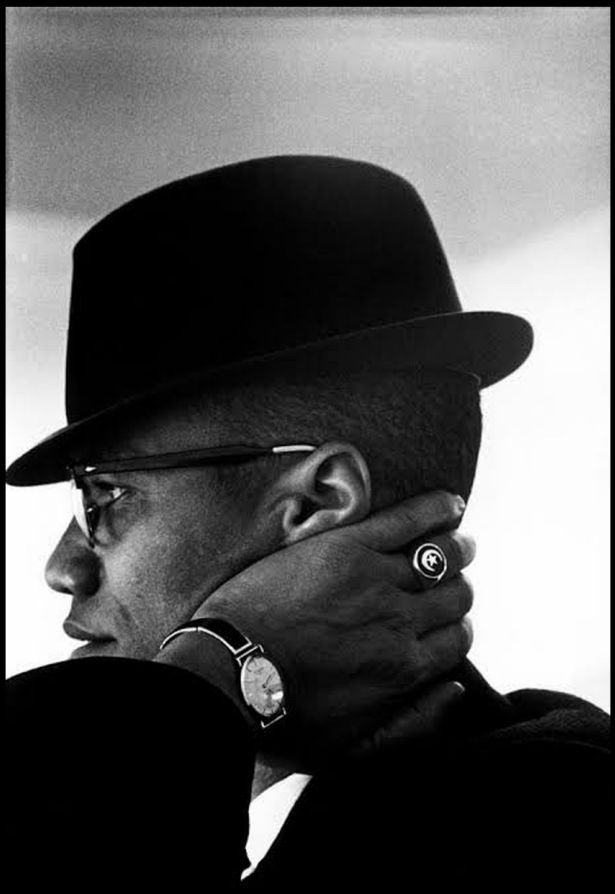
THE BLACK GLOW EXPERIENCE PRESENTS

100

BLACK MEN WHO CHANGED AMERICA



The Most Influential Black Men in American History

By J. N. Sanders

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Cover photograph: Malcolm X

Introduction

They tried to erase us from the history books. They left our names out, our faces out, our work out — as if America built itself. This book is my answer to that.

These are 100 Black men who changed America. Not just the names everybody knows, but the inventors, the soldiers, the preachers, the teachers, the ballplayers, the businessmen, the poets, and the presidents. Men who were enslaved and men who were free. Men who marched and men who built. Every one of them left this country different than they found it.

I put this book together because our children deserve to see themselves in history — not as a footnote, but as the story itself. And I made it free, because history this important should never sit behind a price tag. Share it. Print it. Teach it. Pass it on.

This is only the beginning. The women are next.

— J. N. Sanders, Founder of The Black Glow Experience

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PART ONE

Freedom & the 19th Century



1. Benjamin Banneker (1731–1806) — Scientist & Surveyor

Benjamin Banneker was born free in 1731 in Baltimore County, Maryland, to a free Black farming family. With almost no formal schooling, he taught himself mathematics and astronomy from borrowed books and built a wooden clock that kept accurate time for years. In 1791, he was appointed to the team surveying the land for the new federal capital, helping lay out the boundaries of Washington, D.C. That same year he began publishing his own almanac, filled with his calculations of the sun, moon, and tides — one of the first scientific works ever published by a Black American. He sent a copy to Thomas Jefferson, along with a bold letter challenging the contradiction between the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the practice of slavery. Jefferson replied, and Banneker's letter was printed in the almanac for all to read. He died in 1806, remembered as a self-taught genius who used science to argue for the dignity and equality of his people.



2. Richard Allen (1760–1831) — Founder, African Methodist Episcopal Church

Richard Allen was born enslaved in Philadelphia in 1760 and bought his freedom as a young man. He became a Methodist preacher and, in 1787, walked out of St. George's Methodist Church after white ushers tried to pull Black worshippers from their knees during prayer. That moment changed American religion. Allen gathered the congregation and founded Bethel Church in Philadelphia in 1794, the first independent Black church in the nation. In 1816, he brought Black Methodist congregations together to form the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first fully independent Black denomination in America, and was elected its first bishop. Allen also worked to help newly freed people find work, schooling, and dignity, and he spoke out against slavery until the end of his life. He died in 1831, leaving behind a church that still stands today — and a model of Black self-determination that shaped generations.



3. Absalom Jones (1746–1818) — Minister & Abolitionist

Absalom Jones was born enslaved in Delaware in 1746 and bought his freedom in 1784. He settled in Philadelphia, where he and his friend Richard Allen founded the Free African Society in 1787, one of the first Black mutual-aid organizations in America, helping families in need and caring for the sick during the yellow fever epidemic of 1793. In 1794, Jones founded St. Thomas African Episcopal Church, and in 1804 he was ordained a priest — the first Black Episcopal priest in the United States. From his pulpit, Jones spoke against slavery and for the full humanity of Black people. He and Allen petitioned Congress to end the slave trade, and Jones led his congregation in the long struggle for freedom and respect. He died in 1818, remembered as a pastor, a community builder, and a voice for justice in the earliest days of the republic.



4. Crispus Attucks (1723–1770) — First killed in the Boston Massacre

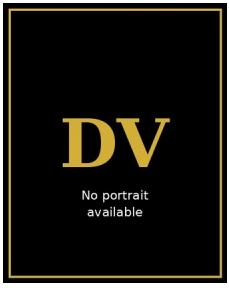
Crispus Attucks was born around 1723 in Massachusetts, the son of an African father and a Native American mother. He had been enslaved as a young man, but he escaped and went to sea, working as a sailor and rope-maker in Boston. On the night of March 5, 1770, Attucks was at the front of a crowd of Bostonians confronting British soldiers in the streets. When the soldiers opened fire, he was the first man to fall — the first person killed in what became known as the Boston Massacre. His death, and the deaths of four others that night, became a rallying cry for the American Revolution. Attucks was buried with honor alongside the other victims, and his name has been remembered

ever since as the first American to die for the cause of liberty — a Black man whose sacrifice helped light the fuse of a revolution.



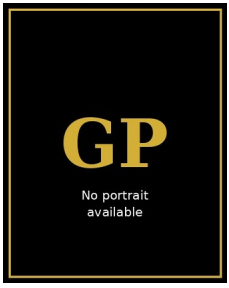
5. James Forten (1766–1842) — Businessman & Abolitionist

James Forten was born free in Philadelphia in 1766. At just fourteen, he joined the fight for American independence, serving aboard a privateer ship. When the British captured his vessel, he was imprisoned aboard the prison ship Jersey in New York Harbor — and he refused an offer of freedom in exchange for switching sides. After the war, Forten became a sailmaker, invented a device for handling sails, and built one of the most successful Black-owned businesses in the young nation. He used his wealth to fund the abolitionist cause, helping to support William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper, The Liberator, and speaking out against slavery and for equal rights. Forten showed that Black Americans could be patriots, businessmen, and reformers all at once. He died in 1842, a wealthy and respected citizen whose life proved that freedom and success were possible even in a nation still bound by slavery.



6. Denmark Vesey (1767–1822) — Rebellion Leader

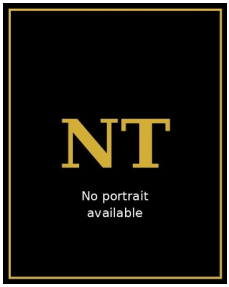
Denmark Vesey was born enslaved in the Caribbean in 1767 and was brought to Charleston, South Carolina. In 1799, he won $1,500 in a lottery and used it to buy his freedom. A skilled carpenter and a respected leader in Charleston's Black community, Vesey helped found an independent Black church and preached that slavery was a sin against God. In 1822, he planned a large uprising of enslaved people in and around Charleston, hoping to seize the city and sail to freedom in Haiti. But the plot was betrayed before it could begin. Vesey was arrested, tried, and executed in July 1822, along with dozens of others. His plan never came to pass, yet his name lived on as a symbol of courage and resistance — a free Black man who risked everything to strike a blow against slavery, and whose story inspired future generations to keep fighting.



7. Gabriel Prosser (1776–1800) — Rebellion Leader

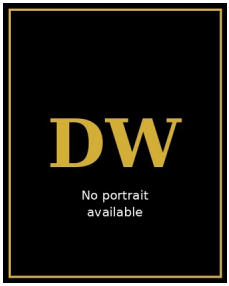
Gabriel Prosser was born enslaved in Virginia in 1776, the year America declared its independence. A skilled blacksmith who could read and write, Gabriel grew up hearing the language of liberty and saw the bitter contradiction of slavery. In the summer of 1800, he organized a plan to march on Richmond with hundreds of enslaved men, seize weapons, and demand freedom. But on the night of the planned attack, a violent rainstorm flooded the roads and bridges, and the plot was betrayed before the men could gather. Gabriel was captured and hanged in October 1800, at just twenty-four years old. His rebellion never reached the city gates, yet it shook Virginia to its core and forced white Americans to face the truth: the people they held

in bondage were not content, and the spirit of freedom could not be chained. Gabriel's courage became a lasting part of the story of resistance.



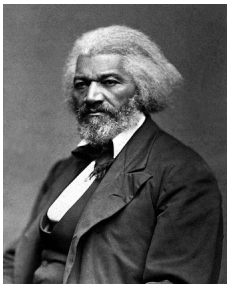
8. Nat Turner (1800–1831) — Rebellion Leader

Nat Turner was born enslaved in Southampton County, Virginia, in 1800. Deeply religious, he became a preacher among the enslaved people of his county, and he believed God had called him to lead his people to freedom. On the night of August 21, 1831, Turner and a small band of followers rose up, killing about fifty-five white people as they moved from farm to farm. The rebellion was put down within two days, and the retaliation was brutal — hundreds of Black people, many of them innocent, were killed by white mobs and militias. Turner hid for weeks before he was captured, tried, and hanged in November 1831. His revolt terrified the South and led to even harsher laws against enslaved people, yet it also proved that the enslaved would not accept their chains forever. Turner's name remains one of the most debated and remembered in American history.



9. David Walker (1785–1830) — Abolitionist Writer

David Walker was born free in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1785, and moved to Boston, where he became a successful clothing merchant. But he could not ignore the suffering of enslaved people, and in 1829 he published a pamphlet that shook the nation: Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World. In it, he called slavery a crime, urged enslaved people to resist, and warned white America that God would judge the nation for its sins. The Appeal was smuggled into the South, where it terrified slaveholders and was banned by law. Walker called on Black Americans to stand up for themselves and to demand the freedom that was their right. He died in Boston in 1830, just a year after the Appeal appeared, under circumstances that have never been fully explained. But his words lived on, inspiring abolitionists and freedom fighters for decades to come.



10. Frederick Douglass (1818–1895) — Abolitionist, Writer & Statesman

Frederick Douglass was born enslaved in Maryland in 1818. As a boy, he was taught to read in secret, and the power of words changed his life forever. In 1838, he escaped to the North, where he became the most powerful voice of the abolitionist movement. His autobiography, published in 1845, told the truth about slavery in his own words and became a bestseller. He founded the newspaper The North Star, gave speeches across America and Britain, and pressed President Abraham Lincoln to let Black men fight in the Union Army and to end slavery altogether. After the Civil War, Douglass continued to fight for equal rights, serving as U.S. Marshal for the District of Columbia and as

minister to Haiti. He died in 1895, after a life that carried him from slavery to the highest levels of American public life — a journey he made with nothing but his mind, his voice, and his unbreakable will.



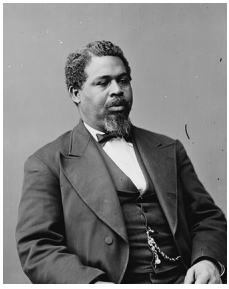
11. William Still (1821–1902) — Underground Railroad Conductor

William Still was born free in New Jersey in 1821, the son of parents who had escaped slavery. He moved to Philadelphia, where he became a clerk for the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society and a conductor on the Underground Railroad. For years, Still met freedom seekers arriving in Philadelphia, gave them food and shelter, and helped them on their way to Canada. He kept careful records of every person he helped — their names, where they came from, and where they were going — and after the Civil War, he published those records in a book, The Underground Rail Road, reuniting families torn apart by slavery. Known as the "Father of the Underground Railroad," Still helped hundreds of people reach freedom. He was also a successful businessman and a lifelong fighter for civil rights. He died in 1902, leaving behind a record that preserves the names and stories of those who risked everything for liberty.



12. Henry "Box" Brown (1815–1897) — Escaped Slavery, Abolitionist

Henry Brown was born enslaved in Virginia in 1815 and worked in a tobacco factory in Richmond. When his wife and children were sold away from him, Brown decided he would rather die than live without hope. In 1849, with the help of friends, he had himself nailed inside a wooden box and shipped as freight to Philadelphia — a journey of twenty-seven hours that nearly killed him. When the box was opened, he stepped out a free man, and the newspapers called him "Box" Brown. He became a famous speaker on the abolitionist circuit, telling his story to crowds across America and England, and he sang songs and performed to raise money for the cause. His escape was one of the most daring of the Underground Railroad, and his name became a symbol of the lengths to which enslaved people would go for freedom. He died in 1897, remembered for a journey no one who heard it ever forgot.



13. Robert Smalls (1839–1915) — Civil War Hero & Congressman

Robert Smalls was born enslaved in Beaufort, South Carolina, in 1839, and worked as a sailor in Charleston Harbor. When the Civil War began, he was forced to serve aboard the Confederate ship Planter. On the night of May 13, 1862, while the white officers were ashore, Smalls took command of the ship, sailed it past Confederate forts using the captain's signals, and delivered it — along with his family and other enslaved crewmen — to the Union fleet. It was one of the most daring acts of the war. Smalls went on to serve in the Union Navy and Army, and after the war he entered politics. He served in the South Carolina legislature and then in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he fought for the rights of freed people and for public schools. He died in 1915, a hero of the war and a statesman who had sailed himself from slavery to Congress.



14. Hiram Revels (1827–1901) — First Black U.S. Senator

Hiram Revels was born free in North Carolina in 1827 and became a minister and a teacher. During the Civil War, he served as a chaplain for Black Union soldiers and helped recruit men for the army. After the war, he settled in Mississippi, where he worked as a pastor and a leader in the freed community. In 1870, the Mississippi legislature elected him to the United States Senate — the first Black man ever to serve in that body. He took the seat once held by Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy, a moment heavy with history. Revels served in the Senate for a year, speaking for education and for the rights of freed people, and then returned to Mississippi to lead a college for Black students. He died in 1901, remembered as a

trailblazer whose election proved that Black Americans belonged in the highest councils of the nation.



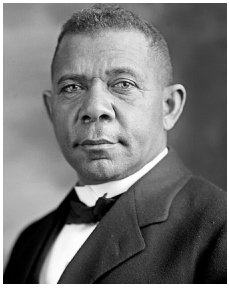
15. Blanche K. Bruce (1841–1898) — U.S. Senator

Blanche K. Bruce was born enslaved in Virginia in 1841. After emancipation, he moved to Mississippi, where he built a life as a teacher, a landowner, and a leader in the new politics of Reconstruction. In 1875, the Mississippi legislature elected him to the United States Senate, where he served a full six-year term — the first Black man to do so. In the Senate, Bruce spoke for education, for the rights of freed people, and for a fair chance for all Americans. After his term ended, he continued in public service, serving as Register of the Treasury under two presidents and as a leader in Washington's Black community. His career showed that a man born in slavery could rise to the highest levels of American government through education, hard work, and dignity. He died in 1898, remembered as a statesman of the Reconstruction era and a symbol of what freedom could make possible.



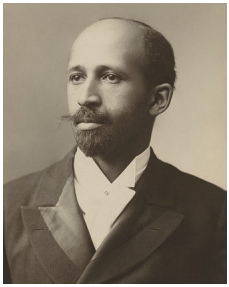
16. Henry O. Flipper (1856–1940) — First Black West Point Graduate

Henry Ossian Flipper was born enslaved in Georgia in 1856. After emancipation, he earned an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point, where he endured years of isolation and prejudice from fellow cadets. In 1877, he became the first Black man to graduate from West Point. Flipper went on to serve as a cavalry officer with the 10th Cavalry, the famed Buffalo Soldiers, on the western frontier. In 1882, he was court-martialed and dismissed from the Army on disputed charges of embezzlement — a punishment many believed was driven by racism. Flipper spent the rest of his life as an engineer, surveyor, and mining expert, and he never stopped seeking to clear his name. In 1999, more than a century later, President Bill Clinton granted him a posthumous pardon. Flipper died in 1940, remembered as a pioneer who broke the color line at West Point and carried himself with honor through it all.



17. Booker T. Washington (1856–1915) — Educator & Founder, Tuskegee Institute

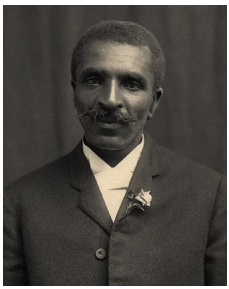
Booker T. Washington was born enslaved in Virginia in 1856. After emancipation, he walked hundreds of miles to attend the Hampton Institute, where he learned the value of education and hard work. In 1881, he was asked to lead a new school for Black students in Tuskegee, Alabama. With almost nothing — no buildings, no books, little money — Washington built Tuskegee Institute into one of the most respected schools in the nation, where students learned trades, farming, and the skills to build their own lives. In 1895, his Atlanta Exposition speech made him the most famous Black leader in America, and presidents sought his advice. He wrote Up from Slavery, the story of his rise from bondage to leadership. Washington believed in lifting up his people through education and self-reliance, and his work at Tuskegee changed the lives of thousands. He died in 1915, leaving behind a school and a legacy that endure today.



18. W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) — Scholar, Writer & Civil Rights Leader

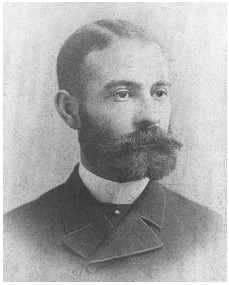
W. E. B. Du Bois was born in Massachusetts in 1868 and grew up to become one of the greatest minds America has ever produced. He was the first Black man to earn a doctorate from Harvard University, and his book The Souls of Black Folk, published in 1903, gave the world a new way of understanding the Black experience in America — including his famous idea of "double consciousness," the feeling of seeing oneself through the eyes of a society that does not fully accept you. In 1909, Du Bois helped found the NAACP and edited its magazine, The Crisis, for twenty-four years, using it to fight lynching,

segregation, and injustice. He spent his life arguing that Black Americans deserved full equality, education, and the vote — not someday, but now. In his later years, he moved to Ghana, where he died in 1963, on the eve of the March on Washington. His scholarship and his courage shaped the civil rights movement for generations.



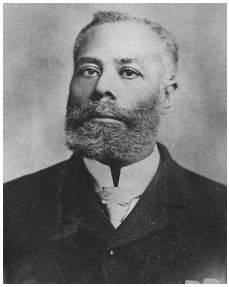
19. George Washington Carver (1864–1943) — Scientist & Inventor

George Washington Carver was born enslaved in Missouri around 1864. As a boy, he was known for his love of plants, and he taught himself to read and study the natural world. He became the first Black student at Iowa State Agricultural College, earning his bachelor's and master's degrees, and in 1896 he joined Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee Institute to lead its agriculture department. There, Carver taught Southern farmers to rotate their crops, planting peanuts and sweet potatoes to restore soil worn out by cotton. He went on to develop hundreds of uses for peanuts, sweet potatoes, and soybeans — from food to ink to medicines — and shared his discoveries freely with poor farmers, Black and white alike. Carver never sought wealth or fame; he wanted his science to serve the people. He died in 1943, remembered as a humble genius whose work fed a nation and lifted up the rural South.



20. Daniel Hale Williams (1856–1931) — Surgeon

Daniel Hale Williams was born in Pennsylvania in 1856 and became one of the most skilled surgeons of his time. In 1891, he founded Provident Hospital in Chicago, the first Black-owned hospital in America with an interracial staff, created because Black doctors and nurses were barred from working in white hospitals. Two years later, in 1893, Williams performed one of the first successful open-heart surgeries in history, repairing the torn heart of a stabbing victim who went on to live for many more years. It was a landmark moment in medicine. Williams also founded a school for Black nurses and helped open the door for Black physicians across the country. He later became the first Black member of the American College of Surgeons. His steady hands and his determination saved lives and broke barriers in a profession that had been closed to Black Americans. He died in 1931, remembered as a pioneer of modern surgery.



21. Elijah McCoy (1844–1929) — Inventor

Elijah McCoy was born in 1844 in Ontario, Canada, to parents who had escaped slavery in Kentucky by way of the Underground Railroad.

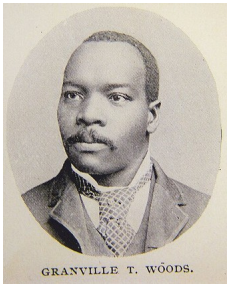
He studied mechanical engineering in Scotland, but when he returned to America, the only work he could find was as a fireman and oilman on the railroads. There, McCoy saw a problem: the steam engines of the day had to be stopped and oiled by hand, which wasted time and money. In 1872, he patented an automatic lubricator that oiled engines while they ran, and his invention was soon used on locomotives and ships across the country. McCoy went on to earn about fifty-seven patents over his lifetime, improving engines, brakes, and machines of all kinds. His work made railroads faster and safer, and his name became known among engineers everywhere. He died in 1929, remembered as a brilliant inventor whose mind could not be held back by the color line.



22. Lewis Latimer (1848–1928) — Inventor

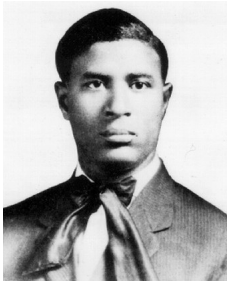
Lewis Latimer was born free in Massachusetts in 1848, the son of parents who had escaped slavery. As a young man, he served in the Union Navy during the Civil War, and after the war he taught himself mechanical drawing while working in a patent law office. His talent was so great that he was chosen to draw the patent designs for Alexander Graham Bell's telephone in 1876. Latimer went on to work with Thomas Edison, where he patented an improved carbon filament for the electric light bulb in 1881 — making bulbs last longer and cost less, and helping bring electric light into ordinary homes. He also wrote the first book on electric lighting, published in 1890, and supervised the installation of electric lights in cities across America and abroad. Latimer's drawings and inventions helped light the modern

world. He died in 1928, remembered as a draftsman, inventor, and writer whose work touched nearly every American home.



23. Granville T. Woods (1856–1910) — Inventor

Granville T. Woods was born free in Ohio in 1856 and taught himself electrical engineering while working on railroads and in iron mills. He went on to earn more than fifty patents, and his inventions changed the way America moved. His most important was the induction telegraph of 1887, a device that let moving trains communicate with stations and with each other — a breakthrough that helped prevent collisions and save lives. Woods also invented improvements to the telephone, the telegraph, and the electric railway. Thomas Edison challenged his patents in court, but Woods won, proving his work was his own. Because of his genius, people called him the "Black Edison." Woods never had the wealth or the fame of Edison, but his inventions made the railroads and the cities of America safer and more modern. He died in 1910, remembered as one of the great inventors of the age of electricity.



24. Garrett Morgan (1877–1963) — Inventor

Garrett Morgan was born in Kentucky in 1877, the son of formerly enslaved parents, and moved to Cleveland, Ohio, where he built a life as a businessman and inventor. In 1914, he patented a safety hood — an early gas mask — that protected the wearer from smoke and dangerous fumes. Two years later, when an explosion trapped workers in a tunnel beneath Lake Erie, Morgan put on his own mask and went in himself, rescuing several men from certain death. In 1923, he patented a three-position traffic signal, with a warning light between stop and go — the ancestor of the traffic lights we use today. Morgan also founded the Cleveland Call, a newspaper serving the Black community. His inventions saved lives on the road and underground, and his courage in the tunnel made him a hero. He died in 1963, remembered as an inventor whose work still protects us every day.



25. Carter G. Woodson (1875–1950) — Father of Black History Month

Carter G. Woodson was born in Virginia in 1875, the son of parents who had been enslaved. He worked in the coal mines as a young man, taught himself to read, and went on to earn a doctorate from Harvard University in 1912 — only the second Black man to do so. Woodson believed that Black history had been ignored and distorted, and he dedicated his life to setting the record straight. In 1915, he founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, and in 1916 he began publishing the Journal of Negro History. In 1926, he created Negro History Week, a time for schools and communities to celebrate the achievements of Black Americans. That week grew, year by year,

into Black History Month, observed across the nation every February. Woodson died in 1950, remembered as the father of Black history — the man who made sure our story would be told.

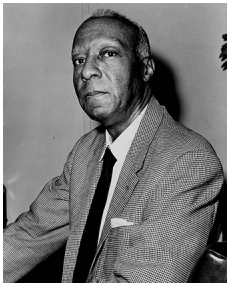
PART TWO

Civil Rights & the Movement



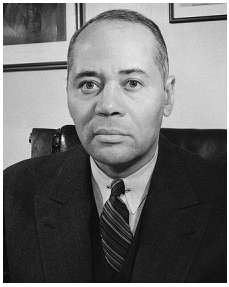
26. Marcus Garvey (1887–1940) — Pan-African Leader

Marcus Garvey was born in Jamaica and became the most powerful voice for Black pride and self-reliance in the early twentieth century. In 1914 he founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association, which grew into the largest Black organization in history, with millions of members across the Americas, the Caribbean, and Africa. Garvey taught that Black people should be proud of their heritage, build their own businesses, and look to Africa as their homeland. His Black Star Line steamship company was meant to carry trade and people between Africa and the Americas. Though the company failed and Garvey was convicted of mail fraud in 1923 and deported from the United States in 1927, his ideas never died. He died in London in 1940, but the movement he built inspired African independence leaders, the Rastafari faith, and generations of Black nationalists who followed.



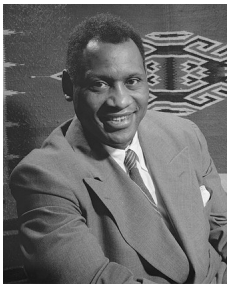
27. A. Philip Randolph (1889–1979) — Labor Leader & Civil Rights Organizer

A. Philip Randolph proved that Black workers could organize and win. In 1925 he founded the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first Black-led labor union to gain recognition from the American Federation of Labor, and he spent a decade fighting the Pullman Company for fair pay and dignity for its porters. In 1941, when defense jobs were closed to Black workers, Randolph threatened a march on Washington and forced President Franklin Roosevelt to ban discrimination in defense industries. He later helped organize the 1963 March on Washington, where Dr. King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech. Randolph received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964. He spent his life arguing that civil rights and economic rights were the same fight, and he lived long enough to see much of what he demanded become law.



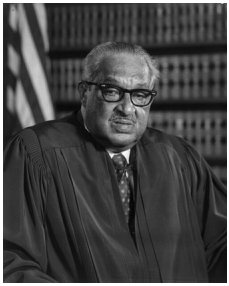
28. Charles Hamilton Houston (1895–1950) — Legal Architect of Desegregation

Charles Hamilton Houston was the quiet genius behind the legal destruction of segregation. A Harvard Law graduate and dean of Howard University's law school, he turned Howard into a training ground for civil rights lawyers, including his most famous student, Thurgood Marshall. As the NAACP's chief legal counsel, Houston designed a patient strategy: challenge segregation in the courts case by case, starting with graduate schools, until the whole system of "separate but equal" could no longer stand. He argued before the Supreme Court and won cases that opened the University of Maryland's law school and other institutions to Black students. He died in 1950, four years before Brown v. Board of Education, but every lawyer who argued that case was following the plan he had drawn. Marshall called him "the man who killed Jim Crow."



29. Paul Robeson (1898–1976) — Singer, Actor & Activist

Paul Robeson was one of the most gifted men of his century, and he paid a heavy price for refusing to stay silent. Born in New Jersey, he was valedictorian and an All-American football star at Rutgers, then earned a law degree from Columbia. He became world famous as a singer — his deep bass voice made "Ol' Man River" unforgettable — and as an actor, playing Othello on Broadway and in London. But Robeson used his fame to speak out against racism, colonialism, and war, and in the 1950s the United States government revoked his passport and blacklisted him for his political views. He spent years unable to travel or perform. He died in 1976, and only later did America begin to reckon with how much it had lost by silencing him.



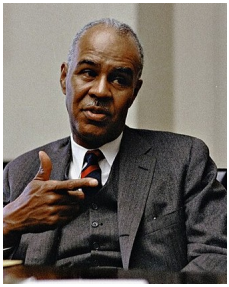
30. Thurgood Marshall (1908–1993) — First Black Supreme Court Justice

Thurgood Marshall spent his life in courtrooms, arguing Black America toward freedom. Born in Baltimore, he studied law at Howard University under Charles Hamilton Houston and became the NAACP's chief lawyer. Over two decades he won case after case before the Supreme Court, most famously Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, which declared school segregation unconstitutional. He won 29 of the 32 cases he argued before the Court. President Lyndon Johnson named him Solicitor General in 1965, and in 1967 Johnson appointed him to the Supreme Court, making him the first Black justice in American history. He served for 24 years, defending the rights of the poor, the accused, and the powerless. He retired in 1991 and died in 1993, remembered as a man who changed the law itself.



31. Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (1908–1972) — Pastor & Congressman

Adam Clayton Powell Jr. was Harlem's voice in Washington for a generation. As pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, one of the largest Black congregations in America, he led protests that forced Harlem businesses to hire Black workers. In 1945 he was elected to Congress, the first Black congressman from New York, and he served for 25 years. As chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, he pushed through laws that raised the minimum wage, expanded school lunches, and funded job training. He was fearless and flamboyant, unafraid to challenge presidents and his own party when he believed Black people were being ignored. Though his later years were clouded by controversy, his record in Congress made him one of the most effective Black legislators of his time.



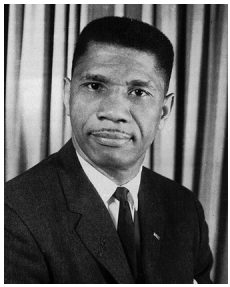
32. Roy Wilkins (1901–1981) — NAACP Leader

Roy Wilkins led the NAACP through the most dramatic years of the civil rights movement. Born in Missouri, he began as a journalist and became editor of The Crisis, the NAACP's magazine, before rising to become the organization's executive secretary in 1955. For the next 22 years, he was the steady hand guiding the nation's oldest civil rights group — supporting court cases, lobbying Congress, and helping organize the 1963 March on Washington. Wilkins believed in working within the system, and he built relationships with presidents from Franklin Roosevelt to Lyndon Johnson. He was criticized by younger activists who wanted faster change, but his patience and discipline helped win the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. He retired in 1977 and died in 1981.



33. Whitney Young (1921–1971) — Urban League Leader

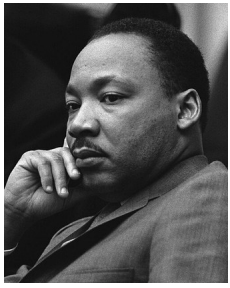
Whitney Young led the National Urban League during the turbulent 1960s and made it a bridge between Black America and the boardrooms of corporate America. Born in Kentucky, he became the League's executive director in 1961 and transformed it from a quiet social service agency into a powerful voice for jobs, housing, and equal opportunity. Young proposed a "Domestic Marshall Plan" — a massive federal investment in Black communities, modeled on the plan that rebuilt Europe after World War II. He worked with presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, and he pressed white business leaders to hire Black workers and open their doors. He believed in talking to power as well as marching against it. He died suddenly in 1971, drowned while swimming in Nigeria, at only 49 years old.



34. Medgar Evers (1925–1963) — NAACP Field Secretary, Mississippi

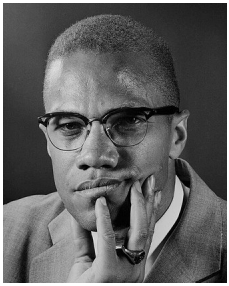
Medgar Evers was the NAACP's man on the ground in the most dangerous state in America. Born in Mississippi, he served in the Army in World War II and came home determined to change the place

he loved. As the NAACP's first field secretary in Mississippi, he investigated murders of Black citizens, organized voter registration drives, and led boycotts of white-owned stores in Jackson. His work made him a target, and he knew it — his family lived with the fear that he would be killed. On June 12, 1963, hours after President Kennedy's televised civil rights address, Evers was shot in the back in his own driveway as he came home to his wife and children. His killer, Byron De La Beckwith, was not convicted until 1994, more than thirty years later. Evers's death shocked the nation and deepened its commitment to the movement.



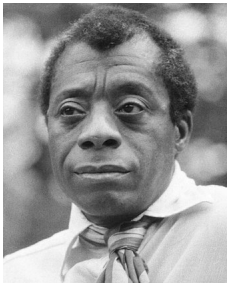
35. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) — Civil Rights Leader

Martin Luther King Jr. was the voice of the civil rights movement and one of the greatest Americans who ever lived. Born in Atlanta, he became a Baptist minister and first rose to fame leading the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955. As head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, he led campaigns in Birmingham, Selma, and across the South, preaching nonviolent resistance and the dream of a beloved community. His "I Have a Dream" speech at the 1963 March on Washington is one of the most famous speeches in history. In 1964 he received the Nobel Peace Prize, the youngest person ever to win it. He pushed America to pass the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act, and by 1968 he was fighting poverty and the Vietnam War. He was assassinated in Memphis on April 4, 1968. He was 39 years old.



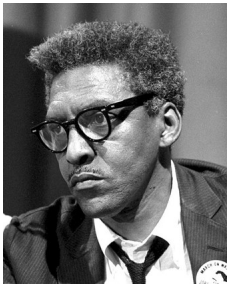
36. Malcolm X (1925–1965) — Minister & Human Rights Leader

Malcolm X was the movement's most electrifying voice, a man who remade himself and then remade the way Black America saw itself. Born Malcolm Little in Omaha, he spent his youth in crime and prison, where he educated himself and converted to the Nation of Islam. As the Nation's national spokesman, his powerful speeches drew thousands to the movement and forced America to listen to Black anger. In 1964 he broke with the Nation, made a pilgrimage to Mecca, and came home with a broader vision of human rights for all people. He founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity and began building bridges with civil rights leaders. On February 21, 1965, he was assassinated while speaking at the Audubon Ballroom in New York. He was 39 years old, and his autobiography became one of the most influential books in American history.



37. James Baldwin (1924–1987) — Writer & Voice of the Movement

James Baldwin put the Black experience into words no one could ignore. Born in Harlem, he was a child preacher before he became a writer, and he left America for Paris in 1948 to find the freedom to write honestly about race, love, and his own life. His first novel, Go Tell It on the Mountain, appeared in 1953, and his essays — collected in Notes of a Native Son and The Fire Next Time — spoke directly to white America about what racism cost everyone, Black and white alike. Baldwin returned to the United States during the civil rights movement, speaking at the March on Washington and traveling through the South. He wrote about race with a moral clarity and a beauty of language that made him one of the most important American writers of the century. He died in France in 1987.



38. Bayard Rustin (1912–1987) — Organizer of the 1963 March on Washington

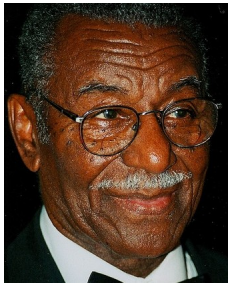
Bayard Rustin was the man who made the March on Washington happen. Born in Pennsylvania, he was a pacifist who studied the nonviolent methods of Mahatma Gandhi and became Dr. King's teacher and advisor. Rustin had organized the Journey of Reconciliation in 1947, the first Freedom Ride, and he had spent years planning marches and protests when King asked him to organize the 1963 March on Washington. In just weeks, Rustin pulled together the largest demonstration in American history to that point — more than 200,000 people — and it went off without a single incident. Because he was openly gay in an era when that was dangerous, Rustin was kept in the background and rarely given the credit he deserved. He spent his

later years fighting for workers' rights and human rights around the world. He died in 1987.



39. John Lewis (1940–2020) — Congressman & Civil Rights Leader

John Lewis spent his whole life making what he called "good trouble." Born in Alabama to sharecropper parents, he was a young man when he joined the Freedom Rides of 1961 and became chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. He was beaten by mobs and jailed dozens of times, and on March 7, 1965 — Bloody Sunday — he led marchers across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma and was beaten nearly to death by state troopers. He spoke at the March on Washington when he was only 23. In 1986 he was elected to Congress from Georgia, where he served for 33 years, fighting for voting rights, health care, and justice. He died in 2020, and in his final days he urged young people to keep marching, writing, and voting — to never give up on the cause he had given his life to.



40. Fred Shuttlesworth (1922–2011) — Minister & Movement Leader, Birmingham

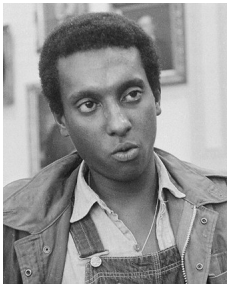
Fred Shuttlesworth was the fearless heart of the Birmingham movement. A Baptist minister born in Alabama, he founded the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights after the state banned the NAACP, and he spent years challenging segregation in the courts and in the streets. His home was bombed, he was beaten by mobs, and he was jailed again and again — but he never backed down. In 1963 he convinced Dr. King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to bring their campaign to Birmingham, and it was Shuttlesworth's courage that held the movement together when the city answered with police dogs and fire hoses. The images from Birmingham shocked the world and pushed President Kennedy to call for a civil rights bill. Shuttlesworth later moved to Cincinnati, where he continued preaching and organizing until his death in 2011.



41. Ralph Abernathy (1926–1990) — Minister & Movement Leader

Ralph Abernathy was Dr. King's closest friend and the man who kept the movement going after King was killed. Born in Alabama, he was a Baptist minister who met King in Montgomery, where the two men worked side by side through the bus boycott and founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference together. Abernathy was with King through every campaign — Birmingham, Selma, Chicago, Memphis — and he was standing beside him the night before King was assassinated. After King's death, Abernathy took over the SCLC and led the Poor People's Campaign, bringing thousands of poor Americans of every race to Washington to demand economic justice.

He wrote a memoir about his friendship with King and spent his later years preaching and teaching. He died in 1990, remembered as the loyal friend who never left the front lines.



42. Stokely Carmichael / Kwame Ture (1941–1998) — Activist, Black Power

Stokely Carmichael changed the language of the movement. Born in Trinidad and raised in the Bronx, he joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee while a student at Howard University and became its chairman in 1966. That year, during a march in Mississippi, he called out for "Black Power" — a phrase that electrified young Black people who were tired of waiting and ready to claim their own strength and identity. Carmichael argued that Black people should control their own organizations, their own communities, and their own destiny. He later moved to Guinea in West Africa, where he took the name Kwame Ture and worked for Pan-African unity until his death from cancer in 1998. He was loved by some and feared by others, but no one could deny that he gave a generation a new way to speak about itself.



43. Huey P. Newton (1942–1989) — Co-founder, Black Panther Party

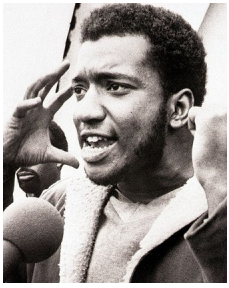
Huey P. Newton co-founded the Black Panther Party and gave it its vision. Born in Louisiana and raised in Oakland, he was a law student who had read widely in history and philosophy when he and Bobby Seale started the Panthers in 1966. Newton wrote the party's Ten-Point Program, demanding jobs, housing, education, and an end to police brutality, and he insisted that the Panthers would protect their communities with armed self-defense if necessary. The party grew into a national movement, famous for its free breakfast programs for children, its health clinics, and its bold style. Newton was arrested and tried several times, and the government worked hard to destroy the party he built. His later years were troubled, and he was killed in Oakland in 1989 at the age of 47.



44. Bobby Seale (1936–) — Co-founder, Black Panther Party

Bobby Seale was the organizer who turned the Black Panther Party into a real movement. Born in Texas and raised in California, he met

Huey P. Newton at Oakland's Merritt College, and together they founded the Panthers in 1966, with Seale as chairman. He built the party's structure, recruited members, and edited its newspaper, which carried the Panthers' message across the country. In 1969 he was put on trial in Chicago as one of the "Chicago Eight," and his defiant behavior in court — he was bound and gagged by the judge — became a symbol of a system that seemed determined to silence him. After the Panthers faded, Seale ran for mayor of Oakland in 1973 and later devoted himself to community work and writing, telling the story of what the Panthers tried to build.



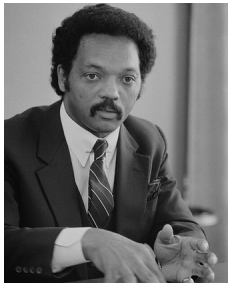
45. Fred Hampton (1948–1969) — Black Panther Leader, Chicago

Fred Hampton was only 21 years old when he was killed, but in his short life he showed a gift for leadership that frightened those in power. Born in Illinois, he joined the NAACP as a teenager and became chairman of the Black Panther Party's Chicago chapter at 20. Hampton was a powerful speaker who built the "Rainbow Coalition," bringing together Black, white, and Latino groups — including poor white Appalachians and Puerto Rican activists — to fight poverty and police abuse together. He also organized free breakfast programs and health clinics for Chicago's poorest neighborhoods. In the early morning of December 4, 1969, police raided his apartment and shot him dead as he slept beside his pregnant fiancée. The killing became one of the most infamous events of the era and a lasting symbol of the cost of the movement.



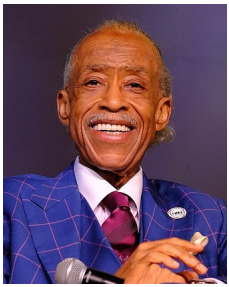
46. Elijah Muhammad (1897–1975) — Leader, Nation of Islam

Elijah Muhammad built the Nation of Islam into one of the most powerful Black institutions in America. Born in Georgia, he took over leadership of the Nation in 1934 and spent four decades preaching a message of Black pride, self-reliance, and moral discipline. Under his leadership, the Nation opened mosques across the country, started schools and businesses, and published its own newspaper. He taught that Black people should build their own economic base rather than depend on white society, and his message drew thousands of followers — including Malcolm X, who became his most famous minister, and Muhammad Ali, who joined the Nation in 1964. Elijah Muhammad's teachings were controversial, but the organization he built gave many Black men dignity, purpose, and a path out of poverty. He led the Nation until his death in 1975.



47. Jesse Jackson (1941–) — Minister, Activist & Presidential Candidate

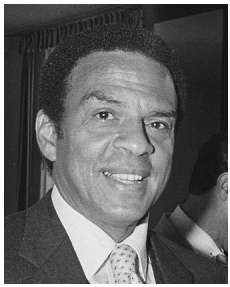
Jesse Jackson carried the civil rights movement into national politics. Born in South Carolina, he was a young minister working with Dr. King in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and he was in Memphis on the day King was assassinated. Jackson went on to found Operation PUSH in Chicago, pushing corporations to hire Black workers and do business with Black-owned companies, and later the Rainbow Coalition, a multiracial movement for justice. In 1984 and 1988 he ran for president of the United States, winning millions of votes and millions of new voters — and proving that a Black candidate could compete on the national stage. His campaigns opened the door for the Black candidates who followed, including Barack Obama. Jackson has spent decades as a minister, mediator, and negotiator, fighting for the poor and the forgotten.



48. Al Sharpton (1954–) — Minister & Civil Rights Activist

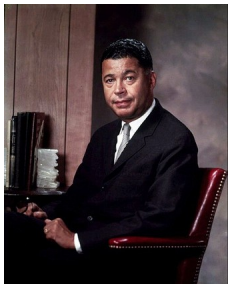
Al Sharpton has spent more than five decades as one of America's most visible civil rights voices. Born in Brooklyn, he was preaching by the age of four and was ordained as a minister while still a boy. He learned politics as a young aide to Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm and the Reverend Jesse Jackson, and in 1991 he founded the National Action Network, which became his base for fighting police brutality, racial profiling, and economic injustice. Sharpton has led marches and rallies across the country, from the streets of New York to the funerals of victims of police violence, where grieving families have asked him to speak. He became a television host on MSNBC and a trusted voice in national debates about race. Loved and criticized in equal measure,

he has never stopped showing up.



49. Andrew Young (1932–) — Ambassador, Mayor of Atlanta & Movement Leader

Andrew Young was the diplomat of the civil rights movement — the man who could talk to anyone. Born in New Orleans, he was a minister who joined Dr. King's inner circle, serving as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's executive director and King's trusted negotiator. Young helped plan the campaigns in Birmingham and Selma, and he was with King in Memphis when King was killed. After the movement, he entered politics, winning a seat in Congress from Georgia in 1972. President Jimmy Carter named him ambassador to the United Nations in 1977, making him the first Black American to hold the post. He later served two terms as mayor of Atlanta, helping the city win the 1996 Olympic Games. He has spent his life proving that the movement's goals could be carried into the highest offices in the land.



50. Edward Brooke (1919–2015) — First Black U.S. Senator Elected by Popular Vote

Edward Brooke was a trailblazer in American politics. Born in Washington, D.C., he served in the Army in World War II and then became a lawyer in Boston. He won election as Massachusetts attorney general in 1962, the first Black American elected to that office in any state. In 1966 he was elected to the United States Senate, becoming the first Black senator chosen by popular vote — and the first Black senator since Reconstruction. He served two terms, from 1967 to 1979, earning a reputation as a thoughtful moderate who worked across party lines on housing, civil rights, and education. He helped write the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and fought for affordable housing for low-income families. He lost his seat in 1978, but his career showed that a Black man could win statewide office and govern with distinction. He died in 2015.

PART THREE

Government, Science & Business



51. Benjamin O. Davis Sr. (1877–1970) — First Black General

Benjamin Oliver Davis Sr. was born in Washington, D.C., in 1877, and joined the United States Army in 1898 during the Spanish-American War. In an Army that was segregated by law and custom, he rose steadily through the ranks, serving in the Philippines and along the Mexican border and teaching military science at Wilberforce University and the Tuskegee Institute. For decades, promotion came slowly, and Davis was often passed over for assignments given to white officers with less experience. But he persisted, and in 1940 President Franklin D. Roosevelt promoted him to brigadier general — the first Black general in the history of the United States Army. During World War II, Davis served as an adviser on the use of Black troops, inspecting units and pressing for fair treatment. He retired in 1948, the year President Truman ordered the armed forces desegregated. His son, Benjamin O. Davis Jr., followed him into history. Davis died in 1970 and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery.



52. Benjamin O. Davis Jr. (1912–2002) — Tuskegee Airmen Commander

Benjamin O. Davis Jr. entered West Point in 1932 as the academy's only Black cadet. His classmates refused to speak to him outside of duty for four years, but he graduated in 1936, ranking 35th in a class of 276. When the Army Air Corps finally began training Black pilots at Tuskegee, Alabama, Davis took command of the 99th Pursuit Squadron and later the 332nd Fighter Group — the Tuskegee Airmen. His pilots flew more than 15,000 sorties in World War II, escorting bombers over Europe and earning a reputation for skill and discipline. After the war, Davis helped lead the desegregation of the Air Force. In 1954 he became the first Black general in the Air Force, and in 1965 he became a lieutenant general, the first Black officer to hold that rank. He retired in 1970 and died in 2002. In 1998, President Bill Clinton promoted him to full general.



53. Dorie Miller (1919–1943) — Pearl Harbor Hero

Doris "Dorie" Miller was born in Waco, Texas, in 1919, and joined the Navy in 1939. Like most Black sailors of his time, he was assigned to

work as a mess attendant, cooking and serving food, because the Navy barred Black men from combat roles. On the morning of December 7, 1941, Miller was aboard the battleship USS West Virginia at Pearl Harbor when Japanese planes attacked. He carried wounded sailors to safety, then took over an anti-aircraft gun he had never been trained to fire and shot at the attacking planes until he ran out of ammunition. For his bravery, Miller received the Navy Cross, the Navy's second-highest honor — the first Black sailor to earn it. He was killed in November 1943 when the escort carrier USS Liscome Bay was sunk by a Japanese submarine. Decades later, the Navy named its newest aircraft carrier, CVN-81, the USS Doris Miller, in his honor.



54. Colin Powell (1937–2021) — General & Secretary of State

Colin Powell was born in Harlem in 1937 to Jamaican immigrants and grew up in the South Bronx. He joined the ROTC at City College of New York, and after graduation he entered the Army, serving two tours in Vietnam. Over the next two decades he rose steadily, earning a reputation as a calm, disciplined officer. In 1987 he became national security adviser to President Ronald Reagan, and in 1989 President George H. W. Bush named him chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff — the first Black officer and the youngest person ever to hold the military's highest post. He led American forces during the Gulf War in 1991. After retiring from the Army in 1993, Powell returned to public life in 2001 as secretary of state under President George W. Bush, the first Black American to hold that office. He left government in 2005

and spent his later years writing and supporting young people. He died in 2021.



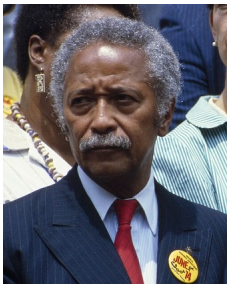
55. Barack Obama (1961–) — 44th President of the United States

Barack Obama was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1961, and raised in Hawaii and Indonesia. After graduating from Columbia University and Harvard Law School — where he became the first Black president of the Harvard Law Review — he moved to Chicago, working as a community organizer and later as a civil rights lawyer. He served in the Illinois State Senate from 1997 to 2004, then won a seat in the United States Senate. In 2008 he was elected the 44th president of the United States, the first Black person to hold the office, and he was re-elected in 2012. During his eight years in office, he signed the Affordable Care Act, which expanded health insurance to millions of Americans, ordered the operation that killed Osama bin Laden, and received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2009. After leaving office in 2017, he and his wife, Michelle, founded the Obama Foundation in Chicago.



56. Douglas Wilder (1931–) — First Black Governor

Lawrence Douglas Wilder was born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1931, the grandson of enslaved people. After serving in the Army during the Korean War, he earned a law degree from Howard University and built a practice in Richmond. In 1969 he won a seat in the Virginia State Senate, becoming the first Black Virginian elected to that body since Reconstruction. Twenty years later, in 1989, Wilder was elected governor of Virginia — the first Black person ever elected governor of any state in American history. He served from 1990 to 1994, balancing the state budget during a recession and earning a reputation for fiscal discipline. Wilder later returned to politics as mayor of Richmond, serving from 2005 to 2009. His election as governor broke a barrier that had stood since the founding of the republic, and it paved the way for Black candidates seeking statewide office across the country.



57. David Dinkins (1927–2020) — First Black Mayor of New York City

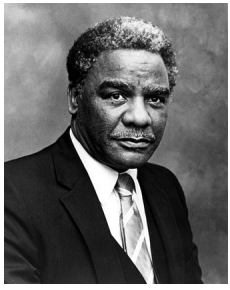
David Dinkins was born in Trenton, New Jersey, in 1927, and raised in Harlem. After serving in the Marine Corps and earning a law degree from Brooklyn Law School, he spent decades in New York politics, including terms in the State Assembly and as Manhattan borough president. In 1989 he was elected mayor of New York City, the first Black person to hold the office. He served one term, from 1990 to 1993, governing a city of eight million people during a time of high crime and deep racial tension. Dinkins hired thousands of additional police officers, began the cleanup of Times Square, and spoke of New York as a "gorgeous mosaic" of many peoples. He lost re-election in

1993 in a close race. After leaving office, he taught at Columbia University and remained a respected voice in the city he loved. He died in 2020, at the age of 93.



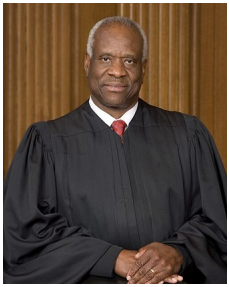
58. Tom Bradley (1917–1998) — Mayor of Los Angeles

Tom Bradley was born in Calvert, Texas, in 1917, and moved to Los Angeles as a young man. He joined the Los Angeles Police Department in 1940 and served for 21 years, rising to lieutenant in a department where Black officers were rarely promoted. After leaving the force, he won a seat on the Los Angeles City Council in 1963. Ten years later, in 1973, Bradley was elected mayor — the first Black mayor of Los Angeles. He would serve five terms, 20 years in all, the longest tenure of any Los Angeles mayor. Under Bradley, the city hosted the 1984 Summer Olympics, built a downtown skyline, and began its Metro rail system. His final years in office were marked by the 1992 riots that followed the Rodney King verdict. He left office in 1993 and died in 1998.



59. Harold Washington (1922–1987) — First Black Mayor of Chicago

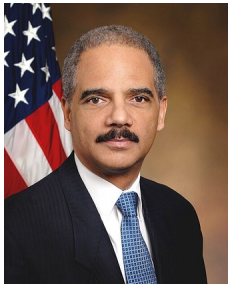
Harold Washington was born in Chicago in 1922 and served in the Army Air Forces during World War II. After earning a law degree from Northwestern University, he entered politics, serving in the Illinois legislature and then in the United States House of Representatives. In 1983 he was elected mayor of Chicago, the first Black person to lead the city. His victory came after a bitter primary, and once in office he faced open resistance from a majority of white aldermen in what the press called the "Council Wars." Washington pushed through reforms that opened city contracts and jobs to Black and Latino Chicagoans, and he fought to make city government work for neighborhoods that had long been ignored. He was re-elected in 1987, but he died suddenly of a heart attack that November, just months into his second term. Chicago still remembers him as the mayor who opened City Hall to everyone.



60. Clarence Thomas (1948–) — Supreme Court Justice

Clarence Thomas was born in Pin Point, Georgia, in 1948, and raised by his grandparents in Savannah after his father left and his mother struggled to provide. He attended the College of the Holy Cross and Yale Law School, graduating in 1974. After working in Missouri state government and at the Monsanto Company, Thomas served in the Reagan administration, first at the Department of Education and then as chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In 1991 President George H. W. Bush nominated him to the Supreme Court, and he was confirmed after contentious hearings to become the second Black justice in the Court's history. On the Court, Thomas

became known for his originalist approach to the Constitution, reading it as its authors understood it, and for his reluctance to speak during oral arguments. He is the longest-serving justice on the current Court.



61. Eric Holder (1951–) — First Black Attorney General

Eric Holder was born in the Bronx in 1951, the son of immigrants from Barbados. He graduated from Columbia University and Columbia Law School, then joined the Justice Department, where he prosecuted public corruption cases. In 1988 he became a judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, and in 1993 President Bill Clinton named him United States Attorney for the District of Columbia, the first Black person to hold that post. In 1997 Holder became deputy attorney general, the second-highest official in the Justice Department. In 2009 President Barack Obama appointed him attorney general — the first Black person to lead the department. He served for six years, overseeing civil rights enforcement, criminal justice reform, and the prosecution of financial crimes after the 2008 crisis. He left office in 2015 and returned to private practice at the Washington law firm Covington & Burling, where he had worked earlier in his career.



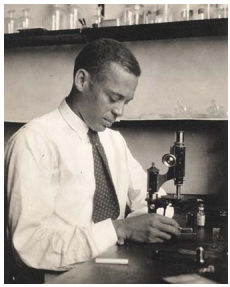
62. Charles Drew (1904–1950) — Physician, Blood Bank Pioneer

Charles Drew was born in Washington, D.C., in 1904, and attended Amherst College, where he was both a star athlete and a strong student. He earned his medical degree from McGill University in Canada, then a doctorate from Columbia University, where he studied how blood could be collected, stored, and transfused. Drew discovered that blood plasma — the liquid part of blood — could be separated, dried, and stored for long periods, then reconstituted when needed. His work made large-scale blood banks possible. During World War II, he directed the American Red Cross blood program, building the system that supplied blood to wounded soldiers. He resigned in protest when the Red Cross ordered blood donated by Black and white Americans to be stored separately. Drew died in 1950, at the age of 45, in a car accident in North Carolina. His research still underpins the blood banks that save lives every day.



63. Percy Julian (1899–1975) — Chemist

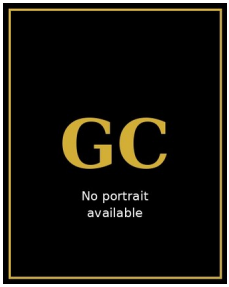
Percy Julian was born in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1899, the grandson of enslaved people. He graduated first in his class from DePauw University in Indiana, then earned a Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of Vienna. As a young chemist, Julian found a way to synthesize physostigmine, a drug used to treat glaucoma, from the calabar bean — a breakthrough that made the medicine affordable. Later he developed a method to produce cortisone and other hormones from soybeans, turning a common crop into the raw material for life-saving drugs. In 1953 he founded Julian Laboratories in Chicago, one of the first major Black-owned chemical companies. Though he held more than 100 patents, Julian faced constant racism, and his home in the Chicago suburb of Oak Park was firebombed in 1951. He died in 1975, remembered as one of the great chemists of his century.



64. Ernest Everett Just (1883–1941) — Biologist

Ernest Everett Just was born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1883, and grew up in the years after slavery's end. He graduated from Dartmouth College with honors, then joined the faculty of Howard University, where he taught biology for more than thirty years. Just was a pioneer in cell biology, studying how a single fertilized egg becomes a living creature. He did much of his research at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, and at laboratories in Naples, Italy, because American institutions often barred him from their facilities. In 1915 he became the first recipient of the NAACP's Spingarn Medal, and in 1939 he published his landmark book, The Biology of the Cell Surface. He died in 1941, at

the age of 57, leaving behind work that shaped the study of cells for generations.



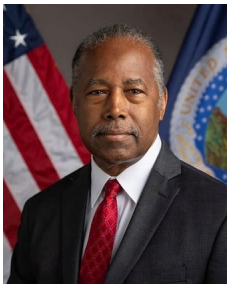
65. George Carruthers (1939–2020) — Physicist & Space Scientist

George Carruthers was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1939, and built his first telescope as a boy. He studied physics at the University of Illinois, earning a doctorate in aeronautical and astronautical engineering. At the Naval Research Laboratory, Carruthers designed a far-ultraviolet camera that could photograph the universe in light invisible to the human eye. In 1972 his camera flew to the Moon aboard Apollo 16, where astronauts set it up on the lunar surface. It sent back the first photographs of Earth taken in ultraviolet light, and it detected hydrogen in the space between stars. Carruthers spent his career at the Naval Research Laboratory, mentoring young scientists and working to bring more Black students into physics. He received the National Medal of Technology and Innovation, and he died in 2020.



66. Neil deGrasse Tyson (1958–) — Astrophysicist

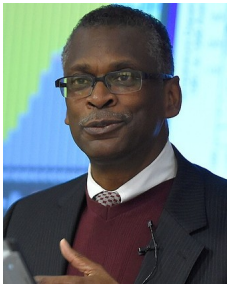
Neil deGrasse Tyson was born in New York City in 1958 and grew up in the Bronx, where the night sky over the city first drew him to astronomy. He studied physics at Harvard and earned a doctorate in astrophysics from Columbia University. In 1996 he became director of the Hayden Planetarium in New York, where he rebuilt its exhibits and helped lead the public conversation that reclassified Pluto as a dwarf planet. Tyson became the most recognizable scientist in America, hosting the television series Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey in 2014 and the radio and television show StarTalk, and writing best-selling books that explain the universe in plain language. His gift is translation: he takes the most complex ideas in science and makes them clear, funny, and exciting for people who never thought they could love astronomy.



67. Benjamin Carson (1951–) — Neurosurgeon

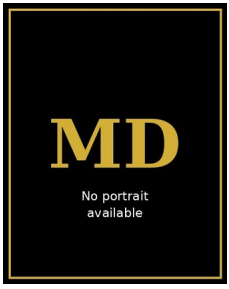
Benjamin Carson was born in Detroit in 1951 and raised by his mother, who worked as a domestic and pushed her sons to read and learn. After graduating from Yale University and the University of Michigan Medical School, Carson became a neurosurgeon at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. In 1987 he led the surgical team that separated the Binder twins, infant boys joined at the head — the first operation of its kind ever to succeed. He became director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins, one of the youngest physicians ever to hold such a post, and he performed hundreds of operations on children with brain tumors and epilepsy. Carson wrote several best-selling books about his life and his faith. In 2008 he received the Presidential

Medal of Freedom. He later served as secretary of housing and urban development from 2017 to 2021.



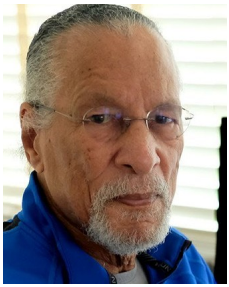
68. Lonnie Johnson (1949–) — Engineer & Inventor

Lonnie Johnson was born in Mobile, Alabama, in 1949, and as a teenager he built a remote-controlled robot from scrap parts that won first prize at a science fair. He studied mechanical engineering at Tuskegee University, then went to work for NASA, helping to design the Galileo spacecraft that explored Jupiter. In his spare time, Johnson invented a powerful water gun — the Super Soaker — which became one of the best-selling toys in American history, generating more than a billion dollars in sales. He used that success to found his own research company, Johnson Research and Development, and turned his attention to clean energy, developing new ways to convert heat into electricity. Johnson holds more than 100 patents. His life shows what can happen when a curious child from Mobile is given the chance to build.



69. Mark Dean (1957–) — Computer Scientist, IBM

Mark Dean was born in Jefferson City, Tennessee, in 1957, and studied electrical engineering at the University of Tennessee. He joined IBM in 1980 and went on to help design the personal computer that changed the world. Dean co-invented the Industry Standard Architecture bus — the system that let printers, monitors, and other devices plug into a PC — and he holds three of the nine patents on the original IBM PC. He later led the IBM team that built the first computer chip to run at one gigahertz, a thousand million cycles per second, and he became the first Black engineer named an IBM Fellow, the company's highest technical honor. Dean holds more than twenty patents and earned a doctorate from Stanford University. After leaving IBM, he became a professor at the University of Tennessee, teaching the next generation of engineers.



70. James West (1931–) — Inventor, Microphone

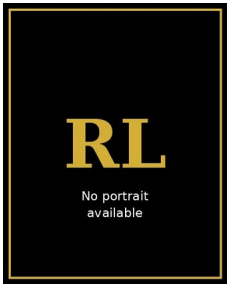
James West was born in Farmville, Virginia, in 1931, and grew up fascinated by radios and electronics. He studied physics at Temple University and joined Bell Laboratories in 1957, where he worked with German scientist Gerhard Sessler. Together, in 1962, they invented the electret microphone — a tiny, inexpensive microphone that needs almost no power. Their invention is now inside nearly every telephone, hearing aid, laptop, and smartphone in the world; billions have been made. West holds more than 250 patents, and in 1999 he was inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame. Later in his career, he became a professor at Johns Hopkins University, where he encouraged young Black students to pursue science and engineering.

His microphone is a reminder that the most important inventions are often the ones we never see.



71. John H. Johnson (1918–2005) — Founder, Ebony & Jet

John H. Johnson was born in Arkansas City, Arkansas, in 1918, and moved to Chicago with his mother as a teenager. In 1942 he borrowed $500 against his mother's furniture to start a magazine, and three years later he launched Ebony, a monthly magazine that showed Black life with pride and glamour — its pages filled with Black doctors, lawyers, entertainers, and families. In 1951 he added Jet, a small weekly news magazine that became a staple in Black households. Johnson built his company into the largest Black-owned publishing business in America, and in 1982 he became the first Black person named to the Forbes 400 list of the richest Americans. In 1996 President Bill Clinton awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Johnson died in 2005, but Ebony and Jet had already changed how Black America saw itself — and how America saw Black America.



72. Reginald F. Lewis (1942–1993) — Businessman, First Black Billion-Dollar Deal

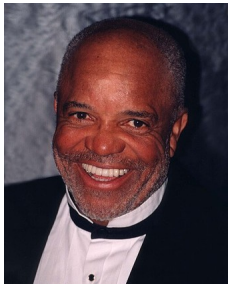
Reginald F. Lewis was born in Baltimore in 1942 and grew up in a working-class neighborhood. He graduated from Harvard Law School in 1968 and built a successful career as a corporate lawyer. In 1984 Lewis bought the McCall Pattern Company, a sewing-pattern business, for $22.5 million, turned it around, and sold it three years later for a large profit. Then, in 1987, he completed the largest leveraged buyout ever by a Black-owned company, acquiring the international food business Beatrice International for $985 million. The deal made his company, TLC Beatrice International, the largest Black-owned business in the United States. Lewis's autobiography, Why Should White Guys Have All the Fun?, published after his death, became a best seller. He died in 1993, at the age of 50, of brain cancer, leaving a fortune and an example of what Black ambition could achieve in corporate America.



73. Robert Johnson (1946–) — Founder, BET

Robert Johnson was born in Hickory, Mississippi, in 1946, and grew up in Freeport, Illinois. After earning a master's degree in public affairs from Princeton University, he worked as a lobbyist for the cable television industry, where he saw an opportunity no one else had noticed: no television channel spoke directly to Black America. In 1980 he founded Black Entertainment Television — BET — which grew from a few hours of programming a week into the most-watched Black network in the country. In 2001 Johnson sold BET to Viacom for about $3 billion, becoming the first Black billionaire in the United States. He went on to found RLJ Companies, investing in hotels,

finance, and film, and he became the first Black majority owner of a major professional sports team, the Charlotte Bobcats of the NBA.



74. Berry Gordy (1929–) — Founder, Motown

Berry Gordy was born in Detroit in 1929, the son of a plastering contractor. He worked on the assembly line at Ford Motor Company, where the rhythm of the line gave him an idea: music could be made the same way cars were made — with a team of writers, musicians, and singers working together to produce hit after hit. In 1959, with an $800 loan from his family, Gordy founded Motown Records. The label he built became the "Sound of Young America," launching the Supremes, the Temptations, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, and the Jackson 5, and putting Black music at the center of American popular culture. Motown was the most successful Black-owned record company of its time, and Gordy sold it in 1988. He was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame that same year, and in 2016 he received the National Medal of Arts.



75. Robert F. Smith (1962–) — Investor & Philanthropist

Robert F. Smith was born in Denver, Colorado, in 1962, and grew up in a middle-class family that valued education. He studied chemical engineering at Cornell University, earned a master's degree from Columbia Business School, and worked at Goldman Sachs before founding his own investment firm, Vista Equity Partners, in 2000. Vista became one of the most successful private equity firms in the world, and Smith became the wealthiest Black person in America, according to Forbes. But Smith is best known for what he did with his wealth. At Morehouse College's commencement in 2019, he announced that he would pay off the student loans of the entire graduating class — a gift of about $34 million. He has given hundreds of millions of dollars to education, the arts, and the fight against inequality, and he signed the Giving Pledge, promising to give away most of his fortune.

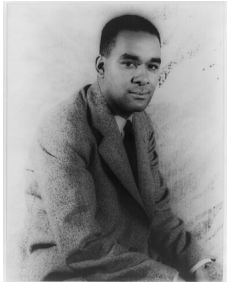
PART FOUR

Arts, Music & Sports



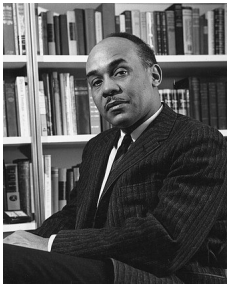
76. Langston Hughes (1901–1967) — Poet

Langston Hughes was the voice of the Harlem Renaissance, the poet who made Black life the subject of American poetry. Born in Joplin, Missouri, and raised largely in Kansas, he published his first famous poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," in 1921, when he was just nineteen. His first book, The Weary Blues, followed in 1926, and his poetry drew on jazz, blues, and the everyday speech of Black people — music and language other poets had ignored. He wrote of ordinary joys and sorrows, of pride and of dreams deferred, most famously in "Harlem" and "I, Too." Hughes also wrote novels, plays, and the beloved Simple stories, and he traveled the world while staying rooted in Harlem. He kept writing until his death in 1967, and his work opened the door for generations of Black writers who followed.



77. Richard Wright (1908–1960) — Novelist

Richard Wright wrote the novel that forced America to look at what racism does to a human soul. Born near Natchez, Mississippi, in 1908, he grew up in the segregated South, worked his way to Chicago, and became a writer determined to tell the truth as he saw it. His novel Native Son, published in 1940, told the story of Bigger Thomas, a young Black man in Chicago whose fear and anger lead him to murder — a book that shocked readers and became a bestseller. Five years later, his memoir Black Boy told his own story of growing up hungry, defiant, and determined to write. Wright later moved to Paris, where he lived until his death in 1960. His blunt, fearless writing changed what American literature could say, and his influence runs through nearly every Black novelist who came after him.



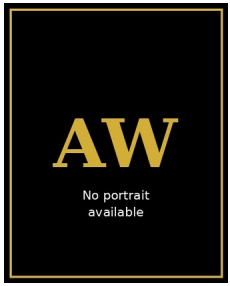
78. Ralph Ellison (1913–1994) — Novelist, Invisible Man

Ralph Ellison wrote one of the great American novels — and then spent the rest of his life trying to finish a second one. Born in Oklahoma City in 1913, he studied music at Tuskegee Institute before moving to New York, where he became part of the city's literary world. In 1952 he published Invisible Man, the story of a nameless Black man who discovers that America refuses to see him as himself. The novel won the National Book Award in 1953, a first for a Black writer, and it has been read in classrooms ever since. Ellison wrote essays and taught, and worked for decades on a second novel that was published after his death in 1994. Invisible Man remains his monument — a book about identity, invisibility, and the search to be seen.



79. Alex Haley (1921–1992) — Author, Roots

Alex Haley brought Black family history into millions of American homes. Born in Ithaca, New York, in 1921 and raised in Henning, Tennessee, he served twenty years in the Coast Guard before becoming a writer. He first became famous as the collaborator on The Autobiography of Malcolm X, published in 1965. Then he spent twelve years tracing his own family's story back to an African ancestor, Kunta Kinte, brought to America in chains. The result was Roots, published in 1976, which won a special Pulitzer Prize and became a television miniseries watched by tens of millions of people. Roots changed how Americans talked about slavery and family history. Haley died in 1992, having given Black families a story of their own past that the whole country could not look away from.



80. August Wilson (1945–2005) — Playwright

August Wilson wrote the history of Black America in ten plays. Born in Pittsburgh in 1945, he left school as a teenager and educated himself in the city's libraries, listening to the voices of the Hill District, the Black neighborhood where he grew up. His Pittsburgh Cycle — ten

plays, one for each decade of the twentieth century — includes Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, Fences, and The Piano Lesson. Fences won the Pulitzer Prize in 1987, and The Piano Lesson won it again in 1990. His characters — blues singers, garbage men, ex-convicts, and dreamers — speak in poetry drawn from everyday Black speech. Wilson died in 2005, but his plays are performed everywhere, and he stands as the greatest Black playwright America has produced. He later moved to Seattle, where he kept writing until the end of his life.



81. Alain Locke (1885–1954) — Philosopher, Harlem Renaissance

Alain Locke was the philosopher who gave the Harlem Renaissance its name and its purpose. Born in Philadelphia in 1885, he was a brilliant student who became the first Black Rhodes Scholar in 1907, studying at Oxford and the University of Berlin. He later taught philosophy at Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he mentored a generation of Black artists and thinkers. In 1925 he edited The New Negro, an anthology of Black writing and art that announced a new era of Black creativity and pride — the book that became the manifesto of the Harlem Renaissance. Locke argued that Black artists should draw on their own heritage rather than imitate white models. His ideas shaped how Black artists saw themselves — not as imitators of Europe, but as heirs of Africa. He died in 1954, remembered as the "Dean of the Harlem Renaissance."



82. Louis Armstrong (1901–1971) — Jazz Trumpeter & Singer

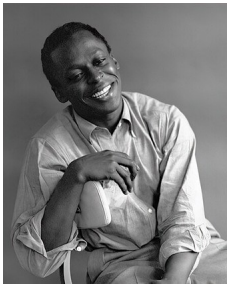
Louis Armstrong changed music — not just jazz, but all of American music. Born in New Orleans in 1901, he grew up poor, learned the cornet in a home for boys, and went on to become the most famous jazz musician in the world. His trumpet playing in the 1920s, on the Hot Five and Hot Seven recordings, turned the solo into the heart of jazz. His gravelly singing, his scat, his smile — all of it became part of the American sound. Songs like "What a Wonderful World" and his hit "Hello, Dolly!" carried him to audiences far beyond jazz. He also appeared in films and on television, carrying jazz to audiences around the world. Armstrong toured the world as America's musical ambassador and died in 1971. Every trumpeter, every singer, every jazz musician who followed stands in his shadow.



83. Duke Ellington (1899–1974) — Composer & Bandleader

Duke Ellington led a band for nearly fifty years and wrote some of the most beautiful music America has ever known. Born Edward Kennedy Ellington in Washington, D.C., in 1899, he took the nickname "Duke"

as a boy for his elegant manners. In the late 1920s his orchestra became the house band at Harlem's Cotton Club, and from there his music traveled the world. He composed more than a thousand pieces — "Mood Indigo," "Sophisticated Lady," "It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)" — music that was both popular and deeply serious. His band was his instrument, and he wrote for the men in it the way other composers write for violins. Ellington died in 1974, and a quarter of a century later he received a special Pulitzer Prize citation for his life's work.



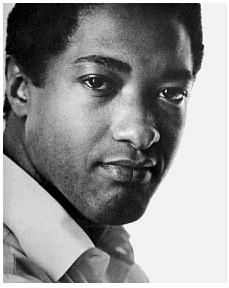
84. Miles Davis (1926–1991) — Jazz Trumpeter

Miles Davis never stood still. Born in Alton, Illinois, in 1926 and raised in East St. Louis, he came to New York as a teenager, played with bebop pioneer Charlie Parker, and then spent forty years reinventing jazz — cool jazz, hard bop, modal jazz, jazz-rock fusion — always a step ahead of everyone else. His album Kind of Blue, recorded in 1959, is the best-selling jazz album of all time, a record of calm, spacious beauty. A decade later, Bitches Brew plugged jazz into electricity and rock, and shocked the jazz world all over again. Davis played with a muted trumpet and a sound that was instantly his own. His bands were schools for young talent, launching the careers of John Coltrane, Herbie Hancock, and many others. He died in 1991, leaving behind a body of work that remade jazz again and again.



85. Nat King Cole (1919–1965) — Singer & Pianist

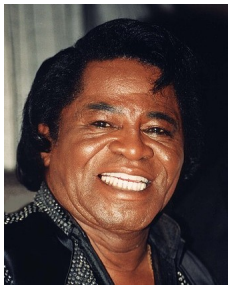
Nat King Cole's voice was one of the smoothest America ever heard. Born in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1919 and raised in Chicago, he began as a jazz pianist, leading the King Cole Trio in the 1940s, and became one of the most popular singers in the world. "Unforgettable," "Mona Lisa," and "The Christmas Song" are still heard every year. In 1956 he became the first Black American to host a national television variety show, The Nat King Cole Show — a milestone that came at a price, as sponsors, afraid of Southern backlash, refused to support it, and the show ended after a year. Cole kept singing, recording, and performing until his death from lung cancer in 1965. He was only forty-five, but his voice — warm, smooth, and unmistakable — has never left us.



86. Sam Cooke (1931–1964) — Singer, "King of Soul"

Sam Cooke was the King of Soul, and one of the first Black artists to take control of his own career. Born in Clarksdale, Mississippi, in 1931 and raised in Chicago, he began singing gospel with the Soul Stirrers, his soaring tenor filling churches. When he moved to pop

music, his smooth voice made "You Send Me" a number-one hit in 1957, and songs like "Wonderful World" and "Chain Gang" followed. Cooke founded his own record label and publishing company, owning his music at a time when few Black artists could. His final single, "A Change Is Gonna Come," released after his death in 1964, became an anthem of the civil rights movement. He was only thirty-three when he died, but his music and his business sense paved the way for generations of Black artists.



87. James Brown (1933–2006) — Singer, "Godfather of Soul"

James Brown was the Godfather of Soul, and the hardest working man in show business. Born in Barnwell, South Carolina, in 1933, he grew up in poverty, spent time in a reform school, and sang his way out with a voice and a stage show like no one had ever seen. "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" and "I Got You (I Feel Good)" made him a star, and his tight, driving rhythms became the foundation of funk — and later, of hip-hop, which sampled his records more than any other artist's. In 1968, "Say It Loud — I'm Black and I'm Proud" turned his music into a declaration of Black pride. Brown's dancing, his cape routine, his sheer energy changed what a live show could be. He died in 2006, still performing into his seventies.



88. Chuck Berry (1926–2017) — Rock and Roll Pioneer

Chuck Berry invented rock and roll guitar. Born in St. Louis in 1926, he mixed country, blues, and rhythm and blues into a sound that teenagers across America — Black and white — went wild for. His first hit, "Maybellene," came in 1955, and "Roll Over Beethoven" and "Johnny B. Goode" followed, songs about cars, school, and young love that became the language of rock and roll. His guitar riffs are still copied today, and his duckwalk across the stage became one of music's most famous moves. His songs were covered by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and nearly every rock band that followed. In 1986 he was among the first musicians inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Berry kept performing into his eighties and died in 2017, the man who, more than anyone, turned the blues into rock and roll.



89. Ray Charles (1930–2004) — Singer & Pianist

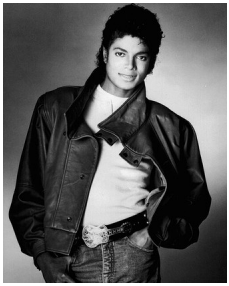
Ray Charles took gospel, blues, and country and made them into something entirely his own. Born in Albany, Georgia, in 1930 and raised in Florida, he lost his sight as a small child but learned piano at a school for the blind and went on to become one of the greatest

musicians of the century. "What'd I Say" in 1959 brought gospel's fire into pop music; "Georgia on My Mind" became his signature song and later the official song of the state of Georgia. He sang country songs, too, and made them his own. Charles won Grammy Awards across the decades and was known simply as "The Genius." He performed until near the end of his life and died in 2004, leaving a catalogue that crossed every line American music had drawn.



90. Stevie Wonder (1950–) — Singer, Songwriter & Musician

Stevie Wonder has been making music since he was a child, and he has never stopped growing. Born in Saginaw, Michigan, in 1950, he was blind from shortly after birth, but he learned piano, harmonica, and drums by ear and was signed to Motown at eleven, billed as "Little Stevie Wonder." At thirteen, "Fingertips" made him the youngest artist ever to top the charts. As an adult he took control of his music, writing and producing classics like "Superstition," "You Are the Sunshine of My Life," and the album Songs in the Key of Life. He has won twenty-five Grammy Awards, and his song "Happy Birthday" helped the campaign that made Martin Luther King Jr. Day a national holiday. Still performing and recording, Stevie Wonder is one of the greatest musicians America has ever produced.



91. Michael Jackson (1958–2009) — Singer, "King of Pop"

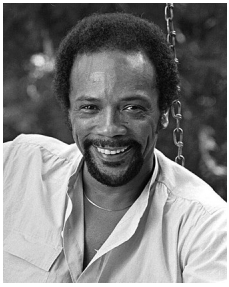
Michael Jackson was the King of Pop, the biggest star the music world has ever seen. Born in Gary, Indiana, in 1958, he was singing lead for the Jackson 5 before he was ten years old. As a solo artist, his album Thriller, released in 1982, became the best-selling album of all time, with seven hit singles and videos — "Billie Jean," "Beat It," "Thriller" — that changed music television forever. His moonwalk, first performed in 1983, became the most famous dance move in the world. He also co-wrote "We Are the World," the 1985 charity single that raised millions for famine relief in Africa. Jackson's music crossed every boundary of race and nation, and his concerts filled stadiums on every continent. He died in 2009, at fifty, but his records are still heard everywhere, and no pop star since has matched his reach.



92. Prince (1958–2016) — Singer, Songwriter & Musician

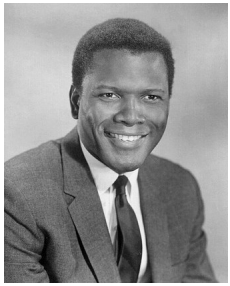
Prince was a one-man band, a genius who played nearly every instrument on his records and wrote songs that bent every rule. Born in Minneapolis in 1958, he signed his first record deal as a teenager and built his own world around his music — funk, rock, pop, and soul, all

at once. In 1984, Purple Rain — the album and the film — made him a superstar, with "When Doves Cry" and "Let's Go Crazy" topping the charts and the film winning an Academy Award. He wrote hits for other artists, too, including "Nothing Compares 2 U," and he fought the music industry for control of his own name and work. Prince died in 2016, leaving behind a vault of unreleased music and a reputation as one of the most gifted musicians of his time.



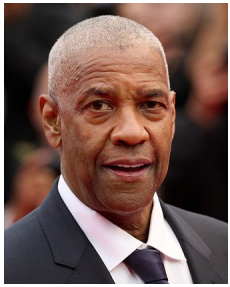
93. Quincy Jones (1933–2024) — Producer, Composer & Arranger

Quincy Jones did it all — trumpet player, arranger, composer, producer — and he did it at the highest level for more than seventy years. Born in Chicago in 1933, he arranged music for Count Basie and Frank Sinatra before he was thirty, and scored films and television, including the theme for Sanford and Son. As a producer, he made Michael Jackson's Off the Wall, Thriller, and Bad — three of the most successful albums in history — and he produced "We Are the World" in 1985, bringing dozens of stars together to fight famine in Africa. Jones won twenty-eight Grammy Awards over his career, more than almost anyone. He died in 2024, at ninety-one, remembered as the man who connected jazz, pop, and film music like no one else ever had.



94. Sidney Poitier (1927–2022) — Actor

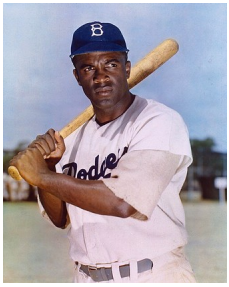
Sidney Poitier changed what a Black leading man could be. Born in Miami in 1927 and raised on Cat Island in the Bahamas, he came to New York as a young man, worked his way onto the stage, and then into films. In 1963 he won the Academy Award for Best Actor for Lilies of the Field, the first Black actor ever to win that honor. In 1967 alone he starred in three landmark films — To Sir, with Love, In the Heat of the Night, and Guess Who's Coming to Dinner — playing men of dignity and intelligence at a time when Hollywood rarely allowed Black actors such roles. Poitier later directed films and served as a diplomat for the Bahamas. He died in 2022, at ninety-four, the man who opened Hollywood's doors for every Black actor who followed.



95. Denzel Washington (1954–) — Actor

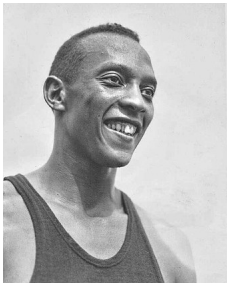
Denzel Washington is one of the finest actors of his generation, on stage and on screen. Born in Mount Vernon, New York, in 1954, he studied drama and worked his way up through theater and television before his film career took off. He won his first Academy Award, for Best Supporting Actor, for Glory in 1989, playing a defiant Civil War

soldier. In 2001 he won Best Actor for Training Day, only the second Black actor to win that award. His roles — Malcolm X, the boxer Rubin Carter in The Hurricane, the father in Fences, which he also directed — have shown his range again and again. Washington has also given back, supporting theater programs and historically Black colleges. Still working at the top of his craft, he stands as a model of excellence and discipline.



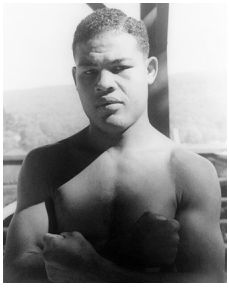
96. Jackie Robinson (1919–1972) — Broke Baseball's Color Line

Jackie Robinson broke baseball's color line, and in doing so he changed America. Born in Cairo, Georgia, in 1919 and raised in California, he was a star athlete at UCLA before serving in the Army. In 1947, Brooklyn Dodgers president Branch Rickey chose him to be the first Black player in Major League Baseball in the modern era. Robinson endured insults, threats, and pitches thrown at his head, and answered them by playing brilliantly — Rookie of the Year in 1947, Most Valuable Player in 1949. He helped the Dodgers win the World Series in 1955 and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1962. After baseball, he fought for civil rights and for Black businesses. He died in 1972, and today his number, 42, is retired by every team in baseball.



97. Jesse Owens (1913–1980) — Olympic Sprinter

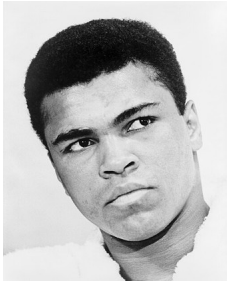
Jesse Owens ran into history at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Born James Cleveland Owens in Oakville, Alabama, in 1913, he was the son of sharecroppers and the grandson of enslaved people. At Ohio State University he became the fastest man in the world, setting multiple world records in a single afternoon in 1935. In Berlin, before Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime that preached white supremacy, Owens won four gold medals — the 100 meters, the 200 meters, the long jump, and the 4×100-meter relay — the most of any athlete at those Games. He came home to a segregated America that barely celebrated him, but his triumphs stood as a rebuke to racism heard around the world. Owens died in 1980, remembered as one of the greatest athletes of all time.



98. Joe Louis (1914–1981) — Heavyweight Champion

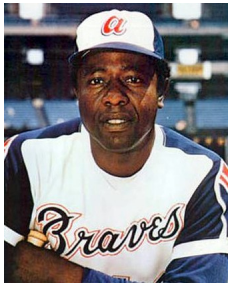
Joe Louis was the heavyweight champion of the world for nearly twelve years — the longest reign in the division's history. Born in Lafayette, Alabama, in 1914 and raised in Detroit, he turned professional in 1934 and won the title in 1937. He defended it

twenty-five times, more than any heavyweight before or since. His 1938 rematch with Germany's Max Schmeling — a first-round knockout — was more than a fight; in a world drifting toward war, it made Louis a hero to all of America, Black and white. He served in the Army during World War II and gave his fight purses to military relief funds. Louis died in 1981, and his quiet dignity and devastating power made him one of the most respected athletes America has ever known.



99. Muhammad Ali (1942–2016) — Heavyweight Champion & Activist

Muhammad Ali called himself the Greatest, and the world agreed. Born Cassius Marcellus Clay Jr. in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1942, he won Olympic gold in Rome in 1960 and the heavyweight championship in 1964, beating the fearsome Sonny Liston. He then changed his name to Muhammad Ali, and in 1967 refused induction into the U.S. Army on religious grounds, saying he had no quarrel with the Vietnamese people. Stripped of his titles and banned from boxing for three and a half years, he was vindicated when the Supreme Court overturned his conviction in 1971. He won the title back in the "Rumble in the Jungle" in 1974 and the "Thrilla in Manila" in 1975. In later years he lit the Olympic torch in Atlanta in 1996 and worked for peace and charity. He died in 2016, the most famous athlete — and one of the most beloved people — on earth.



100. Hank Aaron (1934–2021) — Baseball Home Run King

Hank Aaron broke the most famous record in sports — and did it with grace under fire. Born in Mobile, Alabama, in 1934, he came to the major leagues in 1954 with the Milwaukee Braves, a quiet young outfielder with a quick, powerful swing. For more than two decades he hit home runs, drove in runs, and played with a consistency no one has matched. In 1974, chasing Babe Ruth's record of 714 home runs, he received thousands of hate letters and death threats, and needed police protection as he closed in. On April 8, 1974, he hit number 715 in Atlanta, and the crowd rose to him. He finished with 755 home runs and still holds the records for runs batted in and total bases. Aaron was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1982 and died in 2021, honored as a king of the game and a man of quiet courage.

About The Black Glow Experience

The Black Glow Experience is an Atlanta wellness and culture brand, founded by J. N. Sanders — made for us, by us. Sea moss, shea butter, and handmade soaps for your body, and space for your mind: music, poetry, mental health, Black history, and community. Resources, education, books, and outreach.

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