

BLACK CULTURAL CENTER

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Margaret Burroughs: African American Renaissance Woman

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The 2015 National Women's History Month theme is "Weaving the Stories of Women's Lives." In celebration of the theme, this brief would like to introduce the story of famed African American artist Margaret Burroughs, whose art is woven throughout the Black Cultural Center and whose life work is felt throughout Chicago, the U.S., and internationally. Burroughs was a poet, artist, teacher, activist, and significant contributor to the African American museum movement.

Born in Louisiana, Burroughs, a participant of the Great Migration, moved with her parents to Chicago in 1922 at the age of five. She attended Chicago public schools and earned her undergraduate degree from Chicago Normal College (now known as Chicago State University). Later, she received an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. By this time, Burroughs, whose primary artistic medium was printmaking, had become a successful artist whose reputation was growing in Chicago and the rest of the country.

Simultaneously, she wrote for the *Chicago Defender*, taught at Du Sable High School, and collaborated with local black artists on African American cultural events in the city, particularly on the "Southside" of Chicago which was known to be a thriving black community. It was in this atmosphere that Burroughs helped to establish the Southside Community Arts Center, a

Federal Arts Project that was promoted by the Works Progress Administration. The community center was a major location of the Chicago Renaissance where artists like Gwendolyn Brooks and Paul Robeson spent time.

Burroughs served as secretary of the National Negro Museum and Historical Foundation based in Chicago. She and her husband Charles were also very active members of the African American Heritage Association. It was through her work in these organizations that her vision to create a museum which would promote and honor black history, culture, and thought was ignited. She and her husband began what is now known as the DuSable Museum of African American History in their home. The DuSable has served the Chicago area since 1961 and is a premiere museum and cultural institution.

In her autobiography Burroughs describes art as having "the power to change the lives of people for the better ... in fact, to be a whole person one should be able to express oneself creatively on a regular basis." If you are interested in knowing more about Burroughs and her contributions, please see the references below.

The BCC Margaret Burroughs collection consists of 14 pieces which can be viewed in person or online at our virtual museum at <http://purduebcc.omeka.net/items/browse?collection=2>.

REFERENCES

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