

# **Benjamin Banneker 1731-1806**



Benjamin Banneker was a free African American surveyor and farmer. Banneker studied math and natural history, mostly learning on his own. He assisted Major Andrew Ellicott in a survey that drew the original borders of Washington, D.C. when it was being built as the nation's new capital. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Banneker wrote man letters to each other discussing the issues of slavery and equality for free African Americans.



# Phyllis Wheatley



Phyllis Wheatley was the first African-American author of a published book of poetry. She was born in West Africa and sold into slavery at about the age of seven. After being taken to the American colonies, she was bought by the Wheatley family, who lived in Boston, Massachusetts. In their home she learned to read and write, and soon began writing poetry.



# **Oloudah Equiano**

**About 1745-1797**



Oloudah Equiano was born in the Igbo village of Essaka, in what is now Nigeria. When he was about 11, he and his sister were both kidnapped and sold into slavery. After earning his freedom, he moved to London where he became involved with the abolitionist movement. In 1789 he published an autobiography, detailing his experience of being kidnapped into slavery. The book helped the abolitionists push for an end to the slave trade in England, which finally happened in 1807, after his death.



# York

About 1770-  
About 1815



York was born into slavery in Virginia. In 1803 President Thomas Jefferson purchased the Louisiana Territory from France. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark were hired to lead the Corps of Discovery Expedition to explore the new land. York went with Clark as his personal slave. In their journal writings York is described as being incredibly helpful. In 1805 York became the first African American to reach the Pacific Ocean.





# **Sojourner Truth**

**1797-1883**



Sojourner Truth was born in upstate New York into slavery, escaped to freedom with her infant daughter, and later sued her former owner to gain her son's freedom. She renamed herself Sojourner Truth to express her belief that God had called her travel to the countryside to spread truth. In 1851, she gave a speech at the Ohio Women's Rights Convention. It would later be called the "Ain't I a Woman?" speech and highlighted that women in slavery worked as hard as men in slavery and that African American women suffered a double discrimination.



# **Dred Scott**

**1799-1858**



Dred Scott was born into slavery in Southampton County, Virginia. His new owner, who was in the army, took Scott with him to different military posts in the free states and territories. After returning to the slave state of Missouri, In 1846 he and his wife sued for their freedom on the basis of having lived in free states for so long.

Abolitionists paid Scott's lawyers as he became a symbol of the movement. He finally received his freedom after being transferred to an abolitionist who freed him.



# **Joseph Cinqué**

**About 1814-1879**



While on a slave ship headed from Africa to Cuba, Joseph Cinqué led the other slaves in a revolt against their captors. The ship entered US waters, and the captured sailors demanded the slaves be arrested. While awaiting trial, Cinqué served as the unofficial representative of the group. Former president John Quincy Adams, who opposed slavery, represented them in court. The court determined that they were being transported illegally. They were given the option to return to Africa, which Cinqué did.



# **Solomon Northup**

**1807-About 1864**



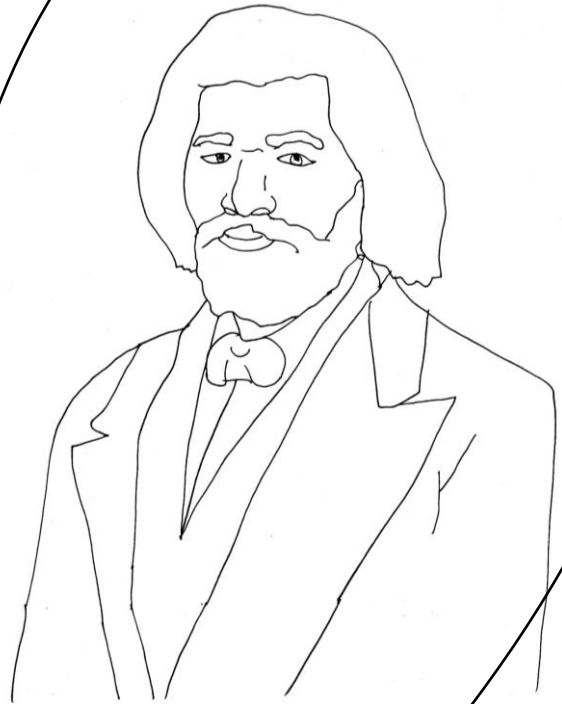
Solomon Northup was born free in New York. When Solomon was 32 years old, he was hired by two men to play violin in New York City. They then convinced him to follow them to Washington, DC. The two men kidnapped Northup, took his papers that proved he was free, and sold him at a New Orleans slave market. Northup was held in slavery for 12 years. Eventually, letters he sent to his family in New York gave enough details for them to find his location. The governor of New York State appointed his attorney general to seek out Northup. He later wrote about his experience in his book, *Twelve Years a Slave*.





# **Frederick Douglass**

**1817-1895**



Frederick Douglass was born into slavery in Maryland. He escaped and began fighting for the abolitionist movement in Massachusetts and New York. He gained attention for his public speaking and writing skills. Douglass wrote about his escape to freedom in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Frederick Douglass also fought for women to have the right to vote. He believed in compromising with others, famously, and controversially, saying, "I would unite with anybody to do right and with nobody to do wrong."



# Harriet Tubman

1822-1913



Harriet Tubman was born as a slave in Maryland. She was badly beaten by her masters as a child and was once hit in the head with a heavy metal weight, which caused a severe head injury, leading her to have dizziness, pain, and sleeping fits throughout her life. It was after this that Tubman says she began to receive visions from God. In 1849, Tubman escaped to Philadelphia, but she did not want to leave others in slavery, so she returned many times. Harriet Tubman became known as "Moses," among slaves, because of her rescue missions.



# Robert Smalls

1839-1915



Robert Smalls was born into slavery in South Carolina and worked on ships. In 1861 the Civil War began just off the coast of Charleston. Smalls was the pilot of a Confederate ship. One night when the Confederate crew members had gone ashore, he and the other enslaved crew members sailed out of the harbor toward a Union ship. Robert Smalls continued to serve in the Union Navy for the rest of the war. After the war he purchased his former owner's home, started an African-American school in South Carolina, founded a railroad, owned a newspaper, and served as a member of Congress.



# **Booker T. Washington**

**1856-1915**



Booker T. Washington was born into slavery and was a child when the Civil War ended. Many former slaves in the South were still treated almost like slaves after they were emancipated because of unfair laws. Washington wrote and gave speeches about how African Americans were being treated. Although he disagreed with the unjust laws, he believed that education and business ownership for African Americans was more of a priority than trying to challenge the laws in government. Washington was the first principal of the Tuskegee Institute.





# **George Washington Carver**

**1864-1943**



George Washington Carver had a love of plants from an early age. He studied agricultural science and became a professor at Tuskegee Institute. He wanted to use knowledge of crops and soil to help better the lives of poor African American farmers in the South. Because the overuse of cotton was causing soil erosion, he encouraged farmers to grow and rotate other crops, like peanuts and sweet potatoes. This made the soil richer and farmers could grow more food to feed their families and sell for extra money.

In 1941, Time magazine called George Washington Carver the "Black Leonardo."



**W.E.B.**  
**DuBois**  
**1868-1963**



W.E.B. Du Bois was born in Massachusetts and had a childhood that was relatively integrated, for the time. He was the first African American to earn a doctorate degree from Harvard University. Du Bois was a leader of the Niagara Movement, which fought for equal rights. He believed in encouraging the growth of a well-educated and politically-involved class of African American leaders which he called the "Talented Tenth." He wrote a collection of essays called, *The Souls of Black Folk*, encouraging this society. He was one of the founders of the NAACP) in 1909.



# **Langston Hughes**

**1901-1967**



Langston Hughes grew up in the Midwest and moved to New York City at an early age. He published essays, poetry, short stories and plays. Hughes became one of the leading voices in the creative circles of Harlem. The 1920s saw a huge increase in African American artists living and producing works in Harlem, New York City. As more African Americans moved from southern farms to big cities in the North there was an increased demand for art they could relate to, which also became incredibly popular with white Americans. This time became known as the Harlem Renaissance.



# Josephine Baker

1906-1975



Josephine Baker was born in St. Louis, Missouri. As a teenager she made her way to Harlem in New York City. After working as a chorus dancer on Broadway, she went to Paris, where she quickly became famous as a dancer and singer. In 1939 World War II began and Baker was now a French citizen. She was recruited to work as a spy for the French military. She would socialize with Germans at parties and performances in Paris, charming them and getting information about their plans. Later, she hid Jewish people in her home in the French countryside.





# **Marian Anderson**

**1897-1993**

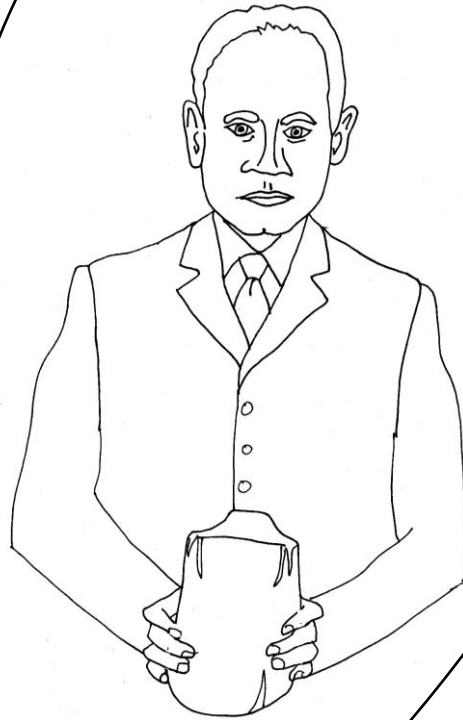


Marian Anderson had a beautiful voice that could sing both opera and spirituals. In 1939, the Daughters of the American Revolution prevented her from singing at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt arranged for Anderson to instead perform outdoors on the Lincoln Memorial. It was one of the most famous musical performances of all time. In 1955, Marian Anderson became the first African American singer to perform at the Metropolitan Opera. Later, she served as a delegate to the United Nations Human Rights Committee.



# Charles Drew

1904-1950



Charles Drew grew up in Washington, D.C. He attended medical school in Quebec, where he was drawn toward the study of blood pathology. He became one of the first prominent African American surgeons and was well known for his medical research in blood transfusions. His work helped improve blood storage and made large-scale blood banks possible during World War II.

He resigned from his position with the American Red Cross over their policy of only giving people blood transfusions from a donor of the same race.



# Jesse Owens

1913-1980



Jesse Owens was a track and field athlete who specialized in sprints and long jumps. He competed in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Germany was under the rule of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party at this time, though World War II had not yet begun. Hitler declared that white people were racially superior and expected that his top German athletes would prove this in the Olympic competitions. Jesse Owens won four gold medals at the Olympic Games. Hitler could be seen on film cringing at Owens' successes, making Jesse Owens even more of a national hero.



# Jackie Robinson

1919-1972



Jackie Robinson was the first African American baseball player in Major League Baseball. For decades, African Americans had to play in a separate league. In 1947, Robinson became the first baseman for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Jackie Robinson faced discrimination from both fans in the stadium and teammates in the locker room. Both his character off the field and his talent on the field helped win over many people from both groups. Robinson was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1962. His uniform number with the Dodgers was 42, which later became the first number permanently retired from all MLB teams.





# Thurgood Marshall

1908-1993



Thurgood Marshall was born in Baltimore, Maryland. He graduated from Howard University School of Law in 1933. Marshall had a private law practice in Baltimore, and later founded the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. As the executive director of the organization, Marshall argued several cases before the Supreme Court. In 1954 he argued *Brown v. Board of Education*, which held that racial segregation in public education was illegal. In 1967, he became the first African American Associate Justice to the Supreme Court.



# **Rosa Parks**

**1913-2005**



In the South during Rosa Parks' time, buses had separate sections with white people riding in the front. African Americans sitting in the back of a bus could be told to give up their seats for a white person if the white section was full. In 1955, Rosa Parks was sitting in the back of the bus. When it became full and a white man boarded with no place to sit, the bus driver ordered Parks to get out of her seat. She refused and was arrested.

Inspired by this courageous act, African Americans in Montgomery boycotted all buses for over a year until bus segregation was declared illegal.



# **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

**1929-1968**



Martin Luther King  
January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1929,  
In 1954, Dr. King  
Baptist minister. After

to give up her seat on the bus, he became one of  
the leaders of the boycott. He continued to lead  
marches and sit-ins for civil rights and in 1957  
became the first president of the Southern  
Christian Leadership Conference, which  
organized nonviolent protests throughout the  
South, though they were often met with violence  
from local police officers. In 1963 Martin Luther

King helped organize the March on  
Washington, where he delivered his famous  
"I Have a Dream" speech on the steps of  
the Lincoln Memorial. He won the  
Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. In  
1968 he was shot and  
killed while standing  
on a motel  
balcony.

Jr. was born  
in Atlanta, Georgia.  
was ordained as a  
Rosa Parks refused



# **Ruby Bridges**

**1954-Present**



Ruby Bridges was born four months after Brown v. Board of Education declared segregation in schools illegal. But despite the federal ruling, many local schools and politicians in the South ignored the decision. In 1960, Ruby Bridges' parents enrolled her in an all-white school in New Orleans. For her safety, she had to be escorted through the doors by four federal marshals. She was only six years old. Her entrance into the school gained national attention and the artist Norman Rockwell painted *The Problem We All Live With* in 1964 to commemorate the brave young girl.





**Althea  
Gibson  
1927-2003**



Althea Gibson grew up in Harlem, New York City, where she played paddle tennis as a girl. In 1956, she won the French Championships, making her the first African American to win a Grand Slam title. In 1957 and 1958 she won both Wimbledon and the US Nationals and was voted Female Athlete of the Year by the Associated Press. Althea Gibson also played golf and was the first African American to compete on the Women's Professional Golf Tour. In the 1970s, Gibson was appointed New Jersey's athletic commissioner, becoming the first woman in the country to hold that role.



**Shirley  
Chisolm**  
**1924-2005**



Shirley Chisholm was born in Brooklyn, New York. After attending Columbia University she worked in early childhood education in Brooklyn. Chisolm became involved in local politics in the 1950s. In 1968, she became the first African American woman elected to the United States Congress. Chisholm represented the Bedford–Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, an area that had great poverty. She served in Congress from 1969 to 1983. In 1972, she ran in the Democratic Party's presidential primary, making history as both the first African American and the first woman to run in a major party's presidential primary.



# Colin Powell

1937-2021



Colin Powell was born in New York City to Jamaican immigrant parents. He served as a soldier for 35 years, rising to the rank of four-star general. In 1989 he was the commander of the US Army. He oversaw the Persian Gulf War from 1990-1991. He became the first African American chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which is the highest military position in the Department of Defense. In 2001 he became the first African American Secretary of State under President George W. Bush. The Secretary of State is the president's advisor on all foreign issues and is fourth in line to the president, after the Vice President and Speaker of the House.



# **Barack Obama**

**1961-Present**



Barack Obama was born in Honolulu, Hawaii. He worked as a civil rights attorney in Chicago and taught constitutional law at the University of Chicago Law School. In 2004 he was elected to the U.S. Senate. He gained attention after his Democratic National Convention keynote address that year. In 2008 he became the first African American president in the history of the United States. A year later, he won a Nobel Peace Prize. During his time in office he enacted the Affordable Care Act (often called "Obamacare"), dealt with the Great Recession, and ended military involvement in the Iraq War.

