

Jean West Lewis

**Education** -B.S.-Clark College (now Clark Atlanta University), Atlanta, Georgia, M.S.-Howard University, Washington, D.C.,Certificate in Administration and Supervision, Johns Hopkins University Baltimore, Maryland

**Professional Experience** - Former Research Scientist- National Institutes of Health,Howard County Maryland Public School System, Specialist in Family and Community Outreach

**Memberships in** American Philatelic Society and ESPER (Ebony Society of Philatelic Events and Reflections

I bought my first commemorative stamp in 1977 for my children ages 5 and 4. The stamp was the very first one in the Black Heritage Series-Harriet Tubman. It was very appropriate because Harriett Tubman was born into slavery in Maryland and I live one block from Harriet Tubman Lane and the location of the only high school established for Blacks in Howard, County during the Jim Crow era. Growing up I enjoyed learning about the Black experience in American history and I wanted that for my children. So, I began doing research on stamps honoring African Americans and purchasing philatelic materials. Eventually with that one stamp and lots of magazine articles, books and other written materials I was the annual guest speaker at my children's schools for Black History Month. This was very special for all the children because the African American student population was in the minority throughout my children's educational journey. When the students were promoted to middle school they asked their teachers in February-"Where is Mrs. Lewis?" So, I loaded up my bags and boxes and followed the children to middle and high school. Everyone benefited-even the staff.

One day in the 1980's I saw a Post Office poster advertising the annual stamp issues for that year. I got so excited when I saw one honoring an African American that I asked if I could have the poster when it was officially out of date. That answer of 'yes" was the beginning of the African American Travelling Stamp Exhibit (and a longtime friendship with the postal employee until her retirement). I consulted with a Baltimore artist and she suggested the design that I have replicated since 1989. Currently the exhibit consists of 25 trifold display boards. It is child wrapped in clear plastic making it child proof. The stamps are in 25 acrylic picture frames according to themes. Covers are in albums and most documents and written materials are encased in folders or laminated. The students can feel, handle and get close without me worrying about damage.

I have exhibited at museums, libraries, churches, conventions, Juneteenth celebrations, Black History Month Programs and scouting events. My outreach has extended to more than 40 schools in the Howard County, Washington, D.C .and Baltimore areas. I speak with students in whatever space is available- classrooms, auditoriums or media centers. The length of time varies-an hour, a day or one week which involves the entire school.

Schools are so challenged now to meet state standards, that I developed mini lessons to support thinking skills, crossword puzzles and classroom cachet making. In this way teachers could continue the higher meaning associated with the exhibit other than just what student "looked at". When you take them from where they are just looking to "what does this mean for you going forward..." the schools pass the word on about the curriculum enhancement associated with the exhibit. Of course, during Covid-19 I had to be creative, so I used zoom. Schools were open but the community was not allowed in. So, I delivered a few

display boards to the classrooms a week before the zoom presentation. The students were then able to discuss and ask questions with confidence and curiosity when I appeared on the screen. In 2023 I had the opportunity and esteemed pleasure to exhibit at two training conferences that resulted in over 7,000 attendees passing by. The results-21 new members in ESPER over a five day period!

I have never charged any fees. Sometimes I smile and request lunch with the students. I've received beautiful letters of thanks, flowers, mugs and a couple of gift cards. For me the joy of interacting with people young and old is telling the stories of the contributions of Black people in American history, inspiring young people to become change makers and passing on the joys of philately.