

Gwen Ifill honored at historic AME church

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [February 26, 2020](#) issue



Gwen Ifill (Photo courtesy of PBS NewsHour/Creative Commons)

In the historic black church where she worshiped, the late journalist Gwen Ifill was remembered with a new Black Heritage stamp in a ceremony featuring dignitaries of the church, politics, and journalism.

Speakers at the event January 30 at Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church took turns describing Ifill's courage in defying expectations and praised her faith-fueled ability to serve as a mentor to young journalists who followed in her footsteps. She was known for her broadcast and print journalism and for moderating election season debates.

Deputy postmaster general Ronald A. Stroman said the US Postal Service considered many settings for the ceremony for the 43rd stamp in its Black Heritage series but determined the Washington church was the appropriate venue.

"Her faith grounded her," he said just before unveiling a supersized version of the stamp before the large cross at the front of the sanctuary. "It gave her strength and informed the values that guided her life."

Ifill, the first African American and first woman to moderate a major television news analysis show, died at age 61 in 2016 after a cancer diagnosis. She was the moderator and managing editor of *Washington Week* and senior political correspondent for *PBS NewsHour* with Jim Lehrer. Ifill became coanchor of the *PBS NewsHour*, part of the first all-women team to anchor a national nightly news program. Earlier in her career, she worked for newspapers, including the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*.

The ceremony featured remembrances from friends and colleagues, including *Post* contributing columnist Michele Norris, who served as mistress of ceremonies, and Ifill's *NewsHour* cohost Judy Woodruff.

Ifill's brother, Earle Ifill, said it was significant to have his sister's memory honored at an African Methodist Episcopal church affiliated with a denomination in which she took an active part and where her relatives held prominent roles.

"It is delightful and meaningful in the fact that not only is it an honor for her and for us as a family but for the AME Church as a whole as she has spent her life in service to the church," Ifill, who retired in 2019 as the presiding elder of the denomination's Atlanta East District, said in a phone interview.

Gwen Ifill was the daughter of parents who were natives of the Caribbean and who became deeply involved in the AME Church. Her father, a minister, eventually became its general secretary, a post he still held when he died in 1991, and her mother was active in the denomination's Women's Missionary Society.

Ifill sang in choirs from the time of her youth and found local AME churches to join as her career moved her to the Boston area, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C., her brother said.

She joined Metropolitan in 1989 and, among other activities, narrated special programs such as a presentation of Handel's *Messiah*. —Religion News Service