

SUMMER 2022

# Patty-Jo

COMIC

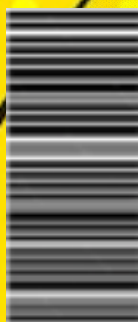
PATTY-JO

1  
\$1.79 US



THE BLOCK  
EPISODE

NEW ADVENTURES!  
SPECTACULAR!



v1

Jackie Ormes was born Zelda Mavin Jackson on August 1, 1911, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to parents William Winfield Jackson and Mary Brown Jackson. Her father William, the owner of a printing company and movie theater proprietor, was killed in an automobile accident in 1917. Her dad's death resulted in the then six-year-old Jackie and her older sister Dolores being placed in their aunt and uncle's care for a brief time. Eventually, Jackie's mother remarried, and the family relocated to the nearby city of Monongahela. Ormes described the suburb in a 1985 interview for the *Chicago Reader* as "spread out and simple. Nothing momentous ever happens here." She graduated from high school in Monongahela in 1930.

Ormes drew and wrote throughout high school. She was an art editor for the 1929–1930 Monongahela High School Yearbook, where her earliest talent as a cartoonist could be seen in her school's student's and teachers' lively caricatures. During this period, she wrote a letter to the *Pittsburgh Courier* editor, a weekly African-American newspaper published on Saturdays. The then-editor, Robert Vann, wrote back. This correspondence led to her first writing assignment—covering a boxing match. Her coverage of subsequent matches led to her becoming an avid fan of the sport.

Ormes started in journalism as a proofreader for the *Pittsburgh Courier*. She also worked as an editor and freelance writer, writing on police beats, court cases, and human-interest topics. While she enjoyed "a great career running around town, looking into everything the law would allow, and writing about it," what she wanted to do was draw.

Jackie pitched *Patty-jo' n' Ginger* to the Black-owned *Pittsburgh Courier* in 1937, which had fourteen editions published around the country and made Ormes not only the first African-American female syndicated cartoonist but the first African-American syndicated cartoonist.

Over 30 years, Ormes produced four separate comic strips. "Torchy Brown in Dixie to Harlem," "Candy," "Torchy Brown heartbeats," and "Patty-Jo' n' Ginger." During the segregated years of the 1900s through 1960's America, the Black Press offered comic strips that featured African American heroes & heroines in a wide variety of life situations. The gritty 'inner-city' stories, poor 'ghetto' life, or today's one-dimensional comic relief did not confine Jackie's characters.

Ormes' strips depicted black in a very different fashion, which was not the norm of her day. Typically, Black people were portrayed as servants or exaggerated caricatures of the "Buckwheat" or "Steppin Fetchit" variety. Ormes' female characters were independent and strong. Ormes said, "I have never liked dreamy little women who can't hold their own."

In the United States, few women's opportunities in general, and even fewer for African American women, existed during the mid-century. Jackie Ormes blazed a trail as a famous cartoonist with the prominent black newspapers of the day.

Ormes's cartoon characters delighted readers of newspapers such as the *Pittsburgh Courier* and *Chicago Defender*. They spawned other products, including an elegant black doll with a stylish wardrobe and "Torchy Togs" paper dolls in the funny papers. In the late 1940s, Ormes transformed cartoon character Patty-Jo into a doll that is now a collector's item.



A comic book panel depicting a neighborhood scene. On the left, a young girl with dark hair in pigtails, wearing a red jacket and a red-and-white striped skirt, points towards the center. In the center, a circular inset shows a woman with dark, wavy hair wearing a green shirt. On the right, a woman with short dark hair, wearing a leopard-print top, looks towards the center. In the background, there are multi-story brick buildings and a large tree with yellow and orange autumn leaves. A speech bubble from the girl on the left says, 'WE HAVE A NEW NEIGHBOR ON OUR BLOCK.' A speech bubble from the woman on the right says, 'YES YOU DO. HER NAME IS TORCHY BROWN'. A name bubble in the top right corner identifies the woman on the right as 'Patty-Jo'.

**Patty-Jo**

WE HAVE A NEW  
NEIGHBOR ON OUR BLOCK.

YES YOU DO. HER  
NAME IS TORCHY BROWN



[www.jackieormes.org](http://www.jackieormes.org)

# **JACKIE ORMES**

**THE INCREDIBLE LIFE OF AN ICONOCLAST**