
BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Celebrating African-American Leaders,
Inventors, & firsts in their field.



ALAIN LeROY LOCKE 1st Black Rhodes Scholar

Alain LeRoy Locke was an American philosopher, educator and writer. After obtaining an undergraduate degree from Harvard University, Locke became the first Black Rhodes Scholar. He later returned to the U.S. to complete his doctoral studies at Harvard where he got a PhD in philosophy in 1918.

Locke later earned the title "Father of the Harlem Renaissance," the period of social, cultural and artistic rebirth that took place in Harlem, New York, throughout the 1920s to the mid-1930s.

Locke continued to mold minds at Howard University as the Philosophy department chair, a role he would keep until his retirement in 1953. In fact, there is a New York City school, Alain L. Locke Magnet School for Environmental Stewardship, named after the educator.



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ALEXANDER TWILIGHT

1st Black Graduate from a US College

Alexander Twilight grew up in Corinth, Vermont during the turn of the 18th century where he worked on a neighbor's farm while learning to read and write. He was able to finally put himself through school at Randolph's Orange County Grammar School at the age of 20. Six years later he transferred as a junior to Vermont's Middlebury College, where he graduated from in 1823, becoming the first Black person to earn a bachelor's degree from a U.S. college.

Twilight went on to become a teacher, molding the minds of students for generations to come. In 1836, during a stint teaching in Brownington, Vermont, he became part of the state legislature.



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BESSIE COLEMAN 1st Black Civilian Pilot

Bessie Coleman was born in Atlanta, Texas, in 1892 and grew up in a family of 13 children. Coleman had dreams of soaring through the air, so she went to France in 1919 to find a flight school willing to teach her.

When she returned to the U.S. in 1921 — as the first Black civilian to be a licensed pilot in the world — Coleman was met with press coverage and attention. She used her platform to do events, like parachute jumps, and give lectures, all with the aim of opening an African-American flying school. Coleman would only perform for desegregated crowds. She died in 1926 during a test flight.



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CHARLES HAMILTON HOUSTON
1st Black Editor of Harvard Law Review

Charles Hamilton Houston went to Amherst and taught English at Howard University before attending Harvard Law School, where he would make his history. Houston started law school in the fall of 1919 and in 1922 he became the first Black editor of the Harvard Law Review.

As a lawyer he went on to play a role in a majority of the civil rights cases before the Supreme Court between 1930 and the Brown v. Board of Education case in 1954. In fact his work working to dismantling the Jim Crow laws earned him the name "The Man Who Killed Jim Crow."



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CONSTANCE BAKER MOTLEY

1st Black Female Federal Judge

When Constance Baker Motley was 15 she was turned away from a public beach because she was Black and it sparked her interest in civil rights. After obtaining her law degree from Columbia Law School, Motley went on to represent Martin Luther King Jr. as a young lawyer and become a law clerk for Thurgood Marshall.

She took an interest in politics and became the first Black woman to serve in the New York Senate, but her political career was cut short when she became the first Black woman to be appointed a federal judge in 1966.



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EUGENE JACQUES BULLARD 1st Black Combat Pilot

Georgia native Eugene Jacques Bullard, born in 1895, was unhappy with his life in the U.S. and fled to Europe in 1912. Bullard joined the French Foreign Legion after the start of World War I and enlisted in the French flying service after betting a friend on leave he could despite being Black.

In 1916, Bullard entered Aeronautique Militaire, French Air Force where he became the first Black military pilot to fly in combat. He was also only Black American pilot in World War I, although he never flew for the U.S.



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FRITZ POLLARD 1st Black NFL Coach

Fritz Pollard was small, but he loved football and went on to have a historic football career at Brown University. Pollard played before attending the Ivy League school, but being on the university's team put him on the map. Many firsts were ahead of him, starting with being the first Black player to be selected for the Walter Camp All-America team and play in the Rose Bowl.

He went on to join the American Professional Football League — which later became the NFL — as a member of the Akron Pros in 1920. Pollard faced adversity and racism at every turn, but he persevered and became the first Black coach when he took the reins of the Pros a year after the team won their first title.



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GWENDOLYN BROOKS

1st Black Pulitzer Prize Winner

Gwendolyn Brooks was a writer who was recognized for her work in poetry. Her poems, like those in her book "A Street in Bronzeville," were about the black experience in America at the time. In 1950, Brooks won a Pulitzer Prize for her book of poetry "Annie Allen." The award made her the first Black author to win the prestige prize.

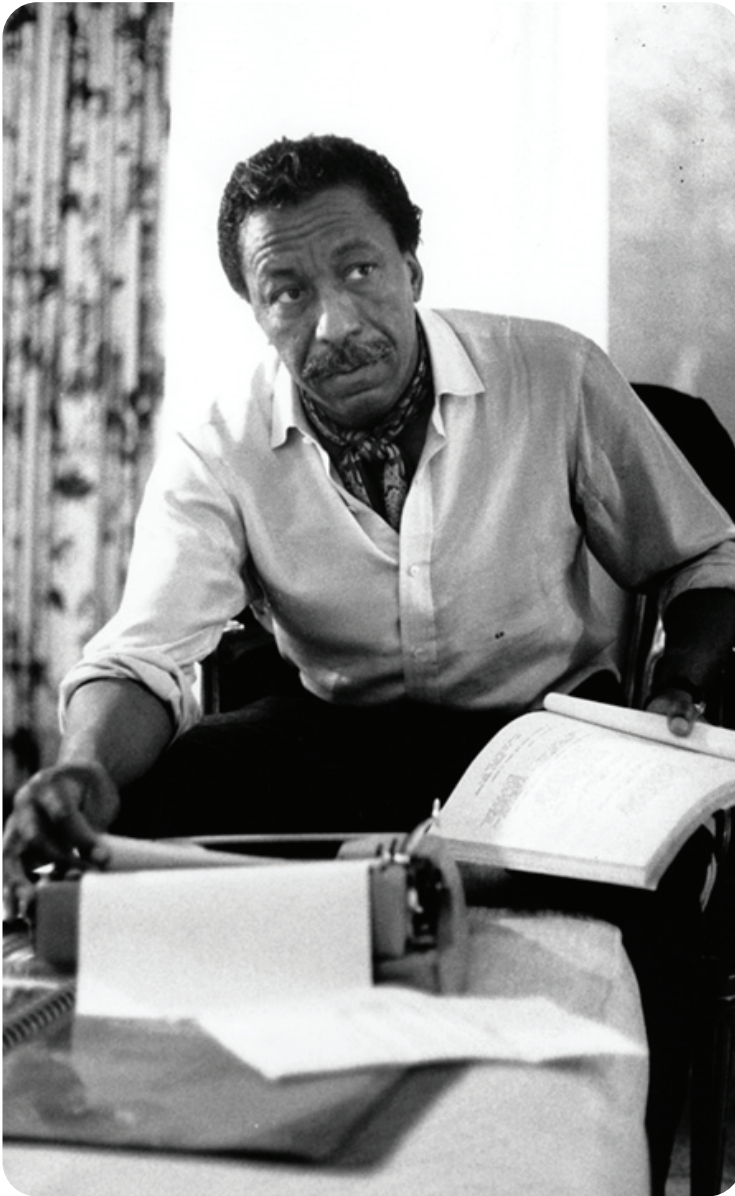
Brooks wrote several other works before passing away in 2000, "Maud Martha," "We Real Cool" and "Blacks." She is one of the most highly regarded poets of 20th-century American poetry.



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GORDON PARKS

1st Black Hollywood Director

Gordon Parks did not begin his career as a filmmaker until he was 55, after a long career as a photographer and writer. In fact, he was the first Black staff photographer at Life Magazine. Parks signed a contract to make 1969's "The Learning Tree," earning him a place in history as the first Black director of a Hollywood studio film.

Park followed the film up with movies including 1971's "Shaft," one of the first Blaxploitation films. Famous filmmakers like Spike Lee and John Singleton have referred to Park's achievement as inspiration for their own careers. Singleton directed the 2000 remake of "Shaft," starring Samuel L. Jackson.



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JOSEPH RAINEY

1st Black to serve House of Representatives

Joseph Rainey, a South Carolina native, was called to serve the Confederate Army during the Civil War. In 1862, he fled the United States with his wife and went to Bermuda, where the couple accumulated a notable amount of wealth.

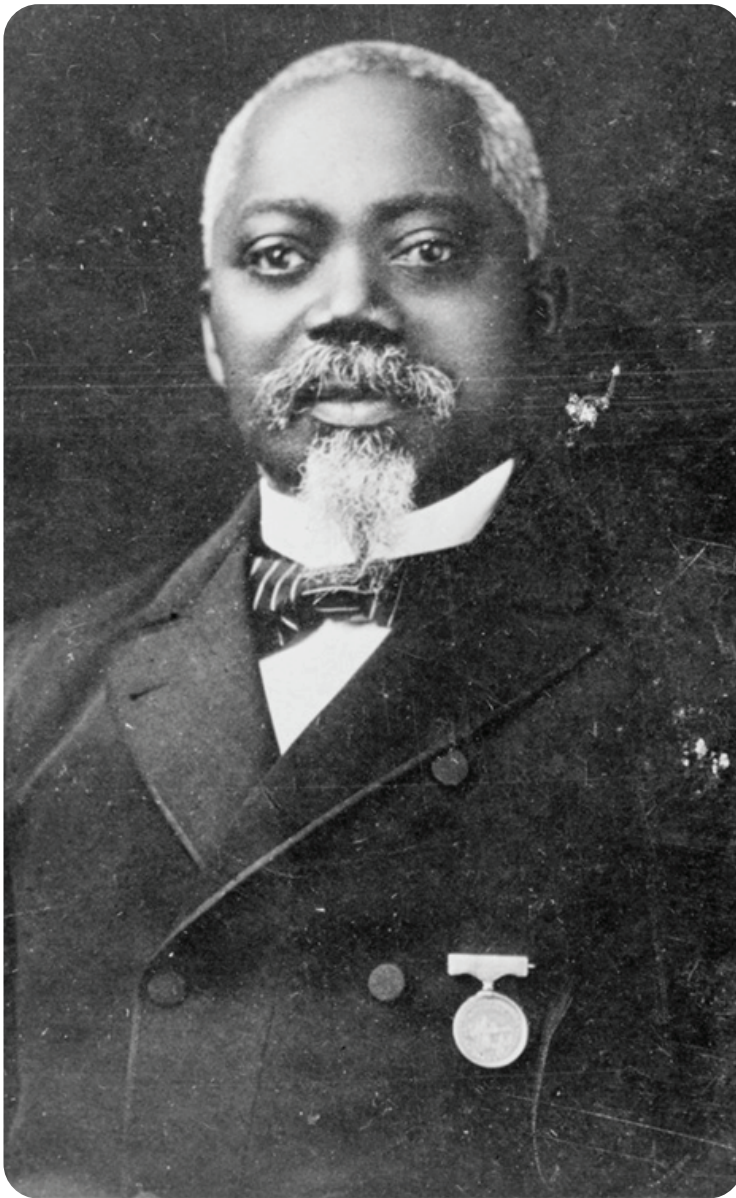
When he returned to the U.S. years later, Rainey utilized his new status to become an active participant in the Republican Party. He won a seat in the North Carolina state senate in 1870 and went on to become the first Black person to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives.



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WILLIAM CARNEY

1st Black Medal of Honor Recipient

William Carney was a member of the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry during the Civil War. Carney and his fellow soldiers were in the Battle of Fort Wagner in July of 1863. When his regiment's color bearer was shot down during the battle, an already wounded Carney struggled to retrieve the banner himself. As he brought the flag back to his fellow soldiers, Carney was shot several more times. For his heroic actions the soldier received a Medal of Honor, making him the first Black soldier to receive the honor.



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RUTH SIMMONS 1st Black Ivy League President

During her undergraduate education at Wellesley College, Ruth Simmons viewed the institution's president Margaret Clapp as proof that women could obtain leadership positions. After continuing her education in France on a Fulbright fellowship and later at Harvard where she received her PhD, Simmons continued to work in education.

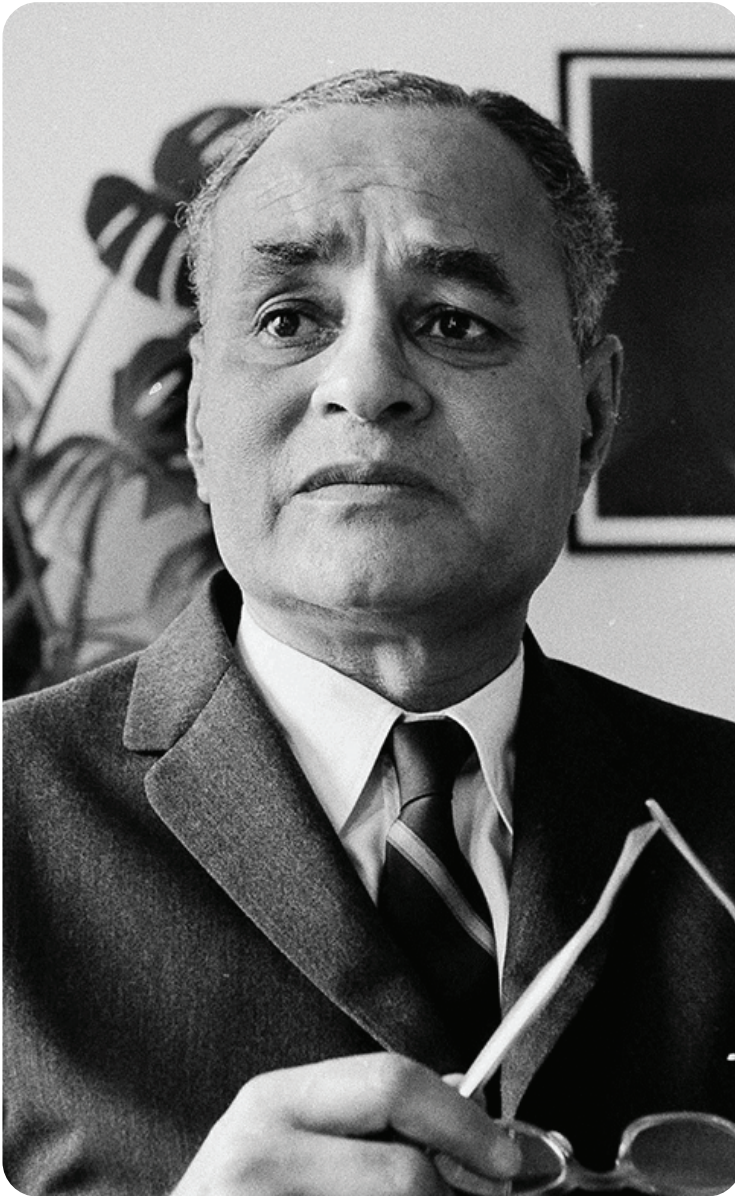
Starting in 1983, Simmons worked at universities across the country, including University of Southern California, Spelman and Princeton. Simmons became the first Black woman to be president of an Ivy League institution when she became president of Brown in 2001. She stepped down in 2012, but is still a professor at the university.



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RALPH BUNCHE

1st Black Nobel Peace Prize Winner

Ralph Bunche was a social science graduate who had studied colonial policy in West Africa before going into service with the United Nations. The diplomat went to the Middle East to develop a plan for the divisive situation between Arabic and Jewish communities. Unfortunately the U.N. resolution was rejected and a conflict began, which included the murder of the U.N.'s chief negotiator Folke Bernadotte in 1948. Bunche was named as Bernadotte's replacement and succeeded in achieving a ceasefire with the signing of the Armistice Agreements in 1949.

He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize the following year, becoming the first Black person to receive the prestigious award.



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BARACK OBAMA

1st Black President

On November 4, 2008, Senator Barack Obama of Illinois was elected president of the United States over Senator John McCain of Arizona. Obama became the 44th president, and the first African American to be elected to that office. He was subsequently elected to a second term over former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney.



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MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. CIVIL RIGHT MOVEMENT LEADER

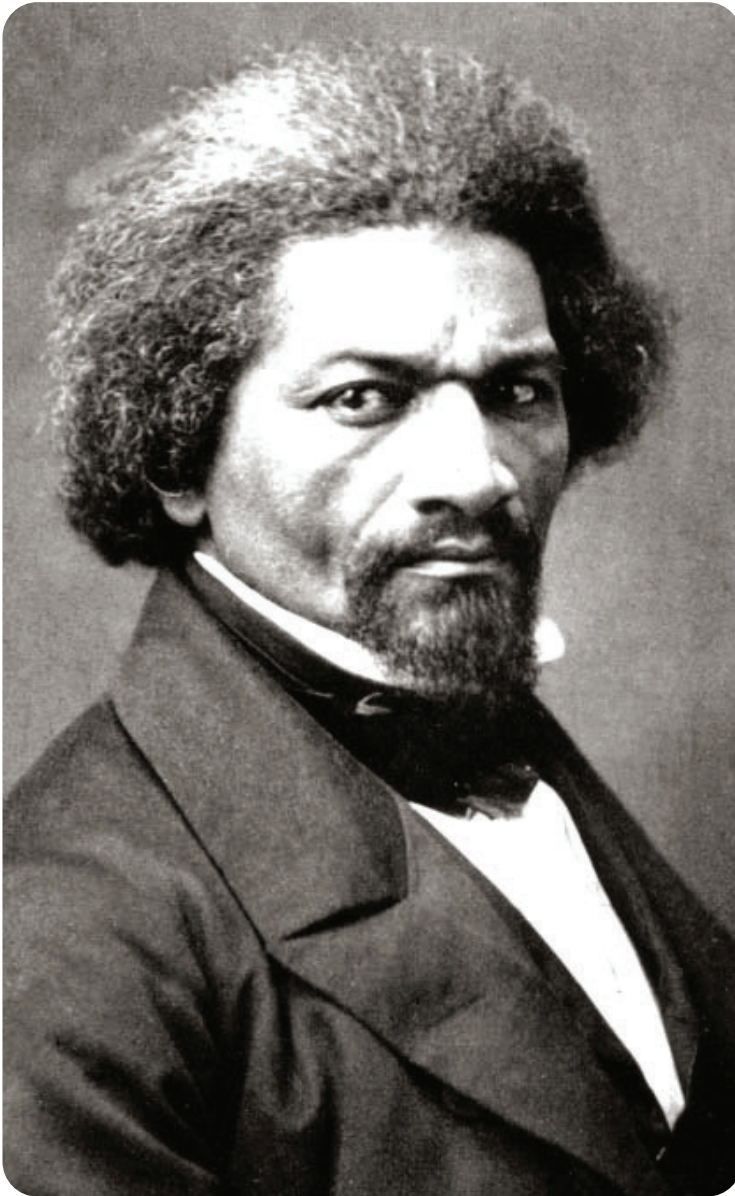
Martin Luther King, Jr. was a social activist and Baptist minister who played a key role in the American civil rights movement from the mid-1950s until his assassination in 1968. King sought equality and human rights for African Americans, the economically disadvantaged and all victims of injustice through peaceful protest. He was the driving force behind watershed events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the 1963 March on Washington, which helped bring about such landmark legislation as the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 and is remembered each year on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, a U.S. federal holiday since 1986.



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FREDERICK DOUGLASS

ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT LEADER

Frederick Douglass was an escaped slave who became a prominent activist, author and public speaker. He became a leader in the abolitionist movement, which sought to end the practice of slavery, before and during the Civil War. After that conflict and the Emancipation Proclamation of 1862, he continued to push for equality and human rights until his death in 1895.

Douglass' 1845 autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, described his time as a slave in Maryland. It was one of five autobiographies he penned, along with dozens of noteworthy speeches, despite receiving minimal formal education.

An advocate for women's rights, and specifically the right of women to vote, Douglass' legacy as an author and leader lives on. His work served as an inspiration to the civil rights movement of the 1960s



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ROSA PARKS

"MOTHER OF CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT"

Often called "The Mother of the Civil Rights Movement," Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white male passenger on a Montgomery, Alabama, public bus in 1955. Four days later, black people in the city organized a boycott of the bus that lasted for over a year. This collective protest employed Martin Luther King, Jr. as its spokesperson and initiated the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement.



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PHILLIS WHEATLEY 1st Black Published Poet

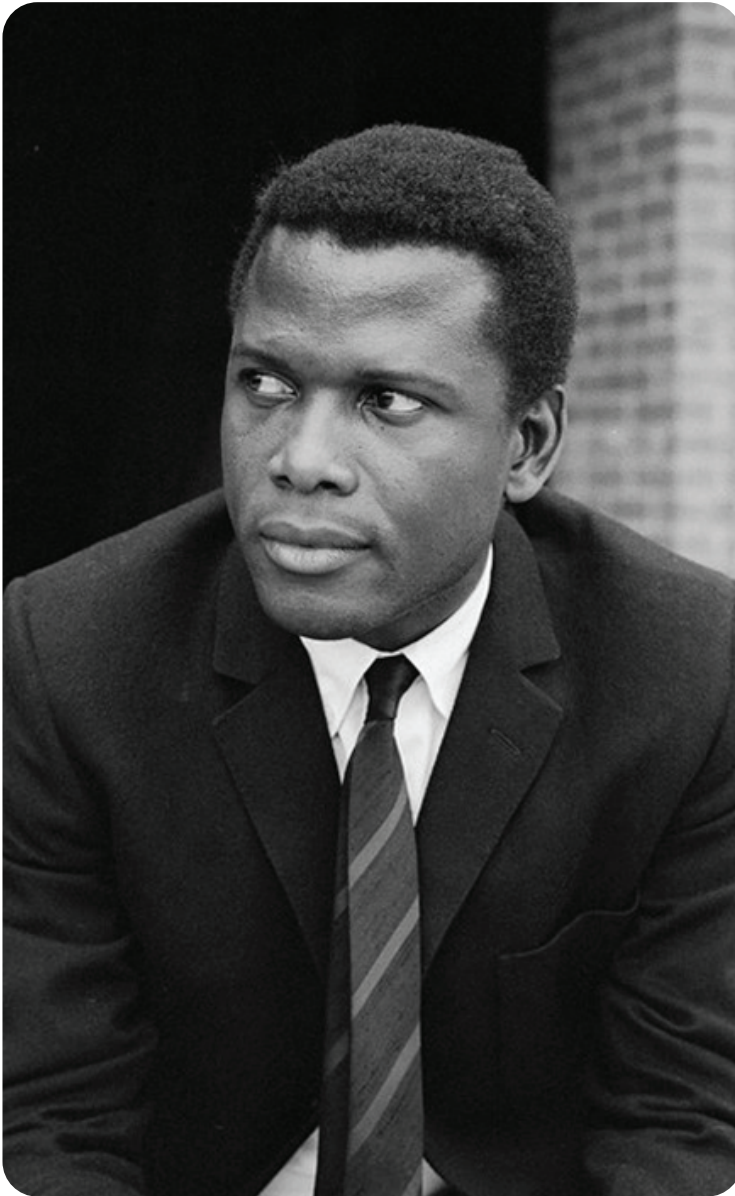
During a time when black people were discouraged from learning how to read and write, Phillis Wheatley, a Senegal/Gambia born black girl who was kidnapped and sold into slavery, defied them all and published a book of poetry in 1773. She's not only the first African-American to have a work of poems published (endorsed by John Hancock and George Washington), but also one of the first women to do so.



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SIDNEY POITIER

1st Black Leading Role Oscar Winner

Born to poor farmers in the Bahamas but later moving to New York, Sidney Poitier came from nothing, but achieved the unimaginable for black actors of his day by becoming a leading man in Hollywood. Sidney was determined to make opportunities for African-Americans and did so by performing outstandingly as an actor, gaining a respected reputation. Eventually, he went on to become the first black actor to win an Oscar for a leading role in "Lilies of the Field."



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HARRIET TUBMAN SAVED 300+ SLAVES

After she helped save over 300 slaves via the Underground Railroad, Harriet went on to serve in the Civil War as a nurse, a cook and a spy. Until the day she died, the metaphorical conductor served her community by opening schools for African-Americans and speaking on behalf of women's rights, all without ever learning to read.



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SHIRLEY CHISHOLM
1st Black Congresswoman

The first African-American woman in Congress and also the first black woman to seek presidential candidacy with a major party. Acting as a stepping stone for what would one day be our first African-American president.



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MADAM C.J. WALKER

1st Black Female Millionaire

Madam C.J. Walker (born Sarah Breedlove) is often credited as the first black woman millionaire. She was a marketing genius, developing a beauty system specifically for black women and advocating for those same women through charitable contributions, like the scholarships she funded at Tuskegee Institute. Committing to her cause, Madam C. J. employed over 3,000 people and rewarded them for giving back to their communities.



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W. E. B. DU BOIS

1st Black Ph.D.

To say W. E. B. Du Bois took education seriously would be an understatement. The co-founder of the NAACP graduated high school (valedictorian, of course) in 1884 and spent the next 11 years studying at various schools, eventually becoming the first black person to ever receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University. He fought tirelessly for social justice until his death in Ghana at the age of 95.



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JESSE OWENS WINNER OF 4 OLYMPIC GOLDS

Won four Olympic Golds at 'Hitler's Olympics', Berlin 1936. Owens maintained a dignified stance on civil rights, despite enduring discrimination during his life.



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MACON BOLLING ALLEN
1st Black Lawyer

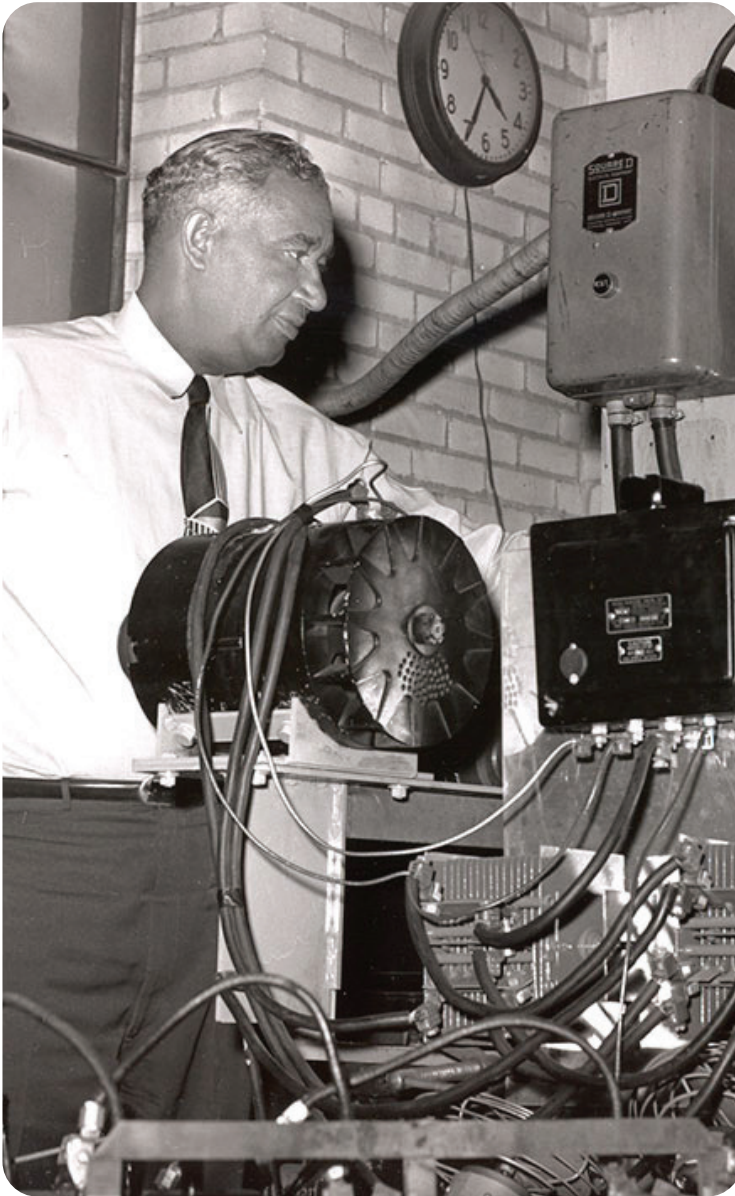
Macon Bolling Allen was the first black-American Justice of the Peace (1848) and the first African-American to pass the bar and practice law in the United States (1845). He is believed to be the first black to ever hold a judiciary position in the United States, despite not being considered a citizen throughout most of his pursuit.



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FREDERICK McKINLEY JONES INVENTED REFRIGERATION SYSTEMS

Frederick McKinley Jones was one of the most prolific Black inventors ever. Frederick Jones patented more than sixty inventions, however, he is best known for inventing an automatic refrigeration system for long-haul trucks in 1935 (a roof-mounted cooling device). Jones was the first person to invent a practical, mechanical refrigeration system for trucks and railroad cars, which eliminated the risk of food spoilage during long-distance shipping trips. The system was, in turn, adapted to a variety of other common carriers, including ships. Frederick Jones was issued the patent on July 12, 1940.



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LEWIS LATIMER INVENTED LONG LIFE LIGHTBULB

Lewis Latimer was born in Chelsea, Massachusetts in 1848. He was the son of George and Rebecca Latimer, escaped slaves from Virginia. Latimer was hired as the assistant manager and draftsman for U.S. Electric Lighting Company owned by Hiram Maxim. Maxim was the chief rival to Thomas Edison. Maxim greatly desired to improve on Edison's light bulb and focused on the main weakness of Edison's bulb – their short life span (generally only a few days.) Latimer set out to make a longer lasting bulb. Latimer devised a way of encasing the filament within an cardboard envelope which prevented the carbon from breaking and thereby provided a much longer life to the bulb and hence made the bulbs less expensive and more efficient. This enabled electric lighting to be installed within homes and throughout streets.



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GARRETT MORGAN

INVENTED GAS MASK, TRAFFIC LIGHT

Garrett Morgan was an inventor and businessman from Cleveland who invented a device called the Morgan safety hood and smoke protector in 1914. On July 25, 1916, Garrett Morgan made national news for using his gas mask to rescue 32 men trapped during an explosion in an underground tunnel 250 feet beneath Lake Erie. Morgan and a team of volunteers donned the new "gas masks" and went to the rescue. After the rescue, Morgan's company received requests from fire departments around the country who wished to purchase the new masks. The Morgan gas mask was later refined for use by U.S. Army during World War I. In 1914, Garrett Morgan was awarded a patent for a Safety Hood and Smoke Protector. After witnessing a collision between an automobile and a horse-drawn carriage, Garrett Morgan took his turn at inventing a traffic signal. Other inventors had experimented with, marketed, and even patented traffic signals, however, Garrett Morgan was one of the first to apply for and acquire a U.S. patent for an inexpensive to produce traffic signal.



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