



Education Department

Title: America's Sisters

Level: All Levels
HISTORY UNIT (1 Lesson)

OVERVIEW

Students will become familiar with the achievements of prominent African American women.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

1. After student engagement with America's Sisters' short biographies, distribute the BINGO Charts (either I or II, provided on pages 2-3).
2. At the teacher's discretion, take information from America's Sisters' biographies and provide random snippets of information.
3. Students will demonstrate their knowledge of America's Sisters as they match information provided with the name on the BINGO Chart.

America's Sisters **BINGO**

Chart I

Toni Morrison	Betty Shabazz	Shirley Chisholm	Septima Poinsette Clark	Yvonne Burke
C. Delores Tucker	Fannie Lou Hamer	Sojourner Truth	Amelia Boynton Robinson	Barbara Charline Jordan
Ella Jo Baker	Bridget "Biddy" Mason	FREE SPACE	Sonia Sanchez	Harriet Tubman
Kathleen Cleaver	Charlayne Hunter-Gault	Mae C. Jemison	Daisy Bates	Mary McLeod Bethune
Maxine Waters	Rosa Parks	Myrlie Evers-Williams	Frances Watkins Harper	Ida B. Wells-Barnett

America's Sisters BINGO

Chart II

Yvonne Burke	Frances Watkins Harper	Rosa Parks	Dorothy Irene Height	Ida B. Wells- Barnett
Mae C. Jemison	Betty Shabazz	Dorothy Irene Height	Fannie Lou Hamer	Septima Poinsette Clark
Amelia Boynton Robinson	Constance Baker Motley	FREE SPACE	Toni Morrison	Sonia Sanchez
Bridget "Biddy" Mason	Daisy Bates	Constance Baker Motley	Ella Jo Baker	Mary Church Terrell
Kathleen Cleaver	Harriet Tubman	Sojourner Truth	C. Delores Tucker	Mary Church Terrell

Ella Jo Baker

(1903 – 1986)

“Every time I see a young person who identifies with the struggle of black people... I take new hope.”



Ella Jo Baker; taken from <http://en.wikipedia.org>

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1943: Became Director of Branches, NAACP

1956: Co-founded civil rights fundraising campaign, In Friendship

1958: Organized SCLC led by Martin Luther King Jr.

1960: Co-founded SNCC

1964: Helped found Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

Ella Baker’s mother wanted her to become a schoolteacher when she graduated from a North Carolina University with honors, but Baker had other dreams. In Harlem, she became the first national director of the Young Negroes Cooperative League, an organization that helped people save by buying goods collectively.

From then on, she worked tirelessly as an activist for civil rights organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Southern Christian Leadership Conferences (SCLC). When students led sit-ins against segregation, Baker turned to organizing young activists.

In 1960, she co-founded the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Its members participated in the Freedom Rides of 1961—a campaign that pressured the federal government to change discriminatory policies. Under Baker’s guidance, SNCC became a leading civil rights organization and gave young people a voice in the growing civil rights movement.

Mary McLeod Bethune

(1875 – 1955)

“Be calm, be steadfast, be courageous.”



Mary McLeod Bethune; taken from The Commons on <http://www.flickr.com>

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1923: Founded Bethune–Cookman College

1935: Created National Council of Negro Women

1936: Organized Federal Council on Negro Affairs, advisory body to Franklin D. Roosevelt

1939: Appointed Director, Division of Negro Affairs, National Youth Administration

In the late 1800s, Mary McLeod Bethune walked five miles to attend a one-room school—one of South Carolina’s few schools for black children. In 1904, with just \$1.50, she opened a school for girls in Daytona Beach, Florida. The six students used crates for desks and charcoal for pencils. The school eventually merged with a boys’ school to become Bethune–Cookman College. Bethune was its president for 22 years.

The visionary educator was a tireless activist for equal rights. Bethune served as president of the 800,000-member National Council of Negro Women—which she founded—for 14 years. As director of the National Youth Administration’s Division of Negro Affairs, she shaped U.S. government policy.

One of the most influential black women of her time, she used her capabilities to help hundreds of thousands of African Americans expand their power.

Shirley Chisholm

(1924 – 2005)

“Our country needs women’s idealism and determination, perhaps more in politics than anywhere else.”



Shirley Chisholm; taken from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1968: Elected to U.S. House of Representatives

1970: Published *Unbought and Unbossed*

1971: Was founding member of Congressional Black Caucus

1972: Became first African American to run for President

1973: Published *The Good Fight*

1977: Was founding member of Congressional Women’s Caucus

1984: Co-founded National Congress of Black Women

Shirley Chisholm was born to parents from the Caribbean region in Brooklyn, New York, where she excelled in school. After graduating from college, she taught nursery school and earned a master’s degree in elementary education. Driven to help the disadvantaged, she became involved in politics in her Bedford–Stuyvesant neighborhood. She and others formed the United Democratic Club to support black candidates.

In 1964, Chisholm herself became a candidate—winning a seat in the New York State Assembly. In 1968, she was the first African American woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where she served for seven consecutive terms. In 1972, she ran for President as “the candidate of the people.”

Chisholm was a gusty congresswoman. She spoke out against the Vietnam War and served as a strong advocate for children, women, and the urban poor. She remained a catalyst for change, teaching politics at Mt. Holyoke College and supporting Jesse Jackson’s presidential campaigns.

Septima Poinsette Clark

(1898 – 1987)

“The greatest evil in our country today is not racism, but ignorance...We need to be taught to study rather than to believe...”



Septima Poinsette Clark; taken from <http://en.wikipedia.org>

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1919: Led Charleston, South Carolina, petition drive to allow black teachers in black schools

1961: Appointed director of education and teaching for Southern Christian Leadership Conference

1974: Became first black female member of Charleston School Board

1979: Accepted Living Legend Award from President Jimmy Carter

1987: Received American Book Award for *Ready from Within*

A young widow and teacher, Septima Clark began her crusade for racial equality by helping the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) force a South Carolina school system to pay black and white teachers equally.

In 1956, after 40 years as a South Carolina schoolteacher, Clark was fired for her NAACP membership. Not giving up, she took a job as director of education at Tennessee's Highlander Folk School, a civil rights training center. There, she started the citizenship Schools, which taught adults reading and writing skills necessary to pass voter literacy tests. Clark's schools spread across the South—enabling thousands of African Americans to vote for the first time.

Clark continued to fight injustice, speaking out for women's' rights, organizing daycare centers, and inspiring others through award-winning books.

Kathleen Cleaver

(1945 –)

“No one ever asks what is man’s role in the revolution.”



Kathleen Cleaver; taken from <http://blogs.indiewire.com/>

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1968: Became first woman to serve as national communications secretary and Central Committee member for Black Panther Party

1970: Co-founded international wing of Black Panther Party

1993: Named to Georgia’s Supreme Court Commission on Racial and Ethnic Bias in the Courts; member of Board of Directors of Atlanta-based Southern Center for Human Rights

2001: Produced and directed International Black Panther Film Festival

As a 21-year-old honor student, Kathleen Cleaver discovered she was more interested in activism than school and left college to work for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. There, she met her future husband, Black Panther Party minister of information Eldridge Cleaver.

Captivated by his fiery speeches and radical approach to social change, she joined the Black Panthers and married Cleaver. As communications secretary, she organized a campaign to free the party’s jailed minister of defense, Huey Newton.

In 1969, Cleaver joined her husband in Algeria, where he fled due to legal problems. There, the Cleavers formed a new party; the Revolutionary People’s Communication Network. Returning to the U.S. in 1975, the mother of two finished college and graduated from Yale Law School.

After Cleaver’s divorce in 1987, she earned a reputation as an educator and expert in African American history. She now teaches law at Emory and Yale universities.

Myrlie Evers-Williams

1933–

“I understand the pain and the challenges, and my attitude is one of standing up with open arms to meet all of them.”



Myrlie Evers-Williams; taken from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1967: Co-authored *For Us, The Living*

1990: Became first black female commissioner of public works in Los Angeles

1995: Elected second female chair of NAACP Board of Trustees

1998: Established Medgar Evers Institute

1999: Published *Watch me Fly: What I Learned on the way to Becoming the Woman I Was Meant To Be*

2005: Published *the Autobiography of Medgar Wiley*

Myrlie Evers–Williams met civil rights activist Medgar Evers on her first day at college in Mississippi and married him in 1951. Living under constant death threats, they organized voter registration drives and civil rights demonstrations. On June 12, 1963, Medgar Evers was assassinated in their driveway.

To help her family heal, Evers–Williams moved to California. She completed her bachelor’s degree, worked as a corporate executive, and became involved in politics. As commissioner of public works in Los Angeles, she managed 6000 employees and a budget of \$400 million. In 1995, when the NAACP was experiencing difficult times, she took over as chair. Within three years, she improved the organization’s image and turned a budget deficit into a surplus.

For 30 years, Myrlie Evers–Williams fought to bring Medgar Evers’ assassin to justice. In 1994, a jury convicted him of murder and sentenced him to life in prison.

Fannie Lou Hamer

(1917 – 1977)

“I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired.”



Fannie Lou Hamer; taken from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1964: Helped organize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

1969: Founded the Freedom Farm Cooperative, where 5000 people grew their own food

1971: Helped found the National Women’s Political Caucus

1972: Served as delegate to the Democratic National Convention

The twentieth child of Mississippi sharecroppers, Fannie Lou Hamer grew up poor and oppressed. Not until 1962, when she was 44 years old, did she discover she had a right to vote. But unfair laws and harassment by white racists made voting nearly impossible for black Mississippians. Despite the danger, Hamer decided to claim the right.

Hamer volunteered to help the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee register Southern black voters. She and other volunteers were threatened, jailed, and beaten. Some were murdered. Hamer drew strength from her religious beliefs and often led hymns and freedom songs during marches.

Hamer’s speech at the Democratic national Convention in 1964 on behalf of the Freedom Democratic Party was instrumental in ridding Mississippi of racist voting practices. This powerful televised testimony about how she and other black people were mistreated influenced passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It guarantees every American an equal right to vote. Hamer spent the next 12 years fighting for human rights.

Charlayne Hunter-Gault

1942–

“If people are informed they will do the right thing. It’s when they are not informed that they become hostage to prejudice.”



Charlayne Hunter-Gault; taken from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1986: Named Journalist of the Year by National Association of Black Journalists

1995: Published *In My Place* about growing up in the segregated South

1999: Became South African Bureau Chief for CNN

2006: Published *New News Out of Africa: Uncovering Africa’s Renaissance*

Charlayne Hunter-Gault wanted to be a journalist since childhood. Her heroine was comic strip reporter Brenda Starr. But when Hunter-Gault and another black student applied to the University of Georgia’s journalism school, they were denied admission. They went to court, won their case, and became the first black students in the university’s 175-year history.

After reporting for *The New Yorker* magazine and *The New York Times*, Hunter-Gault signed on as national correspondent for PBS-TV’s “McNeil/Lehrer Report.” For 20 years, she covered world events and interviewed famous people. She won two Emmy Awards and two Peabody Awards, broadcast journalism’s highest honor. One Peabody was for her documentary “Apartheid’s People.” The award was presented by the University of Georgia, which once turned her away.

Hunter-Gault now lives in South Africa, where she reports on Africa’s problems and promise.

Dorothy Irene Height

(1912 – 2010)

“We are not a problem people; we are a people with problems. We have historic strengths; we have survived because of family.”



Dorothy Irene Height; taken from <http://www.bet.com/>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1938: Began 33 years of global service to Young Women’s Christian Association

1947: Elected national president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, among the oldest of African American sororities

1957: Elected president of National Council of Negro Women

2004: Award Congressional Gold Medal

When Height was growing up, her mother often told her, “You’re a smart girl. And there are many things you can do.”

Sure enough, this young woman from Pennsylvania went on to earn bachelor’s and master’s degrees within four years and to lead several major women’s organizations. As president of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), Height was often the only woman at top civil rights movement meetings, paving the way for other women.

Under Height’s half century of leadership, NCNW improved the lives of millions of women and their families through health, education, and economic programs in the U.S. and Africa. A champion of African American communities, she organized the first Black Family Reunion Celebration in 1986. This annual festival reminds African Americans to take pride in their enduring strengths and traditional family values.

Barbara Charline Jordan

(1936 – 1996)

“If the society today allows wrongs to go unchallenged, the impression is created that those wrongs have the approval of the majority.”



Barbara Charline Jordan; taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/>

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1966: Became first African American woman elected to Texas State Senate

1972: Became first African American congresswoman from the South

1976: Became first African American to deliver a keynote address at a national convention

1994: Awarded Presidential Medal of Freedom

Confrontation wasn't Barbara Jordan's style. Shrewd and ethical, her talent was consensus building. She improved people's lives through legislation—first as state senator, after as a Texas congresswoman.

Throughout her political career, Jordan fought for constitutional rights. She wrote Texas' first successful minimum wage bill and worked to amend the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to protect Hispanic, Native, and Asian Americans.

In 1974, Jordan's moral courage and extraordinary speaking skills gained national recognition. As a member of the House Judiciary Committee considering impeachment of President Richard Nixon, she delivered an electrifying speech declaring her dedication to the Constitution and her outrage at its abuse.

When Jordan's health made it impossible to continue in politics, she inspired others by teaching. Her ethics course at the University of Texas was so popular that students entered a lottery to enroll.

Constance Baker Motley

(1921 – 2005)

“As the first black and first woman, I am proving in everything I do that blacks and women are as capable as anyone.”



Constance Baker Motley; taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/>

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1964: Became first African American woman elected to NY State Senate

1965: Named first female African American Manhattan borough president

1966: Became first female African American federal judge

1982: Appointed chief judge of Southern District of New York

1986: Appointed senior U.S. district judge

1988: Published *Equal Justice Under Law: The Life of a Pioneer for Black Civil Rights and Women's Rights*

A single incident sparked 15-year-old Constance Motley's interest in the civil rights movement—she was banned from a Connecticut beach because she was black. From then on, she was determined to become a lawyer.

One of 12 children of West Indian immigrants, Motley finished college in less than three years with financial help from a local businessman. After graduating from New York University, she earned a degree from Columbia Law School.

Motley worked for Thurgood Marshall at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. She quickly moved up the ranks, becoming a key attorney in groundbreaking school desegregation cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education*. Later, Motley successfully argued her own pioneering cases, including James Meredith's long battle for admission to the previously segregated University of Mississippi.

Motley's accomplishment drew her into politics, where she defended justice as a state senator and, later, federal judge.

Rosa Louise McCauley Parks

(1918 – 2005)

“I would like to be known as a person who was concerned about freedom, equality, justice and prosperity for all people.”



Rosa Parks; taken from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1943: Became secretary of Montgomery, Alabama, chapter of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

1987: Founded Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development

1996: Awarded Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Bill Clinton

1999: Received Congressional Gold Medal

Growing up in Alabama, Rosa Parks tried to avoid the indignity of riding in segregated buses. Their front rows were reserved for white people. As those rows filled, black people had to stand in the rear.

At the end of a long workday in 1955, Parks refused to relinquish her seat to a white man. She was arrested. Led by reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., the black community boycotted the bus system for 381 days. In 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court declared bus segregation illegal. Parks became known as the mother of the modern civil rights movement.

After moving to Detroit, Parks became an aide to U.S. Representative John Conyers and continued to push for racial equality. She was the first woman to lie in state in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda.

Sonia Sanchez

(1934 –)

“...that has propelled me, that love of language that came from listening to my grandmother speak black English.”



Sonia Sanchez; taken from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1969: Offered first course on literature of African American women at University of Pittsburgh

1985: Received American Book Award for *Homegirls and Handgrenades*

1997: Her poetry appeared in feature film *Love Jones*

2001: Received Poetry Society of America's 2001 Robert Frost Medal

Sanchez began to write at age six, after the death of her beloved grandmother. When she moved from Alabama to Harlem, the rhythms, sounds, and language of the streets captivated her. She became a powerful voice of the 1960s' Black Power movement and joined a group of radical poets called the Broadside Quartet. Using urban black English, unusual spellings, and creative structures, they redefined poetry and gave passionate expression to African American culture.

Recipient of many prestigious awards, Sanchez has published more than 16 poetry books since her first—*Homecoming*—in 1969. She has written plays, anthologies, and children's books. She has experimented with many poetic forms, including haiku. In addition, Sanchez has had a distinguished career as a university professor and has given poetry readings around the world.

Betty Shabazz

(1936 – 1997)

“Nothing is insurmountable; there is always a will and a way.”



Betty Shabazz; taken from <http://theshabazzcenter.net/>

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1980: Named Director of Institutional Management, Medgar Evers College

1990: Received New York Urban League’s Frederick Douglass Award

1994: Elected chair of 41st National Council of Negro Women Convention

1995: Received an honorary law degree from Lincoln University

Raised in a middle-class Detroit family, Betty Shabazz went to college in Alabama and studied nursing in New York. There she met and married the well-known Nation of Islam leader, Malcolm X.

In 1965, while giving a speech in Harlem, Malcolm X was gunned down—in front of his children and pregnant wife. Shabazz was devastated, but refused to be bitter. She nurtured her children and carried on her husband’s work. After earning master’s and doctoral degrees, she built a distinguished career in health care and education. She also hosted a radio program for women and earned respect as a community activist.

Thirty years after her husband’s murder, Shabazz gave a moving speech at the Million man March in Washington, D.C.—reaffirming their shared vision of human dignity and social justice.

Mary Church Terrell

(1863 – 1954)

“Keep on moving, keep on insisting, keep on fighting injustice.”



Mary Church Terrell; taken from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1892: Founded the Colored Women’s League

1895: Became first black woman elected to Washington, D.C., Board of Education

1896: Co-founded National Association of Colored Women

1909: Founded executive committee of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

1941: Published her autobiography, *A Colored Woman in a White World*

Born the year of the Emancipation Proclamation, Mary Church Terrell was among the first black women to earn a college degree. Although she had a privileged upbringing and did not have to work, she chose to teach and become a professional lecturer—speaking out against racial violence and for women’s right to vote.

Fluent in three language, Terrell delivered a powerful speech in German on African American achievements at the 1904 International Congress of Women in Berlin. As the first president of the National Association of Colored Women, she established Mothers’ Clubs to help black women with housing, unemployment, and child-rearing issues.

When Terrell was 87 years old, she ordered a meal in a Washington, D.C., restaurant and was asked to leave. She filed a lawsuit and organized picket lines. In 1953, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Terrell’s favor, and the nation’s capital finally began to desegregate.

Harriet Ross Greene Tubman

(Circa 1820 – 1913)

“I had reasoned this out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a right to—liberty or death.”



Harriet Tubman; taken from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1863: First American woman to command a military raid, during Civil War

1896: Served as delegate to first convention of National Federation of African American Women

1903: Founded home for elderly African Americans

Soon after her escape from slavery, Tubman made the dangerous trip back south to guide her sister and two children north. She went on to rescue her entire family, including her elderly parents. Over the next decade, she made 19 trips into slave territory—freeing as many as 70 people.

Tubman was the most daring conductor on the Underground Railroad—a network of “stations” where enslaved black people hid as they fled north. Slaveholders offered up to \$40,000 for Tubman’s capture. She was never caught. Nor were any of her passengers. Tubman became known as the “Moses of Her People,” after the biblical story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt.

During the Civil War, Tubman worked for the Union Army as a nurse and a spy. Afterwards, she spoke out for women’s rights and supported others who needed help, especially children and the elderly.

C. Delores Tucker

(1927 – 2005)

“Never again will black women be disregarded. We will have our share and parity in American politics.”



Dr. C. Delores Tucker

C. Delores Tucker; taken from <http://nationalcongressbw.org/>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1968: Appointed chair of Pennsylvania Black Democratic Committee

1971: Became first female and first black secretary of state, in Pennsylvania

1975: Elected first black female vice president of Penn. Democratic Party

1976: Named first black president of National Federation of Democratic Women

1984: Elected chair of Democratic Party’s National Black Caucus; co-founded and chaired National Congress of Black Women

1991: Founded and became president of Bethune–DuBois Institute, Inc.

In 1965, Philadelphia-born C. Dolores Tucker marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Selma, Alabama. She had become involved in the civil rights movement in her 20s and remained active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and other civil rights organizations for more than 50 years.

A woman of many firsts, Tucker became Pennsylvania’s secretary of state in 1971—the first female and first African American in the nation to hold that position. In 1984, with Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, she founded the National Congress of Black Women to promote the interests of the African American community, particularly women.

During the 1990s, Tucker spoke out against lyrics in gangsta rap and other hip-hop music that she considered obscene and demeaning to women. She received both praise and criticism. But on this, as on all issues, she stood her ground.

Frances Watkins Harper

(1825 – 1911)

“...no nation can gain its full measure of enlightenment...if one-half of it is free and the other half is fettered.”



Frances Watkins Harper; taken from The Commons on <http://www.flickr.com>

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1845: Published first book of poems, *Forest Leaves*

1850: Became first woman teacher at Union Seminary (now Wilberforce University), Wilberforce, Ohio

1857: Published *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, which sold over 10,000 copies

1859: Edited and contributed to *Anglo-African Magazine*, the first African American literary journal

1883: Became director of Northern United States Temperance Union

1892: Published best-known novel, *Iola Leroy, Or Shadows Uplifted*

1896: Co-founded National Association of Colored Women

Frances Harper was born to free parents in the slave state of Maryland. Orphaned before the age of three, she was raised by her uncle and aunt in an atmosphere of social and political activism.

As a young adult, the budding activist moved north. In Pennsylvania, a free state, she helped runaway slaves along the Underground Railroad. The experience convinced her to dedicate her life to ending slavery and improving society.

In 1854, Harper was hired by the Maine Anti-Slavery Society and became one of the first women abolitionist speakers. She was already an accomplished poet and author, and her lyrical prose captivated audiences. Harper spent nearly 50 years traveling across the U.S. and Canada, speaking out against racism, sexism, and immorality. Through more than 12 books and writings, she taught the value of social service and integrity.

Ida B. Wells-Barnett

(1862 – 1931)

“We must educate the white people out of their 250 years of slave history.”



Ida B. Wells-Barnett; taken from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1892: Published *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*

1893: Published *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*

1909: Co-founded National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

Ida B. Wells-Barnett learned self-reliance after her parents died when she was a teenager. At age 16, she taught school in rural Mississippi to support her siblings. Her crusade for justice began in 1884, when she was removed from a Tennessee train for refusing to ride in the car for black people. She sued the railroad and won. The decision was overturned, but Wells-Barnett wrote editorial about the case that gained her recognition as an accomplished journalist.

In 1892, a white mob lynched three of Wells-Barnett's friends in Memphis, Tennessee. Now a full-time journalist and co-owner of the black newspaper *Free Speech*, she wrote a scathing editorial about the murders. Her office was ransacked, and she was forced to leave town.

Nevertheless, Wells-Barnett continued to investigate lynch mobs, publish her findings, and speak worldwide about lynching and other social injustices. This fiery journalist became one of the nation's most respected women.

Maxine Waters

(1938–)

“If you believe in something, you must be prepared to fight. To argue. To persuade. To introduce legislation again and again and again.”



Maxine Waters; taken from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

1984: Became the first woman to hold a chair in the Democratic Caucus of the California State Assembly

1986: Helped pass legislation which divested California state pension funds from companies doing business with South Africa

1991: Named one of the outstanding leaders at the International Women’s Year Conference in Houston and became the Princeton Peace Prize winner

1996: Chosen to lead the Congressional Black Caucus

Born in 1938 in a St. Louis housing project, Maxine Waters was one of thirteen children. She married and had children at a young age, but that did not stop her. She became interested in public service in 1960 after she became involved with a Head Start program in Watts, California. She finally started her career in the politics as the chief deputy to Los Angeles city councilman David Cunningham and gained a reputation for her determination and outspokenness. She began to take on women’s issues and traveled through California to organize and speak with women who had never heard from a legislator.

On August of 1984, Waters co-founded the National Political Congress of Black Women. The organization’s goal was to encourage every black woman to become politically active. She then became a member of the California State Assembly, where she pushed for minority and women’s rights. She passed a South Africa divestment bill after eight years and six reintroductions, a landmark affirmative action bill, and enacted the first Child Abuse Prevention Program. She opposed the 2004 Haiti coup d’etat, defended the rights of political prisoners, and helped develop the Minority AIDS Initiative in 1998 to address the spread of AIDS in minority communities. She has also led congressional efforts to help keep American families in their homes during the housing and economic crisis.

In 1990, she was elected to Congress and was one of the five new African American representatives. In 1996, she was elected to chair the Congressional Black Caucus. She has been serving California’s 43rd district since 2013 and will continue to serve until 2016.

Yvonne Brathwaite Burke

(1932–)

“There was a time when I was a picketer across the street. Then I decided I didn’t want to be there outside of policy-making. I wanted to be inside, fighting right there on their turf.”



Yvonne Brathwaite Burke; taken from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1966: First African American woman to be elected to the California State Assembly

1972: First African American woman to serve as the Vice-Chairperson of the Democratic National Convention and to be elected to the House

1973: First congresswoman to give birth and be granted maternity leave while serving in Congress

1979: First African American woman to serve on the chair of L.A. County Board of Supervisors

Born as Pearl Yvonne Watson, Yvonne Burke received her B.A. in political science at the University of California at Los Angeles in 1953. She then received her J.D. from University of Southern California’s School of Law and opened a law office in Los Angeles. For ten years, she specialized in probate and real estate law and worked as the deputy corporation commissioner for the city of Los Angeles.

In 1966, she became the first African American Democrat to serve in the California State Assembly and was re-elected twice. During her service, she sponsored bills to end job discrimination against women and people of color. She also reformed state prisons and provided more funding for child healthcare and education. In 1972, she was elected to represent the part of the Los Angeles district in Congress and became vice chair of the Democratic National Convention. In 1977, she helped pass the Displaced Homemakers Act, which provided training for women entering the job market.

In 1976, she became the first woman to chair the Congressional Black Caucus. She also served on the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors between 1992 to 2008. During those years, she focused on the needs and education of children in the country’s foster child programs. She was also integral in the California African American Museum’s formation, as she brought in representatives from universities, museums, artists, and community-based organizations to discuss how to establish a permanent African American museum in California. After many meetings, legislation to support a state museum dedicated to presenting the heritage, contributions, and accomplishments of African Americans was established. CAAM had its first exhibit on October 2, 1981 called *Ten California Artists*.

Bridget “Biddy” Mason

(1818 – 1891)

“If you hold your hand closed, nothing good can come in. The open hand is blessed, for it gives in abundance, even as it receives.”



Biddy Mason; taken from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1866: Became the first African American woman to purchase land in Los Angeles

1884: Sold part of her land for \$1500 and built a commercial building to rent out on the remaining land

1872: Established the First African Methodist Episcopal church at 8th and Townes

Biddy Mason spent most of her childhood working on John Smith’s plantation in South Carolina. Although she was forbidden to read and write, she learned many practical skills in medicine and midwifery. Smith left for San Bernardino, California, and Mason and other enslaved Africans walked the whole two-thousand miles there. Slavery had become illegal in California, so Smith had unknowingly brought Mason to her freedom. She petitioned for her freedom in 1856 and won.

While Mason lived in California, she worked as a midwife and nurse and quickly gained a reputation for her skills and herbal remedies. After ten years, she saved enough money to buy two lots on the outskirts of the city and became the first African American woman to buy property in the United States. She used the land to create a garden and then built small wooden houses to rent for the next eighteen years. The neighborhood surrounding Mason’s property developed rapidly and became the main financial district of Los Angeles in the 1890s. By the late 1800’s, Mason had become one of the wealthiest African American women in Los Angeles thanks to her shrewd investments.

Mason was not only wealthy but also generous, as she dedicated much of her time to her community. For example, she opened her home to those who needed her assistance, and lines of people seeking her help often formed on Spring Street. She also donated money to schools, day care centers, grocery stores, and churches and visited jail inmates on a regular basis. One of her biggest accomplishments (with her son-in-law) has been forming the Los Angeles branch of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Mason passed away on January 15, 1891, and a memorial in her honor resides on 4th and Spring.

Daisy Bates, “The First Lady of Little Rock”

(1914–1999)

“No man or woman who tries to pursue an ideal in his or her own way is without enemies.”



Daisy Lee Gatson Bates; taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1952: Elected president of the Arkansas NAACP

1941: Published the first issue of *Arkansas State Press*, which she and her husband created

1957: Guided and advised the Little Rock Nine students

1960's: Appointed by President Lyndon Johnson to help him administer his anti-poverty program

1980: Earned the Honorary Doctor of Laws degree at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville

Because Daisy Lee Gatson Bates's birth mother had been murdered by three white men and her father had fled in fear, Bates was raised by family friends. In 1942, she married Lucius Christopher (L.C.) Bates and moved to Little Rock, where they started *The Arkansas State Press*. It reached 10,000 in circulation in the first few months of publication and soon grew to become the largest and most influential black newspaper in the United States.

In 1952, Bates was elected as president of Arkansas NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). She also became an advisor and mentor to the Little Rock Nine students by providing them with protective custody and becoming their advocate. Because she had no biological children, the Little Rock Nine students were referred to as “Daisy Bates's children.” She remained connected to these students throughout their years in high school. She also worked in voter registration campaigns for the Democratic National Committee, and Lyndon B. Johnson appointed her to help administer anti-poverty programs in the 1960's.

Bates's involvement in the Civil Rights struggle affected the paper, as white businesses stopped advertising in *The State Press*. The lack of revenue caused it to shut down. Though she renewed the paper in 1984, she sold it three years later.

Daisy Bates passed away on November 4, 1999. The state of Arkansas allowed her body to lie in the capitol's rotunda and made the third Monday in February The Daisy Gatson Bates Holiday, thereby becoming the first state to honor an African American woman with a named holiday.

Sojourner Truth

(1797–1883)

“I’m not going to die, I’m going home like a shooting star.”



Sojourner Truth; taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1827: Escaped to freedom

1827–8: Won a landmark law suit to recover her son named Peter, who was illegally sold into slavery

1835: Won a slander suit against a white couple

1851: Delivered her famous “Ain’t I A Woman” speech at a women’s convention in Ohio

Originally born at Isabella Baumfree, Sojourner Truth was born in New York around 1797. Her first language was Dutch, and she learned to speak English later in her life. Though she was born into slavery, she escaped to freedom with her infant daughter.

On June 1, 1843, Isabella Baumfree changed her name to Sojourner Truth and devoted her life to Methodism and abolition of slavery. In 1850, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave* was published. Because she could not read or write, she told her stories to her friend Olive Gilbert. That same year, she spoke at the first National Women’s Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts and began touring with another abolitionist to speak against slavery and for human rights.

In 1851, Truth delivered her famous “Ain’t I A Woman” speech at an Ohio Women’s Rights Convention. She continued to tour around Ohio through 1851–1853 to help bring attention to the antislavery movement, and she gradually attracted larger and larger audiences. Truth was called to Washington, D.C. in 1864 to contribute to the National Freedman’s Relief Association and also met and spoke with Abraham Lincoln about her beliefs and experiences. In 1865, she attempted to ride streetcars reserved for whites only as a way to force desegregation. Later in her life, she began a movement to grant former slaves land from the U.S. government, as she believed that private property would grant African Americans self-sufficiency.

Sojourner Truth passed away on November 26, 1883 at Battle Creek, Michigan, but continued her fight for civil rights till the end.

Amelia Boynton Robinson

(1911 –)

“People have hate within their souls and that’s what we have to get rid of.”



Amelia Boynton; taken from <http://www.ameliaboynton.org/>

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1933: Co-founded the Dallas County Voters League

1930’s–50’s: Held African American voter registration drives in Selma

1964: Became the first African American female (and first woman in general) Democratic candidate from Alabama to run for a seat in Congress

1965: Marched on Bloody Sunday

1990: Won the Martin Luther King Jr. Medal of Freedom

Known as the matriarch of the Civil Rights Movement, Amelia Boynton Robinson was born on August 18, 1911 in Savannah, Georgia. After working as a teacher, Boynton moved to Selma, Alabama, where she became known for her activism.

Although she did not win, in 1964 she became the first African American and the first woman to run as a Democratic candidate for Congress in Alabama. The same year, she asked Martin Luther King Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to visit Selma to promote voting equality for African Americans. King and SCLC set up their headquarters in Boynton’s house and planned the march from Selma to Montgomery. It happened on March 7, 1965 and became known as “Bloody Sunday.” Seventeen protestors were sent to the hospital, including Boynton who had been beaten unconscious by the Alabama state troopers. The newspaper photo of the unconscious Boynton drew national attention.

After the efforts of Boynton and others during Bloody Sunday, Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act on August 6, 1965. Boynton attended as the guest of honor. She continued her path by serving as the vice chair of the Schiller Institute, a non-profit organization dedicated to defending human rights around the world, and continued to promote civil and human rights.

In 1990, she was awarded the Martin Luther King Jr. Medal of Freedom while continuing to tour in America on behalf of the Schiller Institute. She was the special guest at President Obama’s State of the Union address in January 2015. On March 7, 2015, Boynton joined President Obama and Congressman John Lewis for the 50th anniversary of the Bloody Sunday.

Mae C. Jemison

(1956 –)

“Don’t let anyone rob you of your imagination, your creativity, or your curiosity.”



Mae C. Jemison; taken from <https://en.wikipedia.org/>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1977: Received a B.S. degree in chemical engineering (and fulfilled requirements for a B.A. in African and Afro-American Studies) from Stanford University

1981: Received a doctorate degree in medicine from Cornell University

1983–5: Served as the Area Peace Corps Medical Officer for Sierra Leon and Liberia in West Africa

1987: Selected for astronaut program in NASA

1992: Served as the science mission specialist on STS-47 Spacelab-J

1993: Appeared on an episode of Star Trek

The extraordinarily accomplished Mae C. Jemison was born in Alabama, though she moved to Chicago at the age of three. While growing up, she spent much of her time reading about science (especially astronomy) in the school library. She graduated from high school in 1973 with honors and enrolled into Stanford University on a National Achievement Scholarship. During her time at Stanford, she became the head of the Black Student Union and was involved in dance and theater production.

In 1977, she received her B.S. in chemical engineering and continued on to receive her master’s from Cornell University’s Medical College in 1981. During that time, she studied in Cuba and Kenya and worked at a Cambodian refugee camp in Thailand. In 1987, she became one of fifteen (out of a pool of 2000) to join NASA’s astronaut training program and became the first African American woman to be admitted to such a program. After the one year training, she then continued to become the first African American female astronaut as the science mission specialist.

Jemison has received several honorary doctorates and other awards including: the 1988 Essence Science and Technology award, the 1992 Ebony Black Achievement Award, the 1993 Montgomery Fellowship from Dartmouth College. She also became the member of prominent organizations such as: the American Medical Association, the American Chemical Society, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Board of Directors of World Sickle Cell Foundation (1990–1992), and the Center for the Prevention of Childhood Malnutrition. She left the astronaut corps in March 1993 and accepted a teaching fellowship at Dartmouth. She created The Earth We Share, a science camp for twelve to sixteen year olds that improve students’ problem-solving skills.

Toni Morrison

(1931 –)

“At some point in life the world’s beauty becomes enough. You don’t need to photograph, paint or even remember it. It is enough.”



Toni Morrison speaking at “A Tribute to Chinua Achebe – 50 Years Anniversary of ‘Things Fall Apart.’” The Town Hall, New York City, February 26th, 2008. Taken from <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1955: Completed her master’s degree at Cornell University

1977: Her novel *Song of Solomon* became the first work by an African American author to be a featured selection in the book-of-the-month club since *Native Son* by Richard Wright

1980: Appointed to the National Council on the Arts

1993: Became the first African American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize in Literature

2012: Received Presidential Medal of Freedom

Originally named Chloe Anthony Wofford, Toni Morrison was the second of four children. She graduated from Lorain High School in 1949 with honors and continued her education at Howard University, where she majored in English and minored in classics. She pursued her masters at Cornell and received her degree in 1955.

Her first novel *The Bluest Eye* was published in 1970. Her most famous novel *Beloved* was published in 1987 and became a film in 1998 with Oprah Winfrey. It was named the best novel of the past 25 years in the New York Times Book review in 2006.

In 1989, she became a professor at Princeton University, where she established a special workshop for student writers and performers called the Princeton Atelier. She retired from Princeton in 2006. In 1993, she won a Nobel Prize in Literature and became the first African American woman to do so. Since then, she has won nearly every book prize possible.

Morrison also began to explore other artistic forms such as children’s literature and songs and opera writing. She wrote the libretto for *Margaret Garner* and also wrote a collection of non-fiction in 2008. Although she has explored different artistic forms, Morrison is best known for her fictional works. Her novels contain epic themes, vivid dialogue, and richly detailed black characters.

In 2009, she spoke out against censorship after one of her books was banned in Michigan. She became the editor for a collection of essays on censorship called “Burn This Book.” Morrison still remains active in her artistic, intellectual, and political pursuits.