



# Benjamin Banneker

Benjamin Banneker was born on a tobacco farm in Maryland in 1731. His mother was a freewoman and his father was a slave which, by law, made Benjamin a freeman. In school Benjamin showed great interest and ability in mathematics. As he did his chores on the farm, he would make up math problems to solve.

When he was twenty, Benjamin was given a pocket watch. He was so fascinated by the watch that for two years he spent all his spare time building a clock carved entirely of wood. When it was completed, it kept perfect time for over fifty years. This clock is believed to be the first clock made entirely in America.

Later Benjamin was given some astronomy books, science equipment, and a telescope. He began to study the stars and the constellations. Because of his great interest in science and mathematics, he wrote his own almanac. In it he included the times of eclipses, the hours of sunrise and sunset, weather forecasts, and even a list of medicines.

Benjamin Banneker became so well-known that President George Washington chose him to help plan the city of Washington, D.C. It is a beautiful city thanks to the assistance of Benjamin Banneker.



# Carter G. Woodson

On December 19, 1875, Carter G. Woodson was born in Canton, Virginia. His parents were former slaves and were very poor. Carter's family was large, and he was needed to work on the farm. He was not able to go to school regularly. By the time he was seventeen, he had taught himself to read, write and do arithmetic. He finally completed high school and later college. He received a Ph.D. degree in history from Harvard. He went on to teach French, Spanish, English, and history in a Washington, D. C. high school.

In 1915 Woodson organized the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. This organization was founded to collect and keep records about black Americans, and to publish books on black life and history. Carter Woodson spent his whole life researching black history. He published many books and journals.

In 1926 Woodson had the idea for Black History Week. He worked hard and made it a reality. Each year during the second week in February, exhibits, lectures and programs make people aware of the important contributions of black Americans.



# Madame C. J. Walker

Madame C. J. Walker was one of the most famous black women in the cosmetics industry. She was born in 1869 in Louisiana to poor ex-slaves. When she was young her parents died.

Madame Walker was a beautiful and ambitious woman. In 1905 she invented a hair softener and a special hot iron comb. Madame Walker began to manufacture a complete line of cosmetics for women. She traveled to the South and Midwest selling her products, and eventually set up schools to teach women how to sell her products.

Madame Walker went on to become the world's first black person in modern times to build a large manufacturing business. She was the first American woman to become a millionaire through her own efforts.



# Harriet Tubman

Harriet Tubman was born a slave in Maryland. She decided early in life that she wanted to help slaves become free. But before Tubman could help others gain their freedom, she first had to escape from slavery herself. She decided to go north. No one would help her, so she planned her trip secretly and didn't tell anyone when she was going to leave. When she finally escaped, she wasn't sure which way to travel. She followed the paths that she thought would lead her to 'freedom. Fortunately for her and for the many slaves she would later help, Tubman reached the North safely.

After starting a new life in Philadelphia, Harriet Tubman became a conductor for the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad was a series of secret hiding places that allowed slaves to escape to the North during the time of the Civil War. Harriet Tubman secretly made trip after trip back to the South and found slaves who longed for freedom as much as she had. She led these slaves to freedom.

As Harriet Tubman's reputation spread, she was in more and more danger. Slave owners offered a reward to anyone who could stop her, but she continued to lead slaves north. She also helped newly freed slaves find jobs and homes in the North. After her death, Tubman was buried in Auburn, New York, where she had settled her aging parents after leading them to freedom.



# Wilma Rudolph

Wilma Glodean Rudolph was born in 1940 in Tennessee. When Wilma was young she had a crippling disease which left her with a weak leg. Wilma's family gave her a lot of love and care. After having therapy, she was able to throw away her special shoes.

At the age of eleven, Wilma became interested in sports. She did her best not to let her weak leg keep her from doing the things she wanted to do. Wilma and her brothers played basketball in the yard every day. In high school Wilma joined the girl's basketball team but discovered she enjoyed track more. In three years of high school, she never lost a track race. Wilma loved to run and worked very hard to learn to run faster. She went on to become one of her college's greatest track stars.

In 1960 Wilma Rudolph set three Olympic records and won three gold medals. Her team also set a world record for the 400-meter relay race. That same year Wilma was named "Female Athlete of the Year."

Wilma Rudolph overcame her childhood handicap to become a record breaking champion.



# Jackie Robinson

Jackie Robinson was born in Cairo, Georgia, on January 31, 1919. In high school Jackie became a star athlete. He played on the baseball, football, basketball, and track teams. In college Jackie was an outstanding athlete. He decided to be a physical education teacher. Jackie was a popular student, had a good sense of humor, and showed good sportsmanship. He had to leave college before graduating to help support his family.

After serving in the Army during World War \I, he played shortstop for the Kansas City Monarchs, a team in the Negro American Baseball League. He traveled a lot, worked hard for his team, and was able to send money home. Many baseball scouts watched Jackie play, and on April 10, 1947, he became a first baseman for the Brooklyn Dodgers. As the first black baseball player in the major leagues, Jackie had a difficult first year. He had to hold his temper and let his outstanding baseball playing show his teammates that he could help win the pennant. That year Jackie was named Rookie of the Year. He was a batting champion and was very good at stealing bases. His playing added excitement to baseball.



# Colin Powell

Colin Powell is a career Army officer who has received many honors for his service to the United States. Powell was awarded the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star in 1963 and also has a Distinguished Service Medal. These are medals given by the United States government for bravery and public service.

Colin Powell served as the Assistant Secretary of Defense from 1982 until 1986. The Defense Department is the branch of the government that is responsible for making sure the United States is properly armed. It coordinates the affairs of the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force. It also advises the President on matters of national and international security.

Colin Powell served as President Reagan's National Security Advisor. He advised the President about how to best defend our nation. He was also the 'first African American to serve as the White House Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. In 1988, Colin Powell became one of ten four-star generals in the United States Army. He took command of defending the continental United States and was in charge of all troops in the United States.

Colin Powell held his most notable position as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the United States Armed Forces from 1989 until his retirement in 1993. He was the first African American to serve in this post. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff outranks all other officers in the United States armed services. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are responsible for designing military plans and reviewing the requirements of the armed forces.



# Jesse Owens

James Cleveland Owens, known as J.C. and then as Jesse, was born on September 12, 1913, in Danville, Alabama. Jesse worked in the cotton fields as a child. He was small for his age and quite shy. To earn spending money, he scrubbed kitchen floors and worked at a shoeshine stand.

In high school Jesse tried out for track. He won seventy-five of seventy-nine races during his high school career. His coach especially admired Jesse's spirit and sense of fair play.

Jesse earned an athletic scholarship to Ohio State College. He gave record-breaking performances every track season, and made the 1936 Olympic track team.

At the Olympics in Berlin, Germany, Jesse won four gold medals. He set three world records and tied a fourth at the Games. He set world records for sprinting, broad jumping, and the 400-meter relay. He tied the world record in the 100-yard dash.



# Lewis Latimer

Lewis Latimer was the son of a slave. Latimer accomplished many things during his lifetime. He became an electrical engineer and worked with Thomas Edison, the inventor of the light bulb. He also worked with Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone.

Lewis Latimer began working for Thomas Edison in 1883. He worked as an engineer and as chief draftsman for the inventor. A draftsman is a person who creates detailed plans and drawings.

Edison used many of Latimer's ideas in the first light bulbs. Latimer developed the use of tiny carbon wires to light these bulbs. In 1881, he was given the patent for the first incandescent electric lamp to use these carbon threads or wires. A patent is a document given to an inventor stating that no one else may make, use, or sell an invention without the inventor's permission. Eventually, Lewis Latimer became a patent expert. He was called upon to testify when there was a question of whether or not a patent right had been violated.

Lewis Latimer admired Thomas Edison's work and creativity. Latimer was the only African American founding member of the Edison Pioneers. This group of people wanted to keep Thomas Edison's spirit of independent and creative thought alive. Along with his scientific work, Latimer was interested in music and wrote poetry.



# Jesse Jackson

Jesse Jackson was born in Greenville, South Carolina. His family was poor, so he learned to work hard at a young age. Jackson went to North Carolina Agricultural and Technical School. Then he studied to become a Baptist minister and was ordained.

Jesse Jackson was a friend of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He worked with Dr. King in Chicago. Dr. King asked Jesse to lead Operation Breadbasket which was a project to help African Americans find jobs. Jesse was so successful that a national program was started. Jesse Jackson was its leader from 1967-1971.

Next, Jesse Jackson started an organization called PUSH (People United To Save Humanity). Jackson traveled all around the world trying to bring peace and equality to all races. He also helped gain the release of political prisoners.

In 1984 and 1988 Jesse Jackson ran for the Democratic nomination for the presidency of the United States. Though Jackson didn't win, he did form the Rainbow Coalition. This was a combination of many minority groups that tried to help Jesse Jackson win the nomination. Jackson received many votes in the primaries held across the country. He continues to work for equality today.



# Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, on February 1, 1902. Later he moved to Kansas with his mother. He loved to visit his grandmother who lived nearby. She told him marvelous and thrilling stories about his grandparents. He soon discovered that the wonderful world of books could bring him great pleasure. He loved to read everything—novels, plays, and poetry. Hughes also began to write poetry.

Langston Hughes could not make his living by writing until he was about thirty. Until then he had many different jobs. He was a waiter's assistant, office worker, clerk, waiter, and even a cook. During this time he traveled to Mexico, Haiti, France, and Italy. He was encouraged by other people to keep writing and sending his work to publishers.

Langston Hughes is best known for his poetry. His poems about people's joys and sorrows are enjoyed by young and old. In addition to his poetry, Hughes has written novels, operas, plays and operettas. His writings have been translated into Chinese, French, Japanese, and many other languages. He received many awards and honors for his outstanding writing. In 1953 he received the Ainsfeld Wolfe Award, and in 1960 he won the Spingarn Medal, awarded every year to a black person of outstanding achievement.



# Matthew A. Henson

At the age of thirteen, Matthew A. Henson became a cabin boy on a sailing ship. For seven years the captain of the ship took an interest in Henson and taught him to read and write as well as become a good sailor. He traveled all over the world and learned a little of many languages. Henson had the ability to get along with people with different customs.

When he was twenty-one, Henson met Admiral Robert E. Peary and later joined him in his explorations of the North Pole. In those days no one knew what would be found at the Pole. Would there be snow covered land or 'floating chunks of ice? There were no radios for communication or planes to drop food or make an emergency rescue. Henson and Peary both -. accepted the challenge to stand where no other person had stood before.

Time and again they failed to reach the North Pole because of swirling blizzards, temperatures of 50° F below zero, frostbite and lack of supplies. Finally on April 6, 1909, Peary, Henson, four Eskimos and a group of husky dogs reached the exact North Pole. Since Henson was the trailblazer, he and his dog sled reached the Pole first. Peary asked his friend Matthew A. Henson to place the American flag on the spot.



# Alex Haley

Alex Palmer Haley was born on August 11, 1921, in Ithaca, New York. Most of his early life was spent in Tennessee. He loved to hear his grandmother tell of family traditions passed from one generation to the next. He also loved to read, especially stories of adventure.

In 1939 he joined the United States Coast Guard and began writing articles and short stories which he later sold to magazines.

Haley spent twelve years researching his book *Roots*. In this book he combined fact with fiction to tell the history of his family. He began by telling how his ancestor, Kunte Kinte, was kidnapped in Gambia in 1767 and taken to America as a slave. He went on to tell of the struggles of his family in America.

In 1977 Alex Haley received a special Pulitzer Prize and the Spingarn Medal for his book *Roots*.



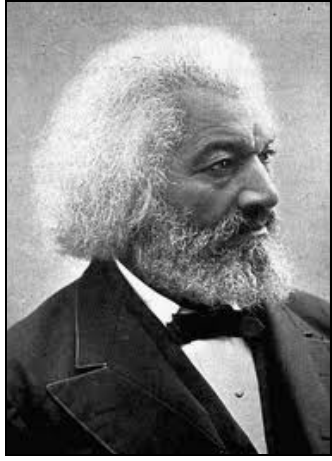
# Duke Ellington

Edward Kennedy Ellington was born in Washington, D.C., on April 29, 1899. He earned the nickname "Duke" in school because he liked to dress in flashy clothes. His friends said he was always "duked out."

At the age of seven, he began piano lessons. At times he hated to practice. By the age of seventeen he had composed his first song, "The Soda Fountain Rag."

For almost fifty years Duke Ellington's jazz band, The Washingtonians, gave concerts in the United States and Europe. During his career he made many hit records and attracted standing-room-only audiences to his concerts.

Duke Ellington was the first living musician to set up a scholarship fund. His scholarship fund was for talented young people who wanted to go to the Juilliard School of Music.



# Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass was born a slave in Maryland. His mother was a slave, and his father was a white man. Frederick was a good student. In those days, slaves usually had to study secretly because slave owners did not want slaves to be educated. Young Frederick was very bright and quickly learned to read and write. In 1838 he left his family and escaped to New York.

In New York Douglass spoke out against slavery. He was invited to a meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-slavery Society. There he told what life as a slave had been like. Everyone listened with interest. Douglass was one of the best speakers they had ever heard. The Society immediately asked Douglass to tell his story and speak out against slavery in other parts of the country.

Though Douglass had changed his name, it was dangerous for him to speak publicly. The law permitted slave owners to recapture escaped slaves, even if the slaves were living in free states. But this didn't stop Douglass. He continued to speak out against slavery in the United States and overseas. Douglass was finally able to buy his freedom in 1847.

Douglass accomplished many things during his lifetime. He started a newspaper called the North Star. Articles in this paper were written to protest slavery. Douglass met with President Lincoln several times to talk about the problem of slavery. After the Civil War, Douglass was made a United States Marshal and Recorder of Deeds for the District of Columbia. From 1889-1891, he was the U.S. Minister to Haiti. He also wrote his autobiography, called *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.



# Shirley Chisholm

Shirley Chisholm was born on November 30, 1924, in Brooklyn, New York. She learned to read and write before she was five. Shirley and her sisters spent a great deal of time on their grandmother's farm in Barbados, an island in the Caribbean Sea.

Shirley graduated from high school and went on to college in New York. When she finished college, she became the director of a nursery school and later took charge of a child care center.

Shirley felt that many people weren't being treated fairly, and she wanted to change this. She served in the New York State government for four years and worked to make laws that would protect people's rights. In 1968 she was the first black woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Here she fought for health care, child care, and good housing. Shirley Chisholm fought for equal rights for women, for blacks and for unfairly treated groups. She called herself "fighting Shirley Chisholm."

In 1972 Shirley ran for nomination as a candidate for United States President.



# George Washington Carver

George Washington Carver was born in 1864 on the Missouri plantation of Moses Carver. From childhood George had a love of plants and was determined to become a scientist.

After high school George Washington Carver worked and saved money for the time when he could continue his education. To pay his way through his first year of college, he opened a one-man laundry for his fellow students. He paid for all of his college education by his own hard work. When he was over twenty-five years old, he graduated from college with degrees in agriculture.

Carver also showed talent in painting. In 1893 four of his paintings were shown at the World's Fair in Chicago.

Carver spent the rest of his life working and teaching at the Tuskegee Institute. He taught southern farmers that by growing crops other than cotton they could improve their farm land. Carver told them to plant peanuts and sweet potatoes. George Washington Carver went on to discover 325 different uses for peanuts and 118 different products made from sweet potatoes. Through scientific research and teaching, George Washington Carver helped many people.



# Dr. Ralph Bunche

On August 7, 1904, Ralph Johnson Bunche was born in Detroit, Michigan. When his parents died, young Ralph, his sister, and Grandma Johnson moved to Los Angeles, California. His grandmother worked hard as a seamstress so that Ralph could stay in school and get a good education.

Throughout high school Ralph excelled in sports and his studies. He did so well that he received a four-year college athletic scholarship and went on to complete a doctoral degree in government at Harvard University. Grandma Johnson died just before he left for Harvard. He knew that he could best repay her for her hard work and faith in him by continuing his studies.

After graduating he worked for our government. He studied other governments, helped start the United Nations and worked hard to keep peace between countries. In 1950 he was the first black American to win the Nobel Peace Prize. He once stated that "all human beings should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."



# Gwendolyn Brooks

On June 7, 1917, Gwendolyn Brooks was born in Topeka, Kansas. Her family soon moved to Chicago. At the age of seven, Gwendolyn began writing poetry with encouragement from her parents. She often visited the public library and shared her poems with the librarian who gave her praise and often posted her poems on the bulletin board.

After two years of studying literature in college, Gwendolyn entered poetry contests and won several awards. Her first book of poems, *A Street in Bronzeville*, was published in 1945. Four years later *Annie Allen* was published. This book was a ballad about black life in Chicago. This book received the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1950.

Gwendolyn Brooks went on to teach poetry at many colleges and to visit schools. She encouraged students to write.



# Guion Bluford

Guion Stewart Bluford, Jr. was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on November 22, 1942. He was a quiet boy who enjoyed doing crossword puzzles and brain teasers and building model airplanes. In high school he decided he would become an aerospace engineer.

By 1978 he had completed eight years of college and in January he was chosen by NASA to become an astronaut. After four more years of training, Bluford became a mission specialist for the eighth space shuttle mission. He would be responsible for coordinating scientific activities and engineering experiments.

On August 30, 1983, the space shuttle Challenger's nighttime launch lit up the sky. Bluford helped launch a communications and weather satellite for the government of India. He also did tests for new drugs to fight diabetes and other diseases. Guion became the first black American in space.



# Mary McLeod Bethune

Mary McLeod Bethune was born in Mayesville, South Carolina, on July 10, 1875. Her large family lived in a cabin on a small cotton and rice farm. Mary was a hard worker and helped her family in the fields picking cotton.

For six years Mary happily walked five miles along a dirt road to school. She was enthusiastic about learning to read and write and would share her new knowledge with her brothers and sisters at night. Thanks to a scholarship from a dressmaker, Mary was able to continue her education.

After completing her studies, Mary decided to become a teacher. She taught in schools in Georgia and South Carolina. Her dream was to open her own school for girls where she could teach them useful things. Such a school was greatly needed because at that time there were few schools for black Americans. She opened a school for black girls in Daytona Beach, Florida, which later became Bethune-Cookman College.

Mary McLeod Bethune received many honors for spending her long life educating young people and helping others.



(C) 2008 Troy Chromatic Concerts Inc

# Marian Anderson

Marian Anderson was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on February 27, 1902. When she was eight, she began singing in her church choir. Her family bought a piano so Marian could sing and play at the same time. Recognizing Marian's "musical talent, some members of her church raised money for her to study singing with a famous teacher.

At seventeen Marian entered a competition in New York and won first prize over three hundred other singers. In 1930 she received an award which paid for a year of study in Europe. After two concert tours of Europe, Marian's fame grew, and soon she was traveling throughout the world giving concerts.

In 1939 Marian sang on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C., to one of the largest crowds ever to hear a singer. Seventy-five thousand people heard her "live" while millions more-listened on the radio.

In 1955 Marian Anderson became the first black person to sing at the Metropolitan Opera. Her rich, warm voice with its wide range delighted audiences.

Marian Anderson was one of the best known and best loved singers of her time. A talented and brave woman, she fought for the right of blacks to be heard in opera houses everywhere.