

[Episode 20 - Marjorie Lee Browne Transcript]

(Valeria) Hi, I'm Valeria. Enough about me. Let's go to Marjorie Lee Browne, one of the first black women in the United States to obtain a PhD. She was born September 9th, 1914, in Memphis, Texas. Marjorie was raised by her father, an educated man for the time, with two years of college. And she was raised by her stepmom, who was a school teacher. Her original mom died when Marjorie was two, but her stepmom was a nice lady. Marjorie Lee was encouraged to study by her stepmom, and her father approved of education so there was no problem there. The Brownes could afford to attend Hayward University in Washington, D.C., during the Depression due to a combination of loans, jobs, and scholarships. She earned a master's degree in mathematics by 1939. At that time she was the first black woman to receive a master's degree. While teaching at Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, she begins work on her doctorate at the University of Michigan. Requirements were met during 1949, making her one of the first two African American women to obtain a PhD in mathematics. There was another woman who had a PhD, but she didn't get to graduate officially until February of 1950. So documents say Marjorie wasn't the very first, but we say one of the first two African American women to obtain her PhD in mathematics. Her thesis was titled "On the One Perimeter Subgroups of Certain Topological and Matrix Groups." With her PhD, Browne joined the faculty of mathematics at North Carolina Central University, later called North Carolina College, for 25 years. Browne retired from there, where she was the only person in her department to have a PhD. Marjorie Lee Browne died at her home in Durham, North Carolina, on the 19th of October, 1979. She was 65 years old. Browne will be remembered for helping students who came to her for help on their PhDs, encouraging them to do what she had achieved.