

Women of Wisdom

SAMELLA SANDERS LEWIS

Artist, Educator, Writer, Filmmaker

Samella Lewis, (b. 1924) is an iconic figure in American art.

ALBERTA MABEL KEARNEY

Museum Founder

Alberta Kearney, (b. 1920) created the Doris Nelson African American Art and History Museum in 1979.

MARGARET TAYLOR BURROUGHS

Visual Artist, Educator, Arts Organizer

Margaret Taylor, (b. 1917) founded the South Side Community Art Center Chicago, The National Conference of Artists, the Lake Meadows Outdoor Art Fair and America's first museum of Black History.

ISABEL WILKERSON

Journalist, Author

Isabel Wilkerson, (b. 1961) became the first African American woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for feature writing.

EULA MCCLANEY

Wise Woman of Real Estate

Eula McClaney, (b. 1913) was raised on a sharecropper's farm in Alabama, taught herself the intricacies of the real estate market and became a philanthropist.

VIVIAN GORDON HARSH

African American Librarian

Vivian Gordon Harsh, (b. 1890) became the first African American librarian in the Chicago Public Library system where she developed a world-renowned Black History collection.

High Flyers

BRIGADIER GENERAL STAYCE D. HARRIS

The Air Force's highest ranking Black female aviator

Stayce Harris, (b. 1959) airborne career has propelled her to command an airlift squadron, air expeditionary group and serve as the first and only Black woman to command a flying wing in the Air Force.

MAE CAROL JEMISON

First African American Woman in Outer Space

Mae Carol Jemison, (b. 1956) was chosen from a pool of 2,000 applicants, and in the process made history as the first African American female astronaut.

VERNICE ARMOUR

America's First Female African American Combat Pilot

Vernice Armour, (b. 1973) flew with HMLA-169 during the invasion of Iraq becoming America's first African American female combat pilot.

JEANINE MCINTOSH MENZE

US Coast Guard's First Black Female Aviator

Jeanine McIntosh Menze, (b. 1978) became the first African American woman to successfully complete flight training and be assigned as a pilot in the United States Coast Guard.

ELIZABETH "BESSIE" COLEMAN

First African American to earn an Aviator's License

Bessie Coleman, (b. 1892) made history June 15, 1921, when she earned an international aviation license from the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale becoming the first African American, male or female, to earn an aviator's license.

NANCY "LEFTY" LEFTENANT-COLON

First Black nurse in Regular Army Nurse Corps

Nancy Leftenant-Colon transferred to the Air Force as a flight nurse a year after making history as the first African American nurse in the Regular Army Nurse Corps.

Publishers and Poets

CHARLOTTA AMANDA SPEARS BASS

Newspaper Publisher, Activist

Charlotta Bass, (b. 1879) was a newspaper publisher-editor and civil rights activist.

MARITA BONNER

Essayist, Playwright, Fiction Writer

Marita Bonner, (b. 1899) won first place in the Crisis Literary Contest of 1925, pinpointing the devalued status of African American women in American mainstream society.

GWENDOLYN BROOKS

First African American Poetry Pulitzer Prize Winner

Gwendolyn Brooks, (b. 1917) won the 1950 Pulitzer Prize, making Brooks the first African American recipient of the Pulitzer.

MARY ANN SHADD CARY

Journalist, Lawyer, Educator

Mary Ann Shadd Cary, (b. 1823) launched the Provincial Freeman in March, becoming the first Black woman publisher in North America.

FRANCES ELLEN WATKINS HARPER

Prolific Writer, Orator

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, (b. 1826) was a prolific and popular writer who published in practically every genre.

ARIEL WILLIAMS HOLLOWAY

Musician, Teacher, Poet

Ariel Williams, (b. 1905) received a bachelor's degree in music from Fisk University in 1926 and another bachelor's degree in music from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music.

OCTAVIA VICTORIA RODGERS ALBERT

Author

Octavia Albert., (b. 1853) combined in "The House of Bondage," the personal narratives of former slaves, along with her own incisive commentary.

Legal Eagles

GABRIELLE KIRK MCDONALD

International War Crimes Law

Judge Gabrielle Kirk McDonald, (b. 1942) was appointed a federal district court judge, the first African American on the Texas federal bench, serving through 1988.

MARION WRIGHT EDELMAN

The Children's Champion

Marian Wright Edelman, (b. 1939) is founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), and has been a champion for children and the disadvantaged her entire career.

CHARLOTTE E. RAY

First Black Woman Lawyer

Charlotte E. Ray, (b. 1850) was the first African American woman to practice law in the United States.

JANE MATILDA BOLIN

First Black Woman Judge in US

Jane Bolin, (b. 1908) was the first Black woman judge in the United States.

CONSTANCE BAKER MOTLEY

Fifty Years as a Jurist

Constance Baker Motley, (b. 1921) was appointed to a judgeship for the Southern District of New York in 1966 where she became the first African American woman on the federal bench.

SADIE TANNER

MOSSEL ALEXANDER

Pioneer in Law & Civil Rights

Sadie Tanner, (b. 1898) was the first Black woman to graduate from Pennsylvania Law School and the first Black woman admitted to the Pennsylvania Bar in 1927.

Inventive, Scientific Women

BESSIE BLOUNT GRIFFIN

Inventor, Forensic Scientist

Bessie Blount, (b. 1914) invented a device that delivered food through a tube, one bite at a time, and appeared on the Philadelphia television show "The Big Idea" in 1953, becoming the first Black and the first woman to be given such recognition.

MIRIAM E. BENJAMIN

Teacher, Inventor

Miriam E. Benjamin, (b. 1861) was a successful teacher in 1888 when she became the second Black woman in history to receive a patent on a system enabling customers to quietly alert staff when in need of service.

SHIRLEY ANN JACKSON

Theoretical Physicist, Ultimate Role Model

Shirley Ann Jackson, (b. 1946) was the first African American woman to earn a Ph.D. at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

SARAH E. GOODE

Inventor, Entrepreneur

Sarah E. Goode, (b. 1850) was the first African American woman to be granted a patent by the US Patent and Trademark Office for her cabinet bed invention on July 14, 1885.

PATRICIA ERA BATH

Ophthalmologist, Inventor

Patricia Era Bath, (b. 1942) is the first African American woman doctor to receive a patent for a medical purpose--an "apparatus for ablating and removing cataract lenses."

BETH A. BROWN

Astrophysicist

Beth Brown, (b. 1969) went to NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center as a National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council post-doctoral research associate and joined the National Space Science Data Center (NSSDC) in 2001 as a civil servant.

APRILLE ERICSSON

Scientist, Engineer

Aprille Ericsson, (b. 1963) was the first female M.I.T graduate to receive a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering from Howard University and the first African American female to receive a Ph.D. in engineering at the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center.

Activists & People's Champions

ORA MOBLEY-SWEETNG

Human Rights Activist

Ora Mobley Sweeting, (b. 1927) became a charter member of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, and a supporter of Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr.

BRIDGET "BIDDY" MASON

Slave Turned Business Woman, Philanthropist

Bridget Mason, (b. 1818) was one of the first African Americans to purchase land in the city of Los Angeles.

ELIZA BRYANT

Pioneer Nursing Home Founder

Eliza Bryant, (b. 1827) worked with the Sarah Green and Lethia Flemming in 1896 and established a home for former slaves to reside.

IDA B. WELLS

Fearless Crusader, Women's Rights Champion

Ida B. Wells, (b. 1862) was a forceful speaker, writer, and anti-lynching crusader.

DAISY BATES

Civil Rights Activist, Writer, Publisher

Daisy Bates, (b. 1914) became the president of the Arkansas chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1952.

FANNIE LOU HAMER

Mississippi Freedom Party Founder

Fannie Lou Hamer, (b. 1917) challenged Mississippi's all-white delegation to the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

Mavericks

SUZANNE CELESTE de PASSE

Entertainment Visionary

Suzanne de Passe, (b. 1948) signed and developed the Jackson 5 and became the first African American woman ever nominated for an Academy Award for screenwriting with “Lady Sings the Blues.”

LEONTINE TURPEAU KELLY

United Methodist Bishop

Leontine Kelly, (b. 1920) served as chief administrator and spiritual leader of more than 100,000 United Methodists in California and Nevada.

“STAGECOACH” MARY FIELDS

Pioneer, Protector, Postal Employee

Mary Fields, (b. 1812) became the second woman and the first African American woman to work for the United States Postal Service.

MAGGIE WALKER

First Bank President

Maggie Walker, (b. 1867) opened the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank and became its president in 1903.

BARBARA HILLARY

Nurse, Adventurer

Barbara Hillary, (b. 1931) used her skills in gerontology to tailor staff development in nursing homes and reached both the North and South Poles in her seventies.

NORMA MERRICK SKLAREK

First Registered African American Woman Architect

Norma Merrick Sklarek, (b. 1928) was the first African American woman registered as an architect in the US, earning her degree from Barnard and her certification in New York in 1954.

She Got Game

ANITA DeFRANTZ

World Class Warrior

Anita DeFrantz, (b. 1952) a rowing champion who became a voice for athletes' rights; she was appointed the first female vp in the history of the International Olympic Committee.

WILLYE B. WHITE

First American Woman Long Jump Medalist

Willie White, (b. 1939) competed for the United States in an astonishing five Olympic Games and became the first American woman to ever medal in the long jump.

ALTHEA GIBSON

Tennis Pioneer

Althea Gibson, (b. 1927) was the first African American of either gender to break the color barrier in tennis and the top-ranked US player in 1957 and 1958.

TONI STONE

Playing Ball With the Boys

Toni Stone, (b. 1921) became the first woman to play in the Negro Leagues and managed what almost nobody could ever do: She got a hit off the legendary pitcher Satchel Page.

ALICE COACHMAN

Dominated the High Jump

Alice Coachman, (b. 1923) became the first Black female athlete of any nation to win an Olympic gold medal and also was the first American female to win an Olympic medal in track and field.

THE WOMEN OF TROY

Cooper, Leslie, Thompson

CYNTHIA COOPER-DYKE, (b. 1963) rocketed to fame in the very first season of the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA). She took the Comets to four WNBA Championships and was named Most Valuable Player in each of those finals.

LISA LESLIE, (b. 1972) sunk 49 straight free throws in one season and was the first center to be named the WNBA's Defensive Player of the Year. On July 31, 2001, Leslie became the WNBA's career scoring leader.

TINA MARIE THOMPSON, (b. 1965) made history when she became the inaugural draft pick of the WNBA when the Houston Comets picked her for the debut season. Thompson is a nine-time All-Star, winning MVP honors at the 2000 All-Star Game.

She Heals

REGINA M. BENJAMIN

America's Doctor

The 18th Surgeon General of the United States Public Health Service, Regina M. Benjamin, (b. 1956) oversees the operational command of 6,500 uniformed health officers serving around the world.

ALEXA IRENE CANADY

First US African American Woman Neurosurgeon

Alexa Irene Canady, (b. 1950) was Chief of Neurosurgery at Children's Hospital of Michigan. She was named Woman of the Year by the American Women's Medical Association and mentors young people by speaking at high schools.

DOROTHY LAVINIA BROWN

The Power of Adoption

Dorothy Lavinia Brown, (b. 1919) spent her childhood in an orphanage and grew up to become the first African American woman surgeon in the South, and was eventually named chief of surgery at Nashville's Riverside Hospital.

AUDREY FORBES MANLEY

Reaching the Height of Public Service

Audrey Forbes Manley, (b. 1934) served as deputy US surgeon general and later reached the pinnacle of public service in medicine as acting US surgeon general before becoming president of Spelman College.

REBECCA LEE CRUMPLER

First African American Doctress

When she graduated medical school in 1864, Rebecca Lee Crumpler, (b. 1831) became the first African American woman in the United States to earn her MD degree and the only African American woman to graduate from the New England Female Medical College.

Sisters in Arms

HAZEL JOHNSON

The General Is A Lady

Hazel Johnson, (b. 1939) was named the first Black woman general in the United States Army. As chief of the Army Nurse Corps, Johnson oversaw 7,000 men and women nurses in the Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserves.

LILLIAN FISHBURN

Navy Daughter to Rear Admiral

Lillian Fishburne, (b. 1949) became the first female African American to be promoted to flag rank in the US Navy she served as the Director, Information Transfer Division for the Space, Information Warfare, Command and Control Directorate.

MARCELITE J. HARRIS

Actress Hopeful Turned General

When Marcelite Harris, (b. 1943) was promoted to the rank of Major-General in 1995, she became the highest-ranking woman in the Air Force, and also the highest ranking Black woman in the entire Department of Defense.

SUSIE KING TAYLOR

Nurse, Educator, Warrior

Susie Reed was born into slavery on Aug. 6, 1848, on a farm near Savannah, GA. During the Civil War she escaped with her uncle's family and joined the all-Black 1st South Carolina Volunteers (which later became the 33d US Colored Infantry) as a nurse, teacher, and laundress.

MARY ELIZABETH BOWSER

From Slave to Spy

To get access to top-secret information, Mary Elizabeth Bowser, (b. 1848) became "Ellen Bond," a dim-witted but able servant in the household of Confederate President Jefferson Davis. She took notes on the documents left out by Davis, unaware the woman they assumed was a slave could read.

The 6888th Central Postal Squadron: Major CHARITY ADAMS, Commander
They made history as the only battalion of African American women to be deployed overseas, delivering mail to approximately seven million American troops stationed in Europe, and were under Major Charity Adams' command, the first woman to be commissioned as an officer in the WACS.