Millicent Clark Holifield, 87, a nurse and nursing instructor, died Wednesday, April 23, 2003. The service will be at noon EDT Monday at St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church, with burial at Greenwood Cemetery. Family will receive friends from 6 to 7:30 p.m. EDT Sunday at Strong & Jones Funeral Home chapel (224-2139). In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Tuskegee University, Office of University Advancement, P.O. Box 1304, Tuskegee, AL 36087.

“A native of Boston, Mass., she and her husband, Bishop Holifield Sr., moved to Tallahassee in 1943. She earned a degree in nursing from Florida A&M University and became a nurse and nursing instructor for Leon County schools. She petitioned Leon County and the state of Florida for blacks to have a practical nursing program. In 1957, it was approved, and she was chosen to head it. The program was placed at the old Lincoln High School, and, later when schools were integrated, the program was moved to Lively Vocational School. She retired from Lively in the late 1970s. Mrs. Holifield was an active member of St. Michael & All Angels Episcopal Church and sponsored church

4-11 youth activities. She was active in the American Red Cross, the American Cancer Society, the Meals on Wheels program, the Senior Citizens program and the Small Business Development Center.



All-Black Licensed Practical Nursing School- Tallahassee, Florida

“She was a supporter of the FAMU Foundation and the FAMU Boosters Club and was a Life to Golden member of the NAACP. In 1991 she was named to the FAMU Nursing School Gallery of Distinction and a scholarship was established in her name. She was honored by her former students at a scholarship banquet in 1990 and received a FAMU Distinguished Alumni Award in 1998. Mrs. Holifield and her husband developed real estate interests and constructed housing for low-income families. They also developed farming, livestock and timber interests. She maintained an active management role in the family real estate business, which includes apartments and single-family housing in the Tallahassee area. Survivors include her children, attorney Bishop Holifield Jr. of Tallahassee, attorney Marilyn Holifield of Miami and Dr. Edward Holifield of Tallahassee, and four grandchildren, Karintha Holifield , Kia Holifield, Bishop Holifield III and Cynthia Holifield. She was preceded in death by her husband, Bishop Holifield Sr.”¹

Today, the legacy of the great Millicent Holifield is memorialized in the *Millicent Holifield Academy of Health Sciences* at the Leon County Public Schools, Tallahassee, Florida. <https://www.leonschools.net/domain/4381>.

¹ Source: *The Tallahassee Democrat* (April 25, 2003).

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY NURSING DEGREE



Shortly after my father, Ozell Ford, was stationed at Fort Knox, Kentucky, my mother enrolled in the Registered Nursing (RN) program at the University of Kentucky, and there attained her nursing degree in 1971, an accomplishment which she spoke about frequently, and with great pride, throughout her life.



Mother Ever Jean is standing second from the right, on the back row.

As the only black nursing student, Mother Ever Jean spoke frequently of episodes of both kindness and race prejudice during her experiences. She accredited her training under her nursing instructor, Mrs. Millicent Holifield, for the reasons for her successfully completing this nursing degree program.



Mother Ever Jean's academic accomplishment was no small accomplishment, for, as she often said, her segregated high school in rural northern Florida had inadequately prepared her for the chemistry and mathematics courses then required under Kentucky's program.

During the 1970s and early 1980s, Mother Every Jean opened and operated her own nursing-boarding home, located adjacent to the Ebenezer AME Church, on 411 Parshley St SW, in downtown Live Oak, Florida, where she was the caregiver to several elderly patients.

During the 1980s and 90s, she also worked professionally as a nurse in Gainesville, Lake City, McClenny, and Tampa, Florida.

Mother Ever Jean took great pride in the nursing profession. She loved both practical and academic nursing, the biological sciences, and helping others with nursing assistance.

To sum things up here: Mother Ever Jean's nursing degree – which she frequently spoke about with great pride – was clearly a symbol of the

fruits of the Civil Rights Movement (1955- 1970); of the progress of the African American women in the United States; and of the testament of her Christian faith and perseverance.

THE END. †



Ever Jean, Age 23



Ever Jean, Early 30s



University of Kentucky



Millicent Holifield's Nursing School, c. 1958



Millicent Holifield (1916 - 2003)

A Special Letter from
Marilyn J. Holifield, Esq.

FROM: Marilyn J. Holifield <marilyn.holifield@hklaw.com> Aug 23, 2025, 7:56 AM

TO: Rev. Roderick Andrew Lee Ford <methodistlawcentre@gmail.com>

Dear Roderick,

I will always remember your beautiful note connecting your mother to my mother. I'm so sorry she is no longer with us. You and your family have my deepest condolences.

With kindest regards,

Marilyn

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SUNRISE SUNSET
April 9, 1939 *July 17, 2025*
SATURDAY JULY 26TH, 2025 AT 2PM