LEARNING MADE EASY

Black American History

for dummies®
A Wiley Brand



The long road to freedom

The Civil Rights Movement and beyond

Black culture in America

Ronda Racha Penrice



Black American History

by Ronda Racha Penrice

for dummies®
A Wiley Brand

Black American History For Dummies®

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.,** 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

Copyright © 2021 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey

Published simultaneously in Canada

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the Publisher. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions.

Trademarks: Wiley, For Dummies, the Dummies Man logo, Dummies.com, Making Everything Easier, and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc., and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

LIMIT OF LIABILITY/DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY: WHILE THE PUBLISHER AND AUTHOR HAVE USED THEIR BEST EFFORTS IN PREPARING THIS BOOK, THEY MAKE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THE ACCURACY OR COMPLETENESS OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK AND SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ANY IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. NO WARRANTY MAY BE CREATED OR EXTENDED BY SALES REPRESENTATIVES OR WRITTEN SALES MATERIALS. THE ADVICE AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED HEREIN MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR YOUR SITUATION. YOU SHOULD CONSULT WITH A PROFESSIONAL WHERE APPROPRIATE. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR THE AUTHOR SHALL BE LIABLE FOR DAMAGES ARISING HEREFROM.

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002. For technical support, please visit https://hub.wiley.com/community/support/dummies.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at http://booksupport.wiley.com. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021935715

ISBN: 978-1-119-78085-4

ISBN: 978-1-119-78086-1 (ebk); ISBN: 978-1-119-78087-8 (ebk)

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents at a Glance

Introduction 1

Part 1: Coming to America 7

CHAPTER 1: The Soul of America 9

CHAPTER 2: From Empires to Bondage: Bringing Africans to the Americas. 33

CHAPTER 3: The Founding of Black America 49

Part 2: Long Road to Freedom 63

CHAPTER 4: American Slavery, American Freedom 65

CHAPTER 5: Bringing Down the House: Marching toward Civil War and Freedom 85

CHAPTER 6: Up from Slavery: Civil War and Reconstruction 109

Part 3: Pillars of Change: The Civil Rights Movement 135

CHAPTER 7: Living Jim Crow 137

CHAPTER 8: I, Too, Sing America: The Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1963 163

CHAPTER 9: Turning Up the Heat (1963–1968) 187

CHAPTER 10: Where Do We Go from Here? Post–Civil Rights 207

CHAPTER 11: The New Civil Rights — Obama, Black Lives Matter, and Beyond 233

Part 4: Cultural Foundations 259

CHAPTER 12: Somebody Say "Amen": The Black Church 261

CHAPTER 13: More Than Reading and Writing: Education 285

CHAPTER 14: Writing Down the Bones: Black Literature 307

CHAPTER 15: The Great Black Way: Theater and Dance 331

Part 5: A Touch of Genius: Music, Film, TV, and Sports 357

CHAPTER 16: Give Me a Beat: Black Music 359

CHAPTER 17: Black Hollywood: Film and Comedy 393

CHAPTER 18: Black Hollywood: TV 427

CHAPTER 19: Winning Ain't Easy: Race and Sports 449

Part 6: The Part of Tens 479

CHAPTER 20: Ten Black American Firsts 481

CHAPTER 21: Ten Black Literary Classics. 487

CHAPTER 22: Ten (Plus One) Influential Black American Visual Artists 493

Index 501

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION 1
About This Book 2
Foolish Assumptions 3
Icons Used in This Book 4
Where to Go from Here 5

PART 1: COMING TO AMERICA 7

CHAPTER 1: The Soul of America 9
A Peek at the Past 10
Life before slavery 11
Life before emancipation 11
Life before civil rights 12
Being Black in America Today 14
Contributions to history and culture 15
Challenges 19
Black Pride Goes Mainstream 22
Celebrating Black heritage 23
Black cultural tourism booms 24
Reconciling the Past to Create the Future 26
Slavery as an American (not Southern) institution 28
Flagging the issue 28
A question of reparations 30

CHAPTER 2: From Empires to Bondage: Bringing Africans to the Americas 33
Touring African Empires 34
Ghana Empire 35
Mali 35
Songhai 36
Interaction with the rest of the world 37
Origins of the Transatlantic Slave Trade 38
Slavery on the African continent 38
Launching the European slave trade 39
Enslaving Africans in Latin America and the Caribbean 41
Sanctioning and opposing slavery 42
Dealing with life enslaved 44
Seeking freedom 45

CHAPTER 3: **The Founding of Black America** 49
From Servitude to Slavery 49
Inching toward slavery 50
Why Africans? 51
The Triangular Trade 51
The Middle Passage 52
The capture 52
The voyage 54
Safe arrival 55
Black Americans and the Revolution 57
A bit of background 58
Fighting for freedom 58
Hope and disappointment 60
The Free African Society and the Birth of Black America 61

PART 2: LONG ROAD TO FREEDOM 63

CHAPTER 4: **American Slavery, American Freedom** 65
American Bondage 66
Northern slavery 66
Enslaved life in the South 69
Before I'd Be a Slave: Fighting the System 73
The Slave Codes 74
Rebellions 75
Running away 79
"Free" Black People 81
Different paths to freedom 82
Perhaps free, but not equal 82

CHAPTER 5: **Bringing Down the House: Marching toward Civil War and Freedom** 85
Picking Fights 86
Arguing against slavery 87
Arguing for slavery 88
Leading the Antislavery Assault: Key Abolitionists 89
Anthony Benezet 89
David Walker 90
William Lloyd Garrison 90
Frederick Douglass 91
Fighting with Words 92
Slave narratives 92
Origins of the Black press 93
Colonization (or Emigration) Movement 94
Early resettlement efforts 95
Cuffe: Man on a mission 95
Questioning motives 96

The Effects of Proslavery Politics 96
The Fugitive Slave Clause 96
Stronger fugitive slave measures: Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 97
Battling over the slave status of new land 97
The Missouri Compromise 98
The Underground Railroad 98
Operation Freedom 99
Key people along the line 99
Message in the music 103
The Breaking Point 103
Straining North-South relations 104
The Compromise of 1850 104
The Kansas-Nebraska Act 105
Slavery continues 105
Dred Scott: A strike against freedom 106
Defining events at Harpers Ferry 106
Facing the Moment of Truth 107

CHAPTER 6: **Up from Slavery: Civil War and Reconstruction** 109
The Question: To End Slavery or Not? 110
Teetering on a tightrope 110
The first Confiscation Act, 1861 111
Black People in the Early Days of the Civil War 111
Serving the Union 112
Surviving in the South 112
Moving toward the Emancipation Proclamation 113
Shutting down the illegal slave trade 113
Passing the Second Confiscation Act 114
Courting England's support 114
Free at Last (Well, Sort of): The Emancipation Proclamation 114
What the Proclamation did 115
Reaction to the order 115
Finally in the Fight 116
As Union soldiers 116
As Confederate soldiers 118
The War's End and the Thirteenth Amendment 119
(Re)constructing Democracy 121
Undermining Lincoln's plan 121
Taking back the power: Reconstruction Act of 1867 123
A Mixed Bag of Hope and Despair 123
The Freedmen's Bureau 123
Where's my 40 acres and a mule? 124
Back to the land 127
Finding a new way 128
Banking on wealth 128
Taking office 129

The Fifteenth Amendment 130
A Turn for the Worse: The End of Reconstruction 131
The Redeemers 131
The Mississippi Plan 132
Civil Rights Act of 1875 132
Pulling the plug 132

PART 3: PILLARS OF CHANGE: THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT 135

CHAPTER 7: Living Jim Crow 137
Post-Reconstruction Blues 137
The Exoduster Movement 138
Black Town, U.S.A. 139
Lynchings and riots/massacres 140
Instituting Jim Crow: Plessy v. Ferguson 146
Court cases before Plessy 146
The actual case: Plessy v. Ferguson 147
Strategies for Achieving Equality 147
Booker T. Washington: The Accommodationist 148
W.E.B. Du Bois: The Integrationist 148
Organizing for Freedom 150
National Afro-American Council 150
The National Negro Business League 150
The Niagara Movement 152
The NAACP 153
The National Urban League 154
Keep on Moving: The Great Migration 154
Leaving the South 154
Life up North 156
Marcus Garvey: Man with a Plan 156
Advocating racial pride 157
Going "Back to Africa" 157
Powerful enemies 158
Can't Catch a Break: The Depression Years and FDR 158
FDR: Friend or foe? 159
Striking a new deal 159
Can't Fool Us Twice: Black Americans and WWII 161

CHAPTER 8: I, Too, Sing America: The Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1963 163
The Tide Turns: Brown v. Board of Education (1954) 163
The 1954 ruling and the reaction 164
Desegregating Central High School 167
Massive resistance follows in Virginia 169

Putting a Face to Racial Violence: Emmett Till 169
Emmett Till's murder 170
The outrage of the nation 170
A New Twist in Leadership: Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. 171
Adopting the philosophy of nonviolence 172
Founding the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) 173
Sit-ins, Boycotts, and Marches: The King Era of the Civil Rights Movement Begins 173
The Montgomery Bus Boycott and Rosa Parks 174
Sitting in for justice 177
Founding SNCC 179
Riding for freedom 179
The Albany Movement: A chink in the armor 180
Integrating Ole Miss and Increasing Federal Involvement 181
1963: A Bloody Year 182
Not-so-sweet home Alabama: Birmingham 182
Murder in Mississippi: Medgar Evers 184
March of All Marches: The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963) 185

CHAPTER 9: **Turning Up the Heat (1963–1968)** 187
Suffering Two Tragic Blows 187
Four innocent victims 188
JFK dies 189
The Civil Rights Act of 1964 189
Targeting Mississippi for Voter Registration: Freedom Summer 190
Getting ready 190
Getting out the Black vote 191
Mississippi burning 192
The success of Freedom Summer 192
Oh Lord Selma: Back in Alabama 193
Getting arrested again 194
Marching from Selma to Montgomery 194
The Voting Rights Act of 1965 195
Black Power Rising 196
The Nation of Islam 196
Malcolm X 197
The Black Panther Party 199
The transformation of SNCC 200
Race Relations in the North 201
Rioting in Watts 201
The Chicago Freedom Movement 202
The Poor People's March 203

Death of a King 203
The night of his death and the mourning after. 204
Continuing his work 204

CHAPTER 10: **Where Do We Go from Here? Post–Civil Rights** 207
The Panthers Stumble 208
Huey Newton: A symbol of Black Power 208
The BPP encounters challenges 208
Changing focus: Embracing nonviolence and women's leadership 213
Fighting Vietnam 214
An unfair fight 214
Reacting to the war 215
Coming home. 215
Black Women Taking a Stand 217
A Race to Political Office. 219
Getting a foot in the door in the 1960s 220
Making political strides in the 1970s 220
Eyeing a bigger prize in the 1980s 221
Still thriving in the 1990s and early 2000s 222
Money, Money, Money 222
Looking at homeownership 222
Facing barriers in business. 223
Successful Black-owned businesses 224
Unforeseen Enemies. 226
Crack cocaine 226
HIV/AIDS 228
The Racial Divide 229
L.A. riots 230
The O.J. Simpson verdict. 230
A modern-day lynching. 231
Hurricane Katrina 232

CHAPTER 11: **The New Civil Rights — Obama, Black Lives Matter, and Beyond** 233
Gaining the Presidency. 234
Obama's 2008 campaign 234
The Age of Obama, 2008–2016 235
Black community gains. 236
Black Lives Matter Emerges 238
I am Trayvon. 239
Ferguson explodes: Michael Brown and the impact of Eric Garner's death 242
Police killings continue: Tamir Rice and Laquan McDonald 243
Baltimore Rising: Freddie Gray 243

The Charleston Church Massacre 244
Say her name: Sandra Bland 244
Colin Kaepernick Kneels and Donald Trump Reacts 245
Trump responds 246
Kaepernick opts out of his contract 247
Change Gone Come: Trump, COVID-19, and George Floyd 247
Trump's attacks continue 248
Stacey Abrams runs for governor in Georgia 249
COVID-19 exposes racial disparities 249
"Stop killing us": George Floyd and Breonna Taylor 251
The 2020 Election 253
Voting in the era of COVID-19 253
Trump and the U.S. Capitol riot 256

PART 4: CULTURAL FOUNDATIONS 259

CHAPTER 12: Somebody Say "Amen": The Black Church 261

Converting to Christianity 262
Early objections, early conversions 262
The Great Awakenings: Called to convert 263
Christianity, Black American style 264
Building and Sustaining the Black Church 266
Black churches in the North 267
The Black church in the antebellum South 268
Post–Civil War and Reconstruction 270
Worship in the early 20th century 271
The modern era: Megachurches 273
The changing role of women 274
Politics and the Church 275
Getting more political 276
Minister-politicians: Pulling double duty 276
Fighting for civil rights: Minister-activists 277
Continuing the struggle 278
Worshiping Outside the Black Christian Mainstream 279
Muslims and the Nation of Islam 279
Black Catholics 281
Jehovah's Witnesses 282
Seventh-day Adventists 283
Black demagogues 283

CHAPTER 13: More Than Reading and Writing: Education 285

A Brief History of Early Black American Education 286
Revolting education 286
Reconstructing: Education post–Civil War 289

20th-Century Educational Milestones 290
Mixing it up with the Brown case 290
Turning back the clock? 292
Vouchers and school choice 292
Leaving no child behind? Maybe 293
Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal 294
Obama and Trump on education 294
Higher Learning 295
Launching higher ed for the Black masses 296
The Morrill Acts: Making it stick 298
Determining the goal of higher education 299
Desegregating higher education 303
School Daze: The Black Greek system 304

CHAPTER 14: **Writing Down the Bones: Black Literature** 307
Troubled Beginnings 308
Early poets 308
Slave narratives 310
A novel journey 311
Writers' Party: The Harlem Renaissance 314
Why Harlem? 315
Key Renaissance artists and themes 316
Post–World War II, Civil Rights–era Literature 319
Richard Wright 320
Ralph Ellison 320
James Baldwin 321
Frank Yerby 321
The Breakthrough: The Black Arts Movement 322
The beginning of the movement 322
Welcoming new voices 322
The Black Arts Movement legacy 323
Anthologies from the Black Arts Movement 323
Black Women's Words 324
Alice Walker 324
Toni Morrison 325
Black Books from the 1990s On 327

CHAPTER 15: **The Great Black Way: Theater and Dance** 331
Making an Early Statement 332
Minstrelsy: Performing in Blackface 333
White minstrels 333
Black minstrels 334

Moving toward Broadway: Black Musical Theater 335
More than minstrels 336
Williams and Walker on Broadway 336
The rumblings of serious Black theater 337
Shuffling ahead 340
Black Theater Comes of Age 342
The Federal Theater Project and Black drama 342
The American Negro Theater (ANT) 343
A place to call home 344
Black musicals, 1940s and beyond 345
Two Visionaries 346
August Wilson 346
George C. Wolfe 347
Black Theater in the 21st Century 348
Kenny Leon 348
Suzan-Lori Parks, Lynn Nottage, Tarell Alvin McCraney, and beyond 349
Black Dance in America 351
Early dances 351
Tap dance 352
Breakdancing 353
Classical dance forms 354

PART 5: A TOUCH OF GENIUS: MUSIC, FILM, TV, AND SPORTS 357

CHAPTER 16: **Give Me a Beat: Black Music** 359
African Roots 359
Black Music Fundamentals 360
Feeling the Spirit: The Spirituals 361
Ragtime 362
Singing the Blues 363
Blues basics 363
Blues genres 364
Famous blues musicians 365
Let the Good Times Roll: Jazz 367
The evolution of jazz styles 367
Jazz singers 371
Great jazz instrumentalists 372
Keeping the tradition alive 374
Spreading the Gospel 375
Kirk Franklin and the new gospel sound 377
Mainstreaming Black Music 378
R&B 378
Rocking and rolling 379

Motown 381
Giving America soul 383
Post-soul Black music 384
Getting funky and popping off 384
The hip-hop age of R&B 385
Taking the Rap 388
Hip hop matures 388
The West Coast opens up rap 389
Women take the mic 390
Trap music emerges 391
Lyrical emcees return 392

CHAPTER 17: **Black Hollywood: Film and Comedy** 393
Making Movies Black 394
Race movies: Introducing all-Black casts 395
Early Black roles in major studio films 398
1940s–1960s: Exploring new themes 401
1960s–1970s: Blaxploitation films 402
Spike Lee and a Black film renaissance 403
Hood films 404
Stepping out of the hood genre 405
The Rise of Black Directors 406
Spike Lee: Getting personal 406
1990s and early 2000s: The music video launch 407
The 2010s: Drama, horror, heroes, and more 408
2020: A stream of Black women directors 411
Black Film Stars: From Song to Celluloid 412
Singers-turned-actors 413
Rappers-turned-actors/producers 413
Kings and Queens of Comedy 415
Richard Pryor 415
Eddie Murphy 415
Male comedians who followed Pryor and Murphy 416
Whoopi Goldberg 419
Other comediennes 419
Enter Stage Left: Serious Actors 421
Sidney Poitier 421
Cicely Tyson 422
Denzel Washington 422
Morgan Freeman 423
Wesley Snipes 423
Samuel L. Jackson 424
Halle Berry 424
Viola Davis 425
And the Award Goes to? 426

CHAPTER 18: **Black Hollywood: TV** 427
Early Black TV Comedies 428
Opening the doors wider 428
Getting an edge 429
Kid comedies 429
Cue the Huxtables and A Different World 430
Targeting the Black Hip-Hop Audience 432
Cable TV Opens the Door to More 432
Black Women Comedians Contribute on TV 434
No More Drama with Dramas 435
The Rhimes effect 435
Made-for-TV movies 436
Black actors in cable TV series 437
Network dramas 440
Highlighting Black LGBTQ stories 440
Black women TV executives 442
The Next Level: Building Black Television and Film Empires 443
The billion-dollar BET 443
The big "O" 444
Tyler Perry builds his own table 445

CHAPTER 19: **Winning Ain't Easy: Race and Sports** 449
Baseball 449
The Negro Leagues 450
Jackie Robinson: Integrating baseball 454
The modern era 455
Basketball 456
College ball 457
Pro ball 458
Women's basketball 462
Boxing 464
Football 467
Pro football 467
College football 469
Track and Field 470
Tennis 474
Arthur Ashe 474
Venus and Serena Williams 475
Golf 475
Other Sports 476

PART 6: THE PART OF TENS 479

CHAPTER 20: Ten Black American Firsts 481

Medicine (1837) 481
Law (1845) 482
Kentucky Derby (1875) 482
Congressional Medal of Honor (1900) 483
Rhodes Scholar (1907) 483
Exploration (1909) 483
Television (1939) 484
Nobel Peace Prize (1950) 484
Pulitzer Prize (1950) 484
Fashion (1988) 485

CHAPTER 21: Ten Black Literary Classics 487

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself (1845) 488
Up from Slavery: An Autobiography by Booker T. Washington (1901) 488
The Souls of Black Folk by W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) 489
The Mis-Education of the Negro by Carter G. Woodson (1933) 489
Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston (1937) 490
Native Son by Richard Wright (1940) 490
Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison (1952) 491
The Autobiography of Malcolm X (As Told to Alex Haley) by Alex Haley and Malcolm X (1965) 491
The Color Purple by Alice Walker (1982) 492
Beloved by Toni Morrison (1987) 492

CHAPTER 22: Ten (Plus One) Influential Black American Visual Artists 493

Joshua Johnson (c. 1763–1832) 494
Edmonia Lewis (c. 1844–1907) 494
Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937) 495
Aaron Douglas (1899–1979) 495
Horace Pippin (1888–1946) 496
Loïs Mailou Jones (1905–1998) 497
Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000) 498
Romare Bearden (1911–1988) 498
John Biggers (1924–2001) 499
Samella Lewis, Ph.D. (1924–) 499
Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988) 500

INDEX 501

Introduction

Black history as American history is a truth that has become increasingly more accepted since *African American History For Dummies* appeared more than a decade ago. The mainstream amplification of the 1921 Tulsa Massacre in such shows as *Watchmen* and *Lovecraft Country*, both from HBO, along with triumphant hidden history like mathematician Katherine Johnson's role in putting a man on the moon as shown in the Oscar-nominated *Hidden Figures*, have highlighted how little the average American, Black, white, Latino, Asian, indigenous, and more, actually knows about Black American history aside from the obvious Black History Month mainstays. For many, the police killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Laquan McDonald, Michael Brown, and more point to the devastating role this nation's history of racial discrimination plays in modern policing. All these events drive home the pressing need for a more inclusionary American history curriculum.

Carter G. Woodson, the man who created Negro History Week, which evolved into Black History Month, actually envisioned a time when general American history would incorporate Black American history. He believed that this important aspect of the nation's collective history was for all to know. It's a core belief that modern Black history experts cosign.

"Black history is American history, and American history is Black history. You can't have one without the other," Dr. Dwight McBride, an African American studies expert who became president of The New School in New York City in 2020, has said. "And if you're going to tell a story of America, and leave out Black people, it's going to be a very incomplete, not to mention unsatisfying and dishonest, story."

Black American history is so much more than a handful of extraordinary individuals or cruel institutions like slavery and Jim Crow, or the ongoing battle for civil and human rights steeped in the Black Lives Matter movement. A lot of it is painful, but it's also inspiring and triumphant. History can give people the courage and strength to become better, to do better. "You can never know where you are going unless you know where you have been," said civil rights trailblazer Amelia Boynton Robinson, who almost lost her life on the Edmund Pettus Bridge during Bloody Sunday in 1965.

Sadly, it has taken the Civil War, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and a lot of struggle in between — and after — to even begin securing Black Americans the basic right of citizenship that many white Americans take for granted. *Black American History For Dummies* isn't a big sermon on this struggle; instead, it's a straightforward, interesting, and honest overview of Black American history from Africa through the transatlantic slave trade, slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s up to today. I hope this history sheds light on both the significance of Barack Obama's election as president and why the Black Lives Matter movement exists. Along the way, this history has birthed a culture that includes the Black church and education, as well as music, literature, film, television, and sports.

About This Book

Making this book as thorough (within the page constraints) and as engaging as possible has been a top priority for me. So consider *Black American History For Dummies* an introduction to a vast and vastly interesting subject. I hope it inspires you to seek out more information (in addition to books, I suggest quite a few documentaries and other movies that bring history to life). At the very least, look at the contributions of Black Americans with new eyes.

Of course, in deciding what to include, I tried to be as objective as possible. I sifted through many history books and online sources, and checked and double-checked numerous dates and facts so that you could trust the information contained in this book. Because that information is often ugly, there is objectionable language in quotes, songs, movie titles, and the overall history itself. So do know that keeping the context of the times in mind is required.

I have a personal connection to the book. My grandfather, a Mississippian from birth to death, came from a family of sharecroppers. My great aunt sang blues songs at family gatherings and told the best stories, some of which I later found in a book of "Negro" folklore. My grandmother never tired of sharing family stories with me, even a tragic one about the unsolved murder of her brother who migrated to Chicago in the 1930s. Of course, my whole family has plenty of stories about the civil rights movement, and, yes, I wish I had first learned about the Ku Klux Klan in books or on TV.

I've lived a little bit of Black American history myself, too. I was a middle school student when Harold Washington became Chicago's first Black mayor, and, wouldn't you know, David Dinkins became the first Black mayor of New York City when I moved there for college? Did I know that LL Cool J would become a global rap pioneer or a successful actor when I bumped into him at NYC clubs? Certainly

not, but in Los Angeles, I did know that meeting Fayard Nicholas of the legendary Nicholas Brothers dance duo was a huge privilege. I also cherished seeing Halle Berry, Will Smith, and Denzel Washington at the Academy Awards luncheon the year Berry and Washington won their Oscars. Braving the cold for Barack Obama's historic 2009 inauguration as the nation's first Black president was simply amazing. Still, one of my biggest thrills in life was meeting Muhammad Ali in Chicago when I was young.

Black American History For Dummies is the actual history behind these personal experiences and hopefully explains why these events mean so much. In my effort to reveal the interesting side of history (believe me, there is one!), I hope you'll also embrace this history and share it. The ultimate goal of this book for me is to make Black American history accessible without sacrificing, well, the history.

This book is chock-full of interesting information and stories to help give you a more complete picture of Black American history. Specifically, you can find details about the following:

- The role the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown played in sparking the Black Lives Matter movement
- How Black TV and film exploded in the 2010s
- The resurgence of political activism among Black athletes
- How Black literature has further expanded
- The changes afoot in the Black church

Foolish Assumptions

In writing (and revising) *Black American History For Dummies*, I had to make some assumptions about you, the reader. On top of my main assumption — that Black American history is important for everyone, not just Black Americans — here are a few others:

- You suspect that Black American contributions to American history run deeper than you learned in required history classes but don't know how to prove it.
- At one point, you tried to read about Black American history, but just couldn't find enough of what you needed to know in one spot and don't like the idea of having to dust off your high school or college research skills or cultivate them.

- You picked up bits and pieces of Black American history here and there but want an accessible reference where you can go to find out more.
- You're naturally inquisitive and open to finding out more about Black Americans and their struggles and triumphs, as well as their contributions to the nation overall.

Icons Used in This Book

The little pictures you see attached to paragraphs throughout the book are another of the standard, helpful *For Dummies* features. They flag information that's special and important for one reason or another. *Black American History For Dummies* uses the following icons:



This icon accompanies information that explains where something — an organization, an event, and so on — originates. Perhaps you didn't know, for example, that other civil rights activists used sit-ins before they became popular in the 1960s.



This icon of a magnifying glass focuses on the details of Black Americans, especially those not typically spotlighted, who did some outstanding things that warrant further explanation.



Words say a lot. Surely, someone who made the brave decision to flee can better tell you how scary running away really was or what freedom truly means than I can. Besides, many of the quotations and excerpts that carry this icon are just outright inspiring.



Although I find everything in this book enlightening, I admit that it isn't all necessary in order to understand the topic. This icon points out what you may want to read but don't have to. It also highlights some interesting facts you might not know, like the fact that Mississippi didn't ratify the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery until 1995.



This icon points to facts or ideas that you should, well. . . remember. Essentially, it's important stuff that's had a major impact on Black American and American history and therefore shouldn't be overlooked.

Where to Go from Here

Now's the time to dive into this book in the way that best suits you: I can't tell you which chapter to choose or part to read. Flip to the Table of Contents or index and find a topic that interests you. Skip around. Fast forward ahead or travel back in time. Within each chapter, sidestep sidebars or read only the text with Remember icons. Or if you like, read *Black American History For Dummies* from cover to cover. If you want a good overview of the book, start with Chapter 1 and find a topic that interests you. Part 2 delves deeper into slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Or if you want to read more about how Black Americans have contributed to culture and sports, start with Part 5. For a handy reference guide, head to `www.dummies.com` and search for the "Black American History For Dummies Cheat Sheet." It's completely up to you.

1 Coming to America

IN THIS PART . . .

Get an overview of Black American history and culture, touching on the legacy of Carter G. Woodson who pioneered the field, identifying the past and present challenges stemming from anti-Blackness, exploring how Black Americans embrace the past personally and institutionally, as well as uncovering the push behind reparations.

Discover how Africans found themselves in the New World and the horrors they endured as commodities who largely built the American colonies effectively making England a world power in the process.

Understand how despite the disappointment of the American Revolution that promised freedom to all but denied it to the enslaved, they managed to become a nation within a nation, continuing the fight for freedom from enslavement that lasted roughly another 100 years.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Capturing the Black American experience throughout history
- Examining advances and challenges for Black Americans
- Exposing all Americans to Black American history
- Remaining conscious of unresolved issues

Chapter 1
The Soul of America

The word "Sankofa" from the Akan people in present-day Ghana and the Ivory Coast roughly translates to "knowing the past to know your future." The collective recognition of Black American history has come in stages and is frankly still evolving. In the mid-1970s, Americans felt that connection to a certain degree when Alex Haley's book *Roots* (1976) and the television miniseries sparked a nationwide fervor among Black Americans and others to learn more about Black Americans and their connection to Africa.

That passion was certainly reignited in the 2000s and 2010s as interest in DNA testing through companies like the Black-owned African Ancestry, allowing Black people, in particular, to see from which part of the African continent they may hail, exploded. So did interest in genealogy research, especially through online genealogy sites. Black scholar Henry Louis Gates proved this with the success of his 2006 PBS docuseries *African American Lives,* where he used DNA testing as well as historical and genealogical research to connect the American and African lineages of such participants as Oprah Winfrey, Chris Tucker, and Whoopi Goldberg. In 2008, he followed it with *Finding Your Roots* and later began incorporating white Americans, too.

Although the nation as a whole appeared to have a thirst for their roots, this quest seemed to once again take on special significance for Black Americans, who, through more than two centuries of slavery, had been routinely robbed of a direct, continuous connection to their African heritage. But what has that quest for

identity, belonging meant, especially in a country where it has been generally denied and suppressed? How does ignorance of Black American history contribute to the police killings of Black Americans like George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, Michael Brown and Tamir Rice? Or to the Capitol Riot at the top of 2021? Why is Black Lives Matter even necessary in the 21st century and why are folks like Stacey Abrams fighting voter suppression?

Not knowing the contributions of Black Americans to overall American history isn't just a disservice to Black Americans. "I want American history taught," celebrated writer James Baldwin once demanded. "Unless I'm in the book, you're not in it either." This chapter presents a general overview of Black American history, underscoring its importance to Black Americans and *all* Americans.

A Peek at the Past

Perhaps no one individual did as much for the study and popularization of Black American history as Carter G. Woodson, the man responsible for Black History Month. Born in 1875 in Virginia to parents who were formerly enslaved, Woodson received his B.A. at Kentucky's Berea College, his M.A. at the University of Chicago, and his Ph.D. at Harvard.

Woodson, who taught and led public schools even after receiving his graduate degrees, spearheaded the 1915 founding of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), presently the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), which began publishing what is now the *Journal of African American History*. After overseeing the organization for more than 30 years, Woodson passed away in 1950 at the age of 74, but the organization still stands and is more than 100 years old.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Woodson believed that preserving Black American history was essential to Black American survival. "If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition," Woodson reasoned. "It becomes a negligible factor in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being exterminated." He also felt that omitting Black American contributions from general American history sanctioned and perpetuated racism. "The philosophy and ethics resulting from our educational system have justified slavery, peonage, segregation, and lynching," he noted. Looking at matters from this perspective, it's little wonder that Black Americans have been vilified.

The only way to move forward is to recognize this reality. And that can only be done by acknowledging the history. The following sections examine some moments in Black history.

Life before slavery

"What is Africa to me?" Countee Cullen asks in his 1930 poem "Heritage." It is a question that should resonate with more than just Black Americans. European interaction with the African continent profoundly changed the world — Black, white, and otherwise — and nowhere else is that fact more evident than in the United States.

With the exception of South Carolina, Africans were largely the racial minority in early America, partially because white colonists adamantly restricted their numbers. Even in small numbers, though, Africans had an enormous impact on American history. The truth is that America has a dual history rooted in both Europe and Africa. Despite what you see in many textbooks, Black American history didn't begin with slavery; like other Americans, Black Americans have a beginning that predates the Americas.

Kidnapped Africans transported to the Americas through the slave trade generally hailed from Western and Central Africa, an area that includes present-day Ghana, Nigeria, the Ivory Coast (also known as Côte d'Ivoire), Mali, Senegal, Angola, and the Congo. Of Africa's many empires, Ghana, Mali, and Songhay are the most important to Black American history. Some unique features of these empires included religious tolerance, attempts at representative government, and somewhat egalitarian attitudes concerning the contributions of women. Chapter 2 provides more information about these empires.

Although Egypt attracted European attention centuries before the slave trade began, tales of Africa's enormous riches reignited European interest in the continent. Portugal, which beat other European countries to Africa, didn't go there to become enslavers but rather to gain material wealth. And although the Portuguese captured Africans during those early trips, they weren't doomed to a lifetime of enslavement. Columbus's "discovery" of the New World and Spain's claim on the land changed that. When Spain instituted slavery to capitalize on cash crops like sugar, Portugal served as the primary supplier of Africans kidnapped from their homes. As Chapter 3 explains, England entered the slave trade relatively late but excelled quickly.

Life before emancipation

The first Africans to arrive in Virginia to Point Comfort and, later, Jamestown in 1619 were brought in on slave ships. Historians of the past argued that these people weren't enslaved; however, when John Punch (believed to be an ancestor of Barack Obama on his mother's side and Nobel Prize winner Ralph Bunche) ran away from Virginia to Maryland with two indentured servants who were white in 1640, only he received a punishment of lifetime enslavement when captured. Still

the evidence shows that Africans, by and large, never resigned themselves to being enslaved and kept trying for their freedom, either through running away, challenging their status in court, or trying to appeal to the moral consciences of colonists.

Enslaved life was harsh, with human beings reduced to nothing more than property. Laws ensured that those enslaved had no control over their lives. Slaveholders had the legal right to dictate their every move and mistreat them with no recourse. Consequently, slaveholders separated families without a second thought, and rapes and unwanted pregnancies were far from unusual occurrences for enslaved girls and women.

Still, free Blacks and their enslaved brethren never abandoned their hope for freedom. Whether they ran away, rallied sympathetic white people toward emancipation or helped carry others to freedom using the Underground Railroad, they did whatever they could to force the new nation to live up to its promise of freedom and equality. Less than a century into the new nation's existence, the inevitable happened with the onset of the Civil War.

Life before civil rights

Long before Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery, Black Americans firmly set their minds on attaining freedom. When Lincoln wavered about ending slavery during the Civil War, Black Americans like Frederick Douglass continued lobbying for freedom.

Reconstruction (the period of recovery, particularly in the South, following the Civil War) revealed that most white Americans had never seriously entertained the idea of Black American freedom. Even some white abolitionists who believed that Black people shouldn't be enslaved didn't necessarily believe that they should enjoy the same rights and freedoms as other white people. White Congressman Thaddeus Stevens was the grand exception. He and others battled to right the wrongs of the past tied to slavery through various actions like proposing an amendment to the 1866 Freedmen's Bureau Bill for 40 acre lots for freedmen or supporting bills like the Civil Rights Act of 1866 declaring all men born in the country free with the aid of newly inaugurated Black American congressmen. White Southerners, evidenced by their subsequent push for poll taxes, grandfather clauses, and new state constitutions often excluding Black people, refused to change the status quo, and the North largely sat back and watched.

When Reconstruction ended, Black Americans continued the fight for racial equality as white mob violence compromised their freedom and Jim Crow ruled their lives determining where they could live, eat and socialize. In the 20th century,

Black American leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois and Ida B. Wells-Barnett seized every opportunity to challenge the "white only" claim.

Searching for better jobs and freedom from Jim Crow, Black Americans migrated North. Although the Promised Land wasn't all they had imagined, they didn't abandon each other. Battling mob violence in the North, the nation saw that Black Americans never accepted lynching or Jim Crow; there wasn't really a "New Negro" at work but rather the old one in plain view. Marcus Garvey capitalized on that spirit when he launched his brand of Black Nationalism and pan-Africanism. (You can read about Du Bois, Wells-Barnett, Garvey, and others, as well as the Great Migration, in Chapter 7.)

The demographic shift created a new power base for Black Americans. Prompted by the shameful treatment Black Americans received during the Great Depression, Black leaders demanded a piece of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal program and switched from the Republican to the Democratic Party. By the time World War II rolled around, strong leaders, remembering the broken promises of World War I, wouldn't back down from their new demands. By the 1950s and 1960s (see Chapters 7 and 8), the weapons critical to winning the battle against inequality were in place.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

PROPHETS LOOKING BACKWARD: BLACK AMERICAN HISTORIANS

If, as German scholar Friedrich von Schlegel observed, "the historian is a backward-looking prophet," then a number of prophets have emerged from Black American history. Celebrated Black American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois, the first Black American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University, chose the African slave trade as the subject of his doctoral dissertation and in 1896 published *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America.* Twelve years prior to Du Bois's work, in George Washington Williams, the first "colored" member of the Ohio legislature, published *History of the Negro Race in America From 1619 to 1880.*

Despite the scholarship of these men, Carter G. Woodson, the man frequently referenced as the Father of Black History, became one of the foremost advocates of Black American history. He wrote some of the most influential works on the Black American experience. He also established Negro History Week in 1926, which blossomed into Black History Month, with the hope that one day general American history would rightfully include the vital and numerous contributions of Black Americans.

(continued)

(continued)

Woodson didn't do this solo and worked with historians Charles H. Wesley, with whom he wrote *The Negro in Our History* (1962), and Lorenzo Greene, with whom he wrote *The Negro Wage Earner* (1930), among others. Black historians who have continued Woodson's push include the following:

- John Hope Franklin (1915–2009), author of arguably the most widely used Black American history textbook, *From Slavery to Freedom* (1947)
- Lerone Bennett (1928–2018), former executive editor of *Ebony* magazine and author of *Before the Mayflower* (1963)
- John W. Blassingame (1940–2000), historian and Yale professor who authored several groundbreaking histories, including the 1972 *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (Oxford University Press); it centered on the voices of Black people, most notably allowing enslaved people to be seen in their own history
- Sterling Stuckey (1932–2018), important historian who advanced the idea that Black people retained their African culture during slavery and impacted the rest of the nation primarily through his 1987 groundbreaking book *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (Oxford University Press)
- David Levering Lewis, Pulitzer Prize–winning historian known for the 1981 *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (Penguin Books) and his two-volume biography series, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (1993) and *W.E.B. Du Bois, 1919-1963: The Fight for Equality and the American Century* (2000) (Holt)
- Paula Giddings, author of the 1983 *When and Where I Enter* (W. Morrow), the 1988 *In Search of Sisterhood* (William Morrow Paperbacks), and the 2008 *Ida: A Sword among Lions* (Amistad)
- Nell Irvin Painter, author of the 1996 *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (W. W. Norton & Company) and the 2006 *Creating Black Americans* (Oxford University Press)
- Robin D.G. Kelley, coeditor of the 2000 *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans* (Oxford University Press) and author of the 1991 *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (University of North Carolina Press)

Being Black in America Today

The Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) dealt a powerful blow to the Jim Crow bully, but Emmett Till's brutal murder in Mississippi in 1955 as the result of an innocent encounter with a white woman shook thousands out

of their complacency. When Martin Luther King Jr. emerged on the scene a few months later, "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round" became an anthem for change.

The nonviolent direct action favored by Gandhi, which the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. followed, also worked in the United States. However, Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party, and eventually the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) felt that Black Power was a more effective strategy and refused to turn the other cheek. Despite their differences, the two factions had the same ultimate goals: freedom and equality.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Black Americans amassed a vast assortment of incredible achievements. From serving as mayors in major cities like Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago to selling millions of records worldwide, Black Americans excelled in both expected and unexpected areas. Black household incomes consistently soared to record heights. The picture wasn't rosy for everyone, however. The effects of crack cocaine ravished Black neighborhoods, gun violence robbed mothers of their children, and prisons often sucked up those who survived.

So much has changed for the better for Black Americans since King and Malcolm X had their lives taken. Visible "colored only" and "white only" signs no longer exist, and Black people aren't physically assaulted for daring to vote. Many of the obstacles that limited opportunities for Black Americans at one time are gone. Yet vestiges of racism linger. On the one hand, hip-hop moguls such as Sean "Diddy" Combs and Jay-Z have turned themselves into global brands. On the other hand, news cameras documented Black men, women, and children stranded on rooftops for days during Hurricane Katrina while elected officials placed blame instead of expediting rescue efforts, and cellphone cameras have captured unarmed Black people being killed by the police. Not even the election of Barack Obama as the nation's first Black president in 2008 could change this reality. And under his successor, one-time reality star Donald Trump, whose presidency spanned from 2017 to 2021, the nation's barometer for anti-Blackness only worsened.

Contributions to history and culture

Black American contributions to American history are tremendous. It's not a stretch to say that enslaved African labor, for example, is one of the reasons the U.S. exists as it does today. In the colonies, Africans cleared land and built houses in addition to cultivating cash crops such as rice, tobacco, and cotton. Black Americans weren't absent in the U.S. expansion westward either. In the North, enslaved Black Americans worked in the shipping industry as well as early factories. Black soldiers fought in the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Civil War.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? "NEGRO," THE N-WORD, AND MANY OTHERS

"African," "Afro-American," "colored," "Negro," "Black," and "African American" are just some of the names used to describe people who trace their roots to the African continent. The constantly evolving terms largely reflect developments in Black American culture and its relationship to the dominant white culture. The changes also reveal Black Americans' ongoing quest for self-identity and self-determination.

Surprisingly, "Negro" didn't always refer to Black people. At times, it included Asians and, in the New World, Native Americans. In 19th-century runaway announcements, the term "negro" identified Black Americans. Progressive institutions such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church preferred the term "African," but "colored" was widely used. In 1829, David Walker addressed his famous appeal to the "coloured citizens of the world." The use of "colored" by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) indicates the term's positive value in the early 20th century; in the years between the two world wars, the NAACP actually spearheaded the use of "Negro" with a capital *n,* and that usage persisted into the 1960s.

As the civil rights movement gave way to the Black Power movement, "Black" replaced "Negro." The 1980s ushered in the use of "African American," which supporters such as Jesse Jackson insisted reflected both an African and American identity. However, some argue that it isn't specific enough because white African immigrants such as actress Charlize Theron and business mogul Elon Musk are technically African American. Today, people often use "African American" and "Black" interchangeably.

Enslaved people sometimes referred to themselves as niggers in front of white slaveholders to indicate their servility, and the term was widely used in European and early American history to refer to Black Americans, including usage in novels such as Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Although widely used, "nigger" was rarely a positive term, a point underscored during the civil rights movement when newspapers and television frequently quoted hostile white Americans using the word freely.

Some Black Americans, especially with the onset of rap music, made distinctions between "nigger" and "nigga." Some Black Americans view the latter more positively when used among Black Americans, although saying it aggressively can indicate hostility. Even though hip-hop songs and comedy routines use the term liberally, it's generally unacceptable for non-Black Americans to use it under any circumstances. The unwritten rule is that Black people can use the term, and non-Black people can't. Of course, many Black Americans believe that absolutely no one should.

Black American contributions in music are celebrated the world over. Few authentic American music genres are without African roots, including rock and roll, which counts Chuck Berry, Little Richard, the infamous Ike Turner, and the lesser-known Roy Brown and Wynonie Harris among its early pioneers. Black American dance has influenced American culture since slavery. Literature and sports have also played key roles. So have less well-known contributions in medicine and architecture, among other fields. The following is a brief sampling of those contributions.

In music and dance

Trying to keep up with Black American contributions in music and dance is dizzying. Jazz is an indigenous American art form birthed from Black American culture, as are hip hop, blues, ragtime, and spirituals. Many argue that jazz put the United States on the world's cultural radar. Few musicians of any color have matched jazz maestro Duke Ellington's volume of compositions. And are there many gospel singers more well-known than Mahalia Jackson? "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" is easily one of the most popular gospel songs. On a similar note, Motown's catalog grows more timeless each year. To read about Black American music and musical influences, go to Chapter 16.

Throughout history, white Americans have borrowed Black American dances. Actually, the dance that gave Jim Crow, America's caste system, its name originated with a Black performer. Both the Lindy Hop and the Charleston got a lift from Black Americans, and many scholars have great reason to believe that tap dancing, as it's known today, was developed during slavery. In contemporary terms, Black artists never seemed to run out of new dances in the 1950s and 1960s, and dancers and choreographers Katherine Dunham and Alvin Ailey garnered international praise for their mastery and innovation in the fields of ballet and modern dance. You can find out about Black American dance in Chapter 15.

In literature

Toni Morrison's 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature wasn't an anomaly in the context of the tradition from which she hails. To start, slave narratives captivated readers in America as well as abroad. White Americans may have questioned the talent of Phillis Wheatley, the remarkable poet who was enslaved, in court, but the English accepted her talent with ease. Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Alice Walker, and so many other Black writers are American treasures whose voices have carried throughout the world. Chapter 14 discusses Black literature in detail.

In sports

Many Black Americans have excelled in all types of sports. Muhammad Ali, Tiger Woods, Venus and Serena Williams, Michael Jordan, Arthur Ashe, Wilma Rudolph, Jesse Owens, and Major Taylor are just a few Black American sports greats. (Read about Black athletes in Chapter 19.)

Black athletes have also played crucial roles in key social issues. Jackie Robinson helped the nation take a critical step toward racial desegregation when he broke Major League Baseball's color line in 1947. Ali's refusal to fight in Vietnam boosted antiwar efforts. Without question, Colin Kaepernick kneeling during the National Anthem as the San Francisco 49ers quarterback during the 2016 season heightened awareness of racial injustice, police brutality, and Black Lives Matter. LeBron James's outspokenness also brought increased awareness to Black Lives Matter, with him and his colleagues in the NBA and WNBA using their platform during the pandemic to speak out against the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and more.

Pioneers, inventors, and other contributors

Black American contributions outside sports, entertainment, and the arts are usually less known but are equally substantial. Dr. Charles Drew pioneered the blood bank. Based on his doctoral dissertation about "banked blood," he spearheaded the "Blood for Britain" project, which ultimately saved many of those wounded in World War II's critical Battle of Dunkirk. In 1941, he served as the director of the American Red Cross's plasma storage program for U.S. armed forces.

Both Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice fit into their individual appointments as Secretary of State so easily that most Americans spent little time pondering the historic appointment of a Black American to this critical position, nor the unprecedented succession of a Black American by another Black American. It's safe to assume most travelers to the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) during the 1984 Olympics were completely unaware that Black female architect Norma Merrick Sklarek designed Terminal One.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

Is it mere coincidence that Lewis Latimer served as draftsman for both Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison for the two inventions that people take for granted today? There's no doubt that Latimer's version of the light bulb using a carbon filament helped it stay bright longer. Without Garrett A. Morgan, the traffic light and the gas mask might not exist.

Discounting the enormity of Black American contributions to American history and culture overall is a big mistake. Black Americans have used their talents to benefit not just Black Americans but also all Americans and the world at large.

Challenges

Black Americans have excelled against tremendous odds. Few cultures have produced as many titans who hail from such humble backgrounds as slavery and Jim Crow. The formerly enslaved Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington were among the most prominent Americans of their day. Billionaire Oprah Winfrey, born poor in the Jim Crow South, was raised in a time when doing laundry for wealthy white people was as far as many Black women could aspire.

With each of these extraordinary individuals, education was the difference maker. Yet for much of American history, Black Americans haven't had access to the ladders by which most Americans climb to success.

Getting equal education

Securing a solid education has been crucial in the overall fight for equality. Education has provided the critical foundation from which Black Americans have waged their fight against countless other inequities, be it inferior housing, discriminatory hiring practices, or police brutality.

Despite hard-won battles against inequities in education, affirmative action is a constant target. Civil rights activists charged that Proposition 209, an amendment to the California constitution purportedly aimed at ending racial discrimination in public education and other public areas of interest, has, according to a 2020 report from EdSource, a nonprofit reporting on California's education challenges, resulted in a lower Black student enrollment in California State University and University of California institutions disproportionate to their Black high school graduation rates.

School desegregation efforts in the South and throughout the nation that only began in earnest in the 1970s has proven that the ills of 200-plus years of slavery and nearly 100 more of Jim Crow can't be erased in just 50 years or more. The impact of No Child Left Behind and an administration with Betsy DeVos heading the Department of Education, not to mention the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and student loans, only compounded the racial disparities in education, particularly as it pertained to the racial technology gap impacting less wealthy Black and other marginalized communities.

Achieving the American dream

Historically, the American dream eluded Black Americans. Immediately following the civil rights and Black Power movements, it no longer seemed true. Black Americans began voting and electing Black politicians. Poverty levels among Black Americans began falling as the Black middle class began expanding in the latter part of the 20th century. Better yet, a larger number of Black Americans became wealthy without hitting the lottery or becoming sports or entertainment celebrities.

In recent years, there's been less to cheer about. Shaking the vestiges of slavery and Jim Crow hasn't been easy for all. And although some Black Americans continue to excel financially and otherwise, many others are backtracking. As civil rights activist Reverend Jesse Jackson often reminded Americans, the playing field is still unequal in many ways:

- **Income:** Even though the white poor constitute 8 percent of the total white population, nearly 25 percent of the Black American population lives in poverty. Black American household income has been 60 percent of white American household income since 1980.
- **Wealth:** *Wealth* is the difference between assets (like homes and retirement accounts) and debt. The 2019 Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF), sponsored by the Federal Reserve Board in cooperation with the U.S. Treasury Department, found that white families, with median family wealth totaling $188,200, outpaced that of Black families, with median family wealth of just $24,100.
- **Discriminatory policies:** Revelations of unwritten discriminatory policies against Black Americans by corporations and other entities have come to light. In 1997, Avis Rent-A-Car paid a $3.3 million settlement for ignoring numerous complaints about a North Carolina franchisee that required higher credit card maximums and proof of employment from prospective Black customers but not others. Several studies revealed that it's not uncommon for Black Americans with the same credit history and assets as white Americans to pay more for a home mortgage or to sell their homes for considerably less.
- **Healthcare:** Healthcare disparities are even broader. According to statistics from 2019, Black infants were more than twice as likely to die as white infants, with Black mothers dying at three and four times the rates of white mothers. The COVID-19 pandemic, which took off in the U.S. in early 2020, revealed many more disparities in the healthcare system; Black people, even by November 2020, were nearly three times as likely to die from it.

Addressing the criminal justice system

According to the Sentencing Project, an advocacy group aimed at achieving a more equitable criminal justice system, 98,000 Black Americans were incarcerated in 1954 and 50 years later 884,500 were incarcerated in 2004. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2018, Black Americans, mostly men, composed nearly 33 percent of the prison population when the Black population as a whole, male and female, was just around 12 to 13 percent. And although the prison population dropped during Obama's presidency, the most significant change was among the white and Latino population.

GEORGE FLOYD AND OTHER POLICE KILLINGS

Video of the police killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, sent collective shock through many in the United States and globally. For 8 minutes and 46 seconds, Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin pressed his knee against Floyd's neck and did not remove it even when Floyd, who was completely unarmed, called for his mother. Instead, Chauvin waited until Floyd was dead at age 46. Floyd's crime? He was accused of passing off a counterfeit $20 bill. Seventeen-year-old Darnella Frazier captured it all on her cellphone. The public response, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, was an outpouring of protests largely in the name of Black Lives Matter by Americans of all races and ages in cities, big and small. Internationally, people protested in solidarity. Historically speaking, the fact that Chauvin was charged with any degree of murder for George Floyd's death marked progress.

Prior to Floyd's death, other Black people who had lost their lives at the hands of the police had become news headlines and hashtags. On August 9, 2014, Ferguson, Missouri, police officer Darren Wilson killed unarmed 18-year-old Michael Brown, who was later accused of stealing a box of Swisher Sweets cigars from a convenience store. Attempts to bring charges against Wilson failed under Black county prosecutor Wesley Bell, who had been elected in 2018 to replace Bob McCulloch, a white man who had been in the office since 1991.

Brown's killing came weeks after the July 17 death of Eric Garner, a 43-year-old father of six, in Staten Island. He was held in a chokehold by New York City police officer Daniel Pantaleo for unconfirmed allegations of him illegally selling cigarettes. Pantaleo ignored Garner's cries of "I can't breathe." Garner's death, captured on video, sparked outrage.

Outrage over Floyd's killing helped bring national attention to Breonna Taylor's shooting death. At just age 26, she was killed in her apartment by Louisville Metro police officers Jonathan Mattingly, Brett Hankison, and Myles Cosgrove on March 13, 2020. That attention prompted public responses from noted Black celebrities, with Oprah Winfrey, rapper Megan Thee Stallion, and LeBron James among them. Yet by February 2021, no arrests had materialized in Taylor's killing despite Kentucky's Republican attorney general Daniel Cameron being Black.

After witnessing Floyd's execution, something snapped for many Americans, who previously couldn't fathom that this kind of tragedy wasn't an anomaly. That response was much like that to Bloody Sunday in Selma, Alabama — the epic civil rights tragedy on the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965, when Alabama state troopers, along with random white men deputized that morning, physically attacked peaceful protesters, including John Lewis; television cameras captured the events. As with Trayvon Martin's death, Floyd's created a ripple whose impact would be felt for years to come.

As activism around unfair sentencing and the decriminalization of marijuana heated up, however, those arguments became more mainstream. Books like the 2010 *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (The New Press) by civil rights litigator and legal scholar Michelle Alexander and documentaries like Ava DuVernay's *13th* (2016), which was nominated for an Oscar and won an Emmy, greatly helped reinvigorate the fight. The greatest difference maker, however, has been the Black Lives Matter movement.

Black Lives Matter was founded by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi in 2013 in response to the acquittal of 28-year-old George Zimmerman. Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer, had shot to death unarmed 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, whom he deemed suspicious, on February 26, 2012, in Sanford, Florida. Known for its hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, the movement has been most often associated with its stance against police brutality and killings as well as the persistence of white supremacy and institutionalized racism.

Fighting systemic racism

Prior to the 2010s, people dismayed by the erosion of civil rights gains argued that the fight was more difficult because dismantling covert racism wasn't as galvanizing as dismantling overt racism. During the 1950s and 1960s, activists could point to "colored only" water fountains, public schools, and other visible manifestations of racial discrimination as clear evidence of racial injustice. Convincing Americans that the disproportionately high incarceration rates for Black Americans was rooted in slavery and Jim Crow was less compelling in the early 2000s. Plus there were also people who simply felt powerless to change it.

Anti-racism work, most notably by Ibram X. Kendi, author of the 2016 *Stamped from the Beginning* (Bold Type Books) and the 2019 *How to Be an Antiracist* (One World), found its way on mainstream news programs, as did the work of attorney and activist Bryan Stevenson to free Black men wrongly sentenced to death row. This raised awareness of the lynching of Black people throughout American history. Historian and political theorist Manning Marable, well-known for his scholarly work surrounding racism prior to his 2011 death, and other civil rights activists consistently argued that recognizing that the events of the past are indeed connected to the present is the first step in creating any strategy for a more equitable American society for all citizens.

Black Pride Goes Mainstream

During the 1960s, an especially turbulent time for the nation in general, Black Americans appeared to vocalize racial pride more, although that impression may have been the result of increased media attention. (In the 1920s, for example, tens

of thousands of Black people were members of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, which emphasized racial pride.)

James Brown's hit 1968 single "Say It Loud — I'm Black and I'm Proud" largely ended the usage of "colored" or "Negro" among Black Americans and others. Slogans such as "Black is beautiful" helped define the early 1970s. Black Americans began to expect more of other Americans, and total ignorance of Black American culture was no longer acceptable. Since the 1970s, it's been customary for the President of the United States to acknowledge Black History Month at the very least.

Celebrating Black heritage

Interest in Black American history spread beyond a few individuals. Demand for more information about Black American history resulted in corporate-funded PBS breakthrough series such as *Eyes on the Prize, Africans in America, The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow,* and *Slavery and the Making of America.* New scholarship and public demand inspired increasingly more in-depth coverage of critical aspects of Black American and American history that have shown, among other things, that slavery was an American institution and not just a peculiarity of the South.

General American culture also began embracing and acknowledging aspects of Black American culture. Curiously many now consider the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who was strongly disliked when he was killed in 1968, one of this nation's greatest Americans, and some white Americans proudly count themselves as allies to Black people and various anti-Black causes. Even with the push-back during the Donald Trump administration, it wasn't uncommon to find Black History Month celebrated in schools with few or no Black students.

During the Obama presidency (2009–2017), there was a notable shift in positive expressions of Black culture. President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama consistently incorporated historic and contemporary Black American culture into the White House, including

- Hosting screenings of films such as 2016's *Hidden Figures,* about the role Black women played in getting American astronauts to the moon
- Acquiring art pieces like the 1940s-era *Lift Up Thy Voice and Sing* by William H. Johnson
- Sponsoring musical performances featuring the hip-hop band The Roots, rapper Common, singers Jill Scott and John Legend, and even hip-hop R&B trio BBD (Ricky Bell, Michael Bivins, and Ronnie Devoe of 1980s New Edition fame)

- Sparking the full production of Lin-Manuel Miranda's groundbreaking theatrical phenom *Hamilton,* which created stars out of several Black actors, including Leslie Odom Jr., Daveed Diggs, Jasmine Cephas Jones, and Renée Goldsberry

American literature classes include the works of Black Americans. *The Narrative of Frederick Douglass* is widely read in high schools, and general Southern Literature courses include the work of Black Southern writers Zora Neale Hurston, Ernest Gaines, and Alice Walker. In fact, Ernest Gaines arguably became one of the most celebrated Southern writers since William Faulkner, and Nobel Prize–winner Toni Morrison is widely considered one of the greatest writers the nation has ever produced.

In the pop culture landscape, more than just Black Americans helped the 2018 film *Black Panther,* the Marvel Cinematic Universe's first Black cast offering, top the box office. Black culture clearly began scoring major wins in all aspects of American life.

Black cultural tourism booms

A boom in cultural tourism in the early 2000s reflected the growing interest in the Black American experience. People of all races attended landmark exhibits such as the New York Historical Society's "Slavery in New York." Almost every state uncovered enough information of specific relevance to Black Americans to create an American heritage tour. Many exhibits have gone online; for example, the Library of Congress long ago began digitizing some of its collection. The same is true of the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Cultural tourism specifically addressing slavery and emancipation increased in popularity, even in the South, where the institution of slavery was more pervasive. This heightened interest contributed to unique museums such as

- **The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center:** This museum in Cincinnati, Ohio, gives visitors a taste of the Underground Railroad, along with the various escape strategies used by those who were enslaved.
- **The Whitney Plantation Historic District:** Less than an hour outside of New Orleans, this former sugar plantation dating back to 1872 has served as a slavery museum, dismantling the myths since 2014.

» **The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration:** Operated by celebrated civil and human rights attorney and activist Bryan Stevenson's EJI in Montgomery since 2018, this museum sits where enslaved people were once warehoused not far from an auction block and other sites where Black people were harmed.

Black communities across the nation have a long history of creating institutions to preserve their history. In time, those institutions began attracting visitors beyond the communities they served. Notable institutions include Chicago's venerable DuSable Museum of African American History, named for the Haitian fur trader Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable, the city's first permanent settler and founder, and the Weeksville Heritage Center, one of the few intact remnants of a free Black Northern pre-Civil War community, in Brooklyn, New York.

Then there are institutions commemorating the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and death, including the King Center in Atlanta (envisioned by Coretta Scott King), the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis (located at the Lorraine Motel, the site of King's assassination), and the national memorial in Washington, D.C. The following sections cover this memorial as well as the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

A memorial for a King

On November 13, 2006, not far from the Capitol building (which Black enslaved labor largely built) and Pennsylvania Avenue (where enslaved Black Americans were once sold), three of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s children were present for the groundbreaking of the national Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial. "We give Martin Luther King his rightful place among the many Americans honored on the National Mall," President George W. Bush told a crowd of several thousand that included former President Clinton, who had signed the bill authorizing the memorial; poet Maya Angelou; and King's longtime civil rights friends and comrades Jesse Jackson and Ambassador Andrew Young. King, Bush said, "redeemed the promise of America."

Congressman John Lewis, who spoke at the historic March on Washington for Freedom and Jobs in 1963 when King delivered his majestic "I have a dream" speech, broke ground on the memorial in an emotional moment. Not so many decades before, police violently had beaten Lewis, a former president of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), as he marched with King from Selma to Montgomery, seeking the justice to which all Americans are entitled.

Conceived by King's Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity brothers in 1983, the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial opened in 2011 as a fitting tribute. Hurricane Irene disrupted the original August 23, 2011, dedication, but the reset for October 16, just four years shy of 1995's historic Million Man March held on the same day, went well.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Back in 1964, King predicted that the country would elect a Black president between 25 and 40 years later. On the day of the dedication of his memorial, President Obama said, "Our work is not done. And so on this day, in which we celebrate a man and a movement that did so much for this country, let us draw strength from those earlier struggles. First and foremost, let us remember that change has never been quick."

A Black American museum on the National Mall

In 2003, when President George W. Bush signed a bill to create the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) on the National Mall, there was no way to gauge how much of a sensation it would become. When the museum, which had been a concept dating as far back as 1915, opened September 24, 2016, President Barack Obama was in the last months of his presidency. The design chosen back in 2009 came from Black American architects Philip Freelon and J. Max Bond Jr., along with Ghanaian-British architect David Adjaye. Black billionaires Oprah Winfrey and Robert Smith donated $21 and $20 million, respectively, to help build the museum, which was constructed in part by two Black-owned construction companies, Smoot Construction of Columbus, Ohio, and H.J. Russell & Company of Atlanta, Georgia.

Joined by four generations of the Bonner family, including 99-year-old matriarch Ruth, whose father had been born enslaved in Mississippi, President Obama helped ring the Freedom Bell, borrowed to officially open the museum headed by Lonnie Bunch III. The bell had been acquired in 1886 by the First Baptist Church of Williamsburg, Virginia, one of the oldest Black churches in the nation (dating back to 1776). In just four months, a million people visited the 350,000-square-foot, 10-story museum, making it one of the Smithsonian's most visited museums. It has more than 40,000 items in its collection.

Reconciling the Past to Create the Future

Slavery remains a topic chock-full of emotions for many Americans, as former Virginia Governor L. Douglas Wilder, the first elected Black governor in the nation and the grandson of enslaved people, learned in his quest to launch the United States National Slavery Museum in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Attracting the support of both corporate and individual donors proved difficult for Wilder because many people don't consider a museum about slavery a healing mechanism that can foster reconciliation with the past.

THE 1619 PROJECT

History, for a long time, suggested the first Africans who arrived in British North America, as opposed to Africans who were already in other parts of the "New World," held a legal status closer to indentured servants. This classification, however, completely ignored the fact that those Africans were kidnapped from present-day Angola and arrived in what is now Virginia on a pirated slave ship. Although their status wasn't clearly an enslaved one legally, it was in practice. In fewer than 50 years, however, "African" and "slave" would indeed become legally interchangeable.

In 2019, *The New York Times* commemorated the 400 years since those Africans' arrival with its ambitious longform journalism initiative, the 1619 Project, intended to place slavery and Black American contributions at the center of the American narrative. In her introductory essay, staff writer and 1619 Project lead Nikole Hannah-Jones, who received her bachelor's degree in history and African American Studies from Notre Dame, argued that preserving slavery was a motivating factor behind the American Revolution.

That sweeping generalization threatened to derail the great enthusiasm around the project, which included journalists (Wesley Morris and Trymaine Lee), artists (filmmakers, poets, writers, playwrights like Barry Jenkins, Yusef Komunyakaa, Jacqueline Woodson and Jesmyn Ward, and Lynn Nottage), activists (Bryan Stevenson), and a handful of academics (Khalil Gibran Muhammad), tackling a myriad of issues, including the prison system, the racial wealth gap, and other fallout connected to slavery and Jim Crow, a system in which Black people were legally discriminated against based on race alone generally associated with the American south where there were even separate "white" and "colored" water fountains.

Historians of varying political persuasions pushed back against Hannah-Jones's assertion, with respected white Princeton historian Sean Wilentz even circulating a letter objecting to the project. Black historian Leslie M. Harris wrote an opinion piece titled "I Helped Fact-Check the 1619 Project. The Times Ignored Me" for *Politico* in March 2020. She claimed her objections to Hannah-Jones's assertion that slavery prompted the Revolutionary War were initially dismissed but also acknowledged that Hannah-Jones later promised to amend it and that, even with its issues, the 1619 Project was "a much-needed corrective to the blindly celebratory histories." Even with Republican politicians like Tom Cotton in Arkansas threatening to prohibit K-12 schools from accessing federal funds for any curriculum related to the 1619 Project, the climate of racial reckoning that had inhabited the country could not be stopped.

(continued)

(continued)

Prior to Hannah-Jones and the 1619 Project, Ta-Nehisi Coates ignited a fire with his 2014 article "The Case for Reparations," for *The Atlantic.* Coates traced the nation's injustice against Black Americans by following Clyde Ross as he moved from being raised in a sharecropping family in 1920s Mississippi through serving in the military to trying to buy a house in Chicago. "The Case for Reparations" awakened many Americans to the reality that Jim Crow wasn't just a Southern institution or practice. It also helped many of them to connect the dots between slavery, Jim Crow, and the racial injustice Black Americans still face.

Slavery as an American (not Southern) institution

Slavery, as evidenced by the 1619 Project (see the nearby sidebar), is the primary unresolved issue in race relations in this country. Despite the nation's tremendous gains, many people still fail to acknowledge the magnitude of slavery within the United States. They either don't understand or refuse to acknowledge that it was the economic backbone of the colonies and later the country. Although some businesses, such as Philip Morris and Wachovia Bank, have acknowledged their ties to slavery, many others have not. Enslaved labor, for example, helped build early railroad lines and institutions such as Brown University. Ultimately slavery continues to matter centuries later because its white supremacist ideology subjugating Black Americans has historically been transferred to federal, state, and city government levels, as well as other entities, resulting in Black Americans experiencing racial bias, job discrimination, redlining, and other inequities only based on race.



TECHNICAL STUFF

Deadria Farmer-Paellmann, a pioneering force behind the Corporate Restitution Movement (see the upcoming section "A question of reparations") who is also credited for energizing the contemporary reparations movement, began tracing corporate ties to slavery in 1997. She rose to national prominence in 2000 when insurance giant Aetna apologized for its ties to slavery after learning that a subsidiary of the company insured those enslaved at one time. Farmer-Paellmann, an attorney, then uncovered similar links for over 50 companies. Because of Farmer-Paellmann's actions, several local and state governments now require that companies seeking public contracts disclose any links to slavery.

Flagging the issue

The Confederate battle flag flew during Civil War battles fought by the Confederacy to preserve its right to practice slavery. Yet for a long time, many non-Black Americans, and a few Black Americans as well, couldn't understand why the presence of the Confederate battle flag, particularly in government facilities or in the Mississippi state flag, bothered so many Black Americans.

Those who defended displaying the Confederate battle flag, also known as the Southern Cross, charged that Black Americans were too sensitive and that the flag merely represented Southern heritage and honored the Confederate dead and veterans. Supporters then often failed to address the link between white Southern heritage and slavery and Jim Crow. Although they defended the gentility of the antebellum South in the symbol of the Confederacy, others simply could not ignore the savagery of enslaving millions of people.

The fact that the Confederate battle flag, the most well-known of the three flags associated with the Confederacy during the Civil War, resurfaced in the South during the intense struggle to dismantle Jim Crow compounded the issue. South Carolina, for example, began flying the Confederate battle flag over the statehouse in 1961 to commemorate the centennial of the beginning of the Civil War in 1861 at Fort Sumter near Charleston (read about the Civil War in Chapter 6). It wasn't until 2000, after the NAACP spearheaded an economic boycott of the state, that the flag was taken down from atop the Capitol dome.

Instead of South Carolina lawmakers ending its allegiance to the Confederate battle flag, it compromised to shift it to a nearby monument for Confederate soldiers on statehouse grounds. And making matters worse, South Carolina lawmakers passed the 2000 Heritage Act, requiring a two-thirds vote of each house of the General Assembly to change it, to protect the flag as well as Confederate and Civil War monuments across the state.

Change came only after activist Bree Newsome was arrested June 27, 2015, for removing the Confederate battle flag from South Carolina statehouse grounds to protest the Charleston church massacre just ten days earlier on June 17, when a 21-year-old white South Carolinian killed nine Black South Carolinians during Bible study at historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, well known as Emanuel AME, founded in 1817. Although the flag was back flying within an hour, it permanently came down July 10, with Governor Nikki Haley, the daughter of Indian immigrants, reversing her previous stance to never remove the flag.

In 2020, the impossible happened in Mississippi. On the heels of the Southeastern Conference (SEC) — one of the most powerful sports entities in all of college sports — and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), which governs all college sports, vowed not to hold official championship events in the state as long as the Mississippi state flag continued to incorporate the Confederate battle flag. The state legislature voted to change the state flag on June 28, 2020, with Governor Tate Reeves signing it into law on June 30. Mississippi voters overwhelmingly approved the flag's new design prominently featuring a magnolia, the state flower, on November 3, 2020, with the new flag becoming official January 11, 2021.

A question of reparations

Although there has never been a lack of evidence that slavery was indeed real, supporters of the reparations movement in its various iterations seeking to obtain acknowledgment and compensation for the descendants of those enslaved and, in some instances, Jim Crow, have historically encountered tremendous resistance. Simply pondering a formal apology for slavery created a furor during the Bill Clinton presidency in 1998. President George W. Bush's 2003 apology in Goree Island in Senegal, from which kidnapped Africans were transported into slavery, didn't attract the same furor. Although there were mixed reactions to the Senate passing an apology for enslaving Black Americans and their African descendants for more than two centuries as well as subsequent decades of racial segregation and injustice that followed in 2009, it did help open another important window.

In the 2010s, American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) gained steam among many Black Americans both as a movement associated with leaders Yvette Carnell and Antonio Moore and as a general concept of Black Americans who trace their lineage back to those enslaved in the United States. For many, white and Black, Ta-Nehisi Coates's groundbreaking 2014 article "The Case for Reparations" in *The Atlantic* helped ground the movement.

Coates, who gained an incredible following after the article, was even called upon to testify before a House Judiciary subcommittee hearing on H.R. 40, a bill sponsored by Texas Democrat Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee that Michigan Democrat Congressman John Conyers introduced back in 1989; it coincided with Juneteenth, a celebration dating back to June 19, 1865, popularly described as commemorating when enslaved Black people in Galveston, Texas first learned of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, and believed themselves free. The H.R. 40 Bill to Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act remained in discussion even in February 2021.

Contrary to popular belief, reparations isn't a concept specific to Black Americans. For example, the U.S. government offered the following reparations:

- Many Confederate slaveholders who lost their land during the war got it back.
- Slaveholders in Washington, D.C., who emancipated those they enslaved received compensation for their losses.
- When 11 Italian men were killed via lynching in New Orleans on March 14, 1891, the U.S. government, under President Benjamin Harrison, paid $2,211.90 to each of their families in Italy, a total amount of $24,330.90.

- The federal government paid a settlement to Japanese Americans wrongfully interred in camps during World War II.
- In 1994, Florida compensated survivors and descendants of the 1923 Rosewood Massacre, in which white Floridians attacked Black Floridians. (Read about the Rosewood Massacre in Chapter 7.)

The "forty acres and a mule" that General William Sherman promised to Black Americans after the Civil War didn't really pan out (refer to Chapter 6), and no form of reparations were paid on a systematic scale to those formerly enslaved. Those who advocated compensation for ex-slaves, as they were referred to, include Alabama native William R. Vaughan, a white Democrat who proposed an ex-slave pension and succeeded in getting nine such bills introduced in Congress from 1890 to 1903 but not in passing them.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Some advocates of reparations have argued that the movement was about more than money. Prior to his 2011 passing, respected historian and political theorist Manning Marable argued that reparations efforts served a greater purpose. "What it's about is an effort to reengage the American people in a discussion of racism in American life," Marable explained. "It's not about the money. [We want to] restart a genuine dialogue about racism and the economic consequences of slavery." Citing the Black-white income gap and denied access to capital, among other injustices, some economists estimate that racism costs Black Americans as much as $10 billion annually.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

CALLIE HOUSE

Born enslaved in 1861, Callie House was a washerwoman and widow living in Nashville, Tennessee. She was an important force in the ex-slave pension or reparations movement through her work with the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association, which began in the 1890s. Basing her argument on the fact that ex-Union soldiers received pensions, House specifically targeted the $68 million collected in taxes on rebel cotton to compensate ex-slaves. Trumped-up charges of postal fraud erroneously suggested that her organization, which succeeded in galvanizing 300,000 ex-slaves across several states, was without merit. House's imprisonment in 1917 on postal fraud ended her fight but not her legacy. Historian and law professor Mary Frances Berry brought the efforts of Callie House into heated contemporary reparations debates with her book *My Face Is Black Is True: Callie House and the Struggle for Ex-Slave Reparations* (2005).

Cash payouts for reparations, however, is what most Americans, good or bad, envision. By some estimates, that number, should it ever materialize on a federal level, could hit between $10 and $12 trillion. BET (Black Entertainment Television) co-founder Bob Johnson and one-time billionaire proposed a $14 trillion plan in 2020. In 2019, the Evanston city council, in the Chicago metro area, agreed to a reparations effort led by Black Alderwoman Robin Rue Simmons for housing discrimination. Two years later, the city made national news with its proposal to make its $25,000 reparations payments for home improvements or mortgage assistance to its Black residents who suffered discriminatory housing practices who had lived in or had been descended from an Evanston resident dating back to before 1969 through a marijuana tax.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Glimpsing life on the African continent prior to the transatlantic slave trade
- Developing the transatlantic slave trade
- Enslaving Africans in Latin American and Caribbean colonies

Chapter 2

From Empires to Bondage: Bringing Africans to the Americas

Mass enslavement is perhaps the most profound consequence of Columbus's so-called "discovery" of the New World. European nations, led by Portugal and Spain, came to the New World in search of riches, but they lacked a workforce necessary to procure them. Attempts to use the indigenous population proved unsatisfactory, so the eventual solution was to import Africans. This decision changed the complexion of what became the Americas. Spain and Portugal's early dominance prompted England and other countries to seek their fortunes in the New World, ultimately leading to the establishment of Black American culture in what would become the United States.

Before delving into the specifics of Black American history, it's necessary to recognize the chain of events that brought Africans to the Americas and weigh the impact of those events. The African continent was rich with history long before Europeans began pillaging it. When Europeans arrived there, they found three main empires: Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. This chapter explores these African empires. It also examines the origins of the transatlantic slave trade as well as the implementation of mass enslavement in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Touring African Empires

Fifty-four countries exist on the African continent with more than 1.3 billion people who speak between 1,500 and 2,000 languages. However, most Black Americans trace their roots to West Africa and Central Africa. Countries in this area are plentiful and include Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Nigeria, Mali, and Senegal, as well as Congo, Chad, Cameroon, and Democratic Republic of Congo.

The African continent had a tremendous history before Europeans ever set foot there. In Black American history, three empires — Ghana, Mali, and Songhai (which I discuss in the following sections) — are particularly important because many enslaved Africans hailed from these regions (see Figure 2-1).



FIGURE 2-1: Ghana, Mali, and Songhai Empires.

© John Wiley & Sons, Inc.



REMEMBER

Slavery existed throughout the world, and on the African continent it differed from what would become institutionalized in the United States (see Chapter 3). It's important to acknowledge that Black Americans, like most Americans, have a story whose beginnings predate life in the Americas.

Ghana Empire

Located on the western coast of Africa in what is now eastern Senegal, southwest Mali, Ghana, and southern Mauritania, the Ghana Empire, populated by the Soninke, rose in the 5th century. Its capital city, Koumbi Saleh (also Kumbi Saleh), became the center of the important trans-Saharan trade connecting West Africa with Mediterranean countries. Trading gold and salt, in particular, made Ghana rich.

Historians often single out the rule of Tenkamenin (sometimes Tunka Manin), who came to power in 1062, because of his expert governance. Every day, Tenkamenin went among the people and listened to their concerns, giving them an audience until justice prevailed. Although Ghana tolerated Islam during that time, particularly because Muslim traders generated wealth, it hadn't converted, unlike other parts of Africa. The Almoravids, a band of Muslims, first attempted to bring Ghana under Islamic rule in 1068, but Ghana fought them off until 1076. Eventually the Soninke regained control of Ghana, but it was too late to prevent its complete decline by the 13th century.


HISTORICAL ROOTS

Ghana's people, the Soninke, know Ghana as Wagadu, meaning "Land of Herds," by written accounts and as "Land of the Great Herds" by oral accounts. Europeans, however, took their lead from the term "ghana," meaning "warrior king" — a term used to describe Wagadu's ruler — and renamed the region the Ghana Empire. The European term is the more commonly used one in Western culture.

Mali

According to oral history, between 1235 and 1238, Sundiata Keita (sometimes Mari Jata) defeated Sumanguru, Ghana's last great ruler, to end Ghana's dominance and begin the Mali Empire, which included parts of Nigeria and the Guinea forests. However, Mansa Musa (sometimes Mansa Moussa), Mali's Muslim ruler from roughly 1307 to 1332, attracted the most attention for Mali outside Africa with the empire's tremendous wealth, largely accumulated through Ghana's salt and gold mines.


TECHNICAL STUFF

In 1324, Mansa Musa's Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, became legendary. As the legend goes, Mansa Musa traveled with a caravan of 60,000 — including 12,000 enslaved people, 500 of them equipped with staffs of gold — and distributed 80 camel loads of gold dust to the poor. He gave so much gold away in Egypt that gold prices reportedly plummeted.

During Mansa Musa's rule, elaborate mosques were built in Timbuktu, Jenne, and Gao, among other places. Eventually Timbuktu became a highly respected intellectual and commercial center. Good government is cited frequently as one of the main reasons behind Mali's relatively long reign as an important African empire. But in the 15th century, Europeans, captivated by Africa's wealth, began penetrating the continent. These incursions coincided with Mali's decline.

Songhai

By the 15th century, the Songhai (also Songhay) Empire emerged and, under the leadership of Sonni Ali (sometimes Sunni Ali or Sonni Ali Ber), took over the Niger region and encompassed the once-mighty Mali Empire. Taking advantage of Mali's declining empire, Ali conquered Timbuktu in 1469; this move immediately established Songhai as a major power. In 1493, Askia Mohammad, a powerful general, overthrew the government. During his rule, Songhai became an intellectual center, and he used his Hajj to connect with scholars and other heads of state in his efforts to strengthen the Songhai Empire and assist Islam's expansion into West Africa. With that knowledge, he standardized trade, policed trade routes, and instituted a bureaucratic system of government. His son, Askia Musa, overthrew him in 1528. The Songhai Empire fell in the 16th century when the Moroccans overtook it.

WHICH WAY TO TIMBUKTU?

Prosperous trans-Saharan trade routes transformed Timbuktu into a major economic and cultural powerhouse beginning in the 13th century. A city on par with ancient Rome, Timbuktu grew even more in stature during the Mali Empire, which controlled the wealthy gold-salt trade routes in the area. It was during the Songhai (Songhay) Empire, however, that Timbuktu really emerged as the spiritual and intellectual center of the Muslim world. Its great Koranic Sankore University not only attracted some of the world's best minds but also garnered praise from many non-Muslims.

Sadly, when the Songhai Empire declined in the late 16th century, so did Timbuktu. When the Atlantic slave trade began, Portugal traders ended Timbuktu's reign as a major commercial center. Contemporary Timbuktu hasn't fared well, either. In 1990, because of increasing desertification that has destroyed the vegetation and water supply, Timbuktu made UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger. (UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.) Sand threatens to bury the city and its great monuments completely.

Interaction with the rest of the world

Africans weren't isolated from the rest of the world. European and Asian contact with Africans was substantial, as evidenced by the following facts:

- East African societies were in contact with their Asian counterparts very early on, and the interaction was markedly strong. Beginning in 900 AD, African sailors and merchants were traveling to South Asia.
- Ethiopians lived in Greece around the fifth century BC.
- Because of trade on and off the continent, Africans traveled to many European countries for business.
- In 711, the Moors, Muslims who hailed from North Africa, began their rule over the Iberian Peninsula (present-day Spain and Portugal). Portugal freed itself from Moorish rule in the late 13th century, but Spain didn't completely free itself of Moorish rule until 1492.

THE EGYPTIAN DEBATE

Denied knowledge of their specific lineage, many Black Americans have long claimed the entire African continent as their "Motherland." That includes Egypt, with its pyramids and pharaohs. Although most Black Americans can't trace their direct ancestry back to Egypt, there is no denying that Egypt is in Africa. Yet, historically, there has been intense debate around whether ancient Egyptians were Black and whether they made significant contributions to civilization at large. Scholars who addressed Egyptian contributions and race include W.E.B. Du Bois, Cheikh Anta Diop, and Martin Bernal, particularly their books *The World and Africa* (1947), *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (1989), and the three-volume *Black Athena* (1987, 1991, 2006). The stance for these scholars is earlier Egyptians were Black.

Hollywood has traditionally cast white actors as Egyptians in various films, including Elizabeth Taylor in *Cleopatra* (1963) and Christian Bale in *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014). Michael Jackson countered this tendency in his 1992 John Singleton–directed "Remember the Time" video/short film by depicting ancient Egyptians as Black, with Eddie Murphy starring as Pharaoh Ramses II and model Iman as Queen Nefertiti.



There's also reason to believe that West African traders established commercial relationships with the indigenous American people long before Christopher Columbus's famous 1492 voyage. In fact, archaeologists have found artifacts to strengthen the idea of Africans in the area of Mexico. Mali, according to some Arabic records, sent at least two expeditions across the Atlantic between 1305 and 1312. Some scholars also claim that Columbus, in his journals, noted that Africans were already in the New World when he arrived. Certainly the discovery of skeletal remains resembling those of Africans in Central America, coupled with the African features found in the art of indigenous Americans and the similarities between the language patterns of early Americans and Africans, strongly suggest Africans could have preceded Columbus to the Americas. Ivan Van Sertima's *They Came Before Columbus,* published in 1976, is a classic text on the African presence in the Americas prior to the transatlantic slave trade.

Origins of the Transatlantic Slave Trade

Portugal's search for wealth, aided by it and Spain settling the Americas, launched the lucrative transatlantic slave trade. As other European countries scrambled for their own riches in the New World, trafficking Africans became more competitive. By 1650, the Dutch, English, and French challenged Portugal's monopoly. Africans also aided the transatlantic slave trade.

Because Europeans arrived in Africa during financially challenging years, participation in the slave trade generated wealth for some of Africa's poorer states. That wealth became so attractive that Dahomey, a West African kingdom that had vowed not to contribute to the slave trade, eventually became a key trading center. When Africans began resisting the institution in the 18th century, Europeans, who possessed gunpowder and other warfare advantages, easily repelled them. Initially Africans participated in the slave trade primarily because slavery, inside and outside the continent, had been a common practice for centuries.

Slavery on the African continent

Unfortunately, every major civilization and almost every ethnic group has practiced slavery in one form or another. Africa was no different: Slavery existed on the African continent prior to the Atlantic or transatlantic slave trade. No matter who practiced it, however, there's little evidence that slavery was ever pleasant. Slaveholders in ancient Greece, Rome, India, and China beat and killed those they enslaved at will, and during elaborate rituals, the Aztecs may have cut out the hearts of those they enslaved. Prior to Portugal's initiation of the Atlantic and transatlantic slave trade, this was largely the case in Africa.

ELMINA CASTLE

Built in 1482 by the Portuguese to protect Portugal's interests on the Gold Coast and owned by the Dutch and the British at different points in its history, Elmina Castle (originally São Jorge da Mina or St. George's Castle) is the oldest surviving European structure south of the Sahara. By the 1500s, it became a site for the deadly transatlantic slave trade. Beginning in 1637, when the Dutch took control of the fort, Elmina Castle saw at least 30,000 African captives pass through its halls annually until 1814. Held in dungeons and packed on top of each other, often for days, these Africans were forced through "the door of no return." Elmina Castle was such an important outpost during the height of the transatlantic slave trade that it housed cannons to protect itself from other European slave traders.

England, Elmina's last owner, seized control in 1872 and relinquished the fort to Ghanaian leader Kwame Nkrumah in 1957. During the 1990s, Ghana began an exhaustive renovation of the site and the surrounding area, which includes Cape Coast Castle, another important fixture in the slave trade visited by President Barack Obama and his family in 2009. Today, Elmina Castle is a tourist attraction and a UNESCO World Heritage Monument. It was prominent in Ghana's Year of Return campaign coinciding with the 400-year commemoration of the arrival of the first Africans in Virginia in 1619.

Captors either sold or kept Africans they captured. (Early slavery on the African continent was also a punishment for crime, retribution, and so forth.) Usually these Africans became the property of the chief or the head of the family. Some of those enslaved served as human sacrifices in royal ceremonies. For the most part, children couldn't be sold and often became trusted family members. When Muslims invaded Africa, the system changed slightly. Purchasing enslaved people became more common than capturing them. Sometimes Muslims seized women for their harems and forced men to serve in the military and perform menial services. Some of those enslaved ended up in Arabia and Persia, among other Islamic strongholds. Still, even under Muslim rule, slavery wasn't as harsh as it would become in the Americas, particularly in the United States. In Africa an enslaved individual could rise to a prominent position and even purchase an enslaved individual. This changed with the European slave trade and its development in the New World.

Launching the European slave trade

Moved by tales of Africa's great wealth, the Portuguese prince known as Henry the Navigator sponsored several voyages to Africa as early as the 1420s. These voyages followed Portugal's 1415 seizure of Ceuta, a Moor stronghold in Morocco, which halted the spread of Islam and promoted Christianity in the region instead. In 1441, Henry's explorers penetrated Africa deeper than previous Europeans had and brought back 12 Africans caught near the coast of northern Mauritania.

Most sources cite the 1444 voyage that resulted in the capture and eventual sale of around 240 Africans in Lisbon as the first slave voyage to Africa. Within ten years, Portugal imported roughly 1,000 Africans a year to meet the tremendous demand for domestics, *stevedores* (dockworkers to load and unload ships), and agricultural workers. Because Henry the Navigator considered himself a devout Christian, his ships sailed under the Order of Christ. Therefore, those African captives often converted to Christianity.



REMEMBER

Initially, Europeans captured Africans themselves. (They also purchased men who were being held for crimes.) They didn't involve other Africans until later. Additionally, the first Africans enslaved by the Portuguese weren't subjected to race-based discrimination because race didn't predetermine their servitude at that time, and race wasn't constructed at this time either.

Even though the success of these voyages stimulated more competition, the Portuguese ruled the slave trade for nearly a century. The 1479 Treaty of Alcáçovas settled the Castilian succession of Spain, allowing Isabella to become queen; in return, Spain conceded the slave trade to Portugal in addition to allowing Portugal to supply her with Africans to enslave. Settling those concerns allowed Portugal to expand its dominion over the slave trade; one example of this expansion was the construction of the fort Elmina Castle in 1482 in what is now Ghana (see the nearby sidebar for more about Elmina Castle).

When Columbus gave Spain a claim to the New World in 1492, it took little time for Spain to introduce slavery there. By 1501, the governor of Hispaniola (the island now occupied by Haiti and the Dominican Republic) was already requesting enslaved African labor. The first African captives arrived in Hispaniola in 1502. Reportedly these enslaved people, relatively few in number, came directly from Spain, which had a long history of slavery. After the cultivation of sugar began in the New World, the demand for enslaved labor increased. By 1518, Portugal was supplying Spain with African captives in large numbers. As Portugal established its own colonies, notably Brazil, in the Americas and Spain expanded its colonies as well, the transatlantic slave trade grew.



HISTORICAL ROOTS

As the Renaissance swept across Europe, new ideas took hold. The end of feudalism resulted in the emergence of cities and a greater reliance on commercial trade. By the time the Industrial Revolution hit its stride in the mid to late 18th century, a culture of greed and profit already existed. These changes created a greater demand for enslaved labor. Although Spain, Portugal, France, England, and the Netherlands, among other countries, played major roles in the transatlantic slave trade and slavery, the Catholic Church and Africans weren't innocent bystanders.

AFRICANS HITCH A RIDE WITH NEW WORLD EXPLORERS

Although many scholars refuse to entertain the idea that Africans beat Columbus to the New World, they do concede that Africans were prominent in conventional stories of the New World's discovery. It was once widely believed that Pedro Alonso Niño (also Pietro Alonso), Columbus's navigator on his 1492 voyage uncovering America, was African. Today scholars claim Niño was erroneously translated into "nignus" and then "El Negro." Also, at the time of the journey, the Spanish banned Africans from traveling to the New World. After Spain lifted its ban in 1501, there's no denying the many Africans who traveled to the New World, however.

Accounts of Africans accompanying explorers include the following:

- Thirty Africans were present when Vasco Núñez de Balboa discovered the Pacific Ocean.
- Africans were with Hernán Cortés in Mexico.
- Esteban (sometimes Estevanico) was pivotal to Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca's exploration of the modern-day southwestern United States. Although Native Americans killed Esteban, his travels to the southwestern interior greatly aided the Spanish conquest of the Southwest.
- French explorations, especially voyages to the Mississippi Valley and Canada, included Africans.

Enslaving Africans in Latin America and the Caribbean

Following the arrival of the first African captives to Hispaniola in 1502, it didn't take long to institute slavery into other colonies such as the Spanish-controlled islands of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Jamaica as well as into Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, and the Portuguese-controlled Brazil. By 1620, 300,000 Africans had arrived in the Americas. Portugal, which supplied an estimated 130,000 African captives to Brazil alone and at least 80,000 African captives to Mexico, was initially the largest importer of enslaved labor.

Columbus crossed the Atlantic to find wealth, so Spain, which claimed one-fifth of the wealth discovered, had ample motivation to sanction enslaved labor for mining copper, gold, and silver. Work in the mines was very taxing, but Africans

seemed in greater supply than the quickly dwindling indigenous population. When mining appeared to be a financial bust, cultivating sugar seemed lucrative. Hispaniola built the Caribbean's first sugar mill in 1516. Spain had numerous sugar mills in various locations of its European empire, so it already had an enslaved African population experienced in cultivating sugar. The industry grew so rapidly, however — and those enslaved died so quickly because of the hard labor associated with cultivating sugar — that Spain didn't have enough Africans already enslaved in Europe to feed the New World demand.

Working in the sugar mills and fields was almost as grueling and dangerous as working in the mines. Being poorly fed didn't help. Unbelievably, many of those enslaved in Latin America (the region comprising South and Central America) weren't given food to eat and were expected to find food in between their many working hours. Despite the toll on human life, the sugar industry flourished in the Americas, with Brazil and Mexico initially leading the way. By the 17th and 18th centuries, the Caribbean islands of Jamaica, Barbados, and Cuba were also significant sugar producers and exporters.


REMEMBER

Enslaved African labor wasn't just used on sugar plantations or in discovering wealth. Africans helped build the New World by working as bricklayers, plasterers, and blacksmiths. They planted and maintained crops and tended to sheep and cattle. As they had in Spain, both enslaved and free Africans worked as domestics, caring for children, cooking, and cleaning. (See the section, "Seeking freedom," later in this chapter for more on free Africans in the colonies.) Only a few areas in the New World were devoid of African contributions.


REMEMBER

By paving the way for slavery in the New World, Spain and Portugal specifically established the economic framework tying enslaved labor to industrial enterprises. American slaveholders, to a certain degree, took cues from Latin American and Caribbean slavery and, as a result, regulated enslaved behavior much more rigorously than either Spain or Portugal had.

Sanctioning and opposing slavery

Europeans didn't immediately turn to enslaved African labor as the solution to their labor challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean. At first, Europeans used both Native Americans and Africans for labor, but the hard work and European diseases such as smallpox decimated the Native American population. In one part of Hispaniola, the native population went from one million to only a few thousand in two decades. By contrast, Africans became the ideal solution because they seemed plentiful.

With the papal bull *Dum Diversas*, Pope Nicholas V invested Portugal's King Alfonso V with the authority to enslave non-Christians in 1452. So, early on, the transatlantic slave trade had the Catholic Church's blessing. King Charles I of Spain (also Holy Roman Emperor Charles V) sanctioned the transatlantic slave trade from Africa to the Americas by permitting the importation of 4,000 Africans to New Spain in 1518.

Ironically, the biggest boost to African enslavement came from a man who fervently opposed slavery — for the native population, anyway: Bishop Bartolomé de Las Casas initially supported importing African captives because he saw it as a means to keep Native Americans free and alive. He later regretted his decision.

There was, however, early opposition to the transatlantic slave trade and slavery.

- Pope Pius II issued a letter in October 1462 condemning the slave trade.
- Pope Leo X decried both slavery and the slave trade in a papal bull in 1514. When Christian pirates presented him with the captured Granadan Leo Africanus, who later wrote about Africa, the pope freed him.
- Pope John III issued the *Sublimis Deus* (often erroneously cited as *Sublimus Dei*) in 1537, decrying enslaving indigenous people in the Americas and others simply because they weren't Christians.
- The Archbishop of Mexico, Alonso de Montúfar, wrote the Spanish Crown in 1560 questioning African enslavement.
- Fray Tomás de Mercado, also an economist, questioned the slave trade as early as 1569 but most extensively in *A Critique of the Slave Trade* in 1587.
- Mexican professor Bartolomé de Albornoz cast doubt on the slave trade's morality and legality when he published *Arte de los contratos (The Art of Contracts)* in 1573.

Though many Africans presumably opposed the slave trade, few are on record. Afonso I or Afonso I Mvemba a Nzinga, a Christian convert who ruled the Kingdom of Kongo (northern Angola and the western portion of the Democratic Republic of Congo today), is an exception. Wanting to grow and modernize his kingdom, Afonso I traded with the Portuguese and sought their counsel. Enslaved labor existed in the kingdom, and in exchange for goods and services, Afonso I even sent captives as slaves to Portugal. Those captives, however, had been prisoners of war. Afonso I's discovery of the illegal slave trade, involving the capture of free people, along with the realization of its harmful effects, made

him uneasy. In a 1526 letter to John III (or João III), King of Portugal, he sought to end the slave trade:



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

> [W]e need from [your] kingdoms no other than priests and people to teach in schools, and no other goods but wine and flour for the holy sacrament: that is why we beg of Your Highness to help and assist us in this matter, commanding the factors that they should send here neither merchants nor wares, because it is our will that in these kingdoms [of the Kongo] there should not be any trade in slaves nor market for slaves.

His pleas were futile. Portugal was the major power player in the transatlantic slave trade, and demand for enslaved labor was increasing. Spain already had flourishing colonies in the New World, and the French, Dutch, and English, along with Portugal, later established successful colonies. As commercial enterprises such as the sugar industry increased, slavery became further entrenched in the New World. It would be at least a few hundred years more before ending slavery and the slave trade received serious consideration.

Dealing with life enslaved

Racial and class distinctions existed among the Spanish and Portuguese who settled in the New World; the breakdown was as follows, in this order:

1. **White elite**
2. **Mestizos:** Those of mixed European and Native American heritage
3. **Mulattos:** Those of mixed European and African heritage
4. **Native Americans**
5. **Africans**
    1. **Ladinos:** Those born in Africa but who had lived in Spain long enough to know some Spanish and familiarize themselves with Spanish culture
    2. **Bozales:** Those coming straight from Africa to the Americas; they could become ladinos by learning Spanish and converting to Christianity
    3. **Criollos (Creoles):** Those born in the Americas

Soon after their arrival in the Americas, African captives received Spanish or Portuguese first names. Popular names include Fernando, Juan, Ricardo, and José for men and Mariá, Louisa, and Ana for women. Very rarely did those enslaved receive a last name. Rather, in paperwork, the country of their origin usually followed their first name, as in Ricardo Angola. Learning Spanish or Portuguese was also necessary in some colonies, especially among enslaved individuals who were considered domestic house workers.

Marriage among enslaved people was acceptable and sanctioned by the government and the Catholic Church, with the latter bestowing those married with official documentation. When applying for marriage licenses, enslaved people had to declare their ethnic backgrounds. Interestingly, the enslaved tended to marry within the same background. In theory, enslaved people who were married weren't subject to separation through sale, so perhaps that made marriage more appealing. Family life was desirable to those enslaved. Plus cohabitation was greatly discouraged, and bigamy was disdained. Some evidence suggests, however, that some Africans continued to practice polygamy in the New World. In their culture, if men outnumbered women, it was acceptable for a man to have more than one wife. Colonial authorities broke up these unions whenever possible.

Because African men outnumbered African women in the Americas, the men often became involved with indigenous women, another practice discouraged by colonial authorities. Known as *zambos,* the children of free indigenous women and African men were born free. To prevent such relationships, authorities passed many restrictions, including keeping Africans and indigenous people from living in the same areas and not allowing them to trade with one another. Because indigenous people and Africans outnumbered whites, it wasn't always easy to enforce such laws.



Even today, Latin America and the Caribbean generally demonstrate a higher retention of African cultural values, and this is mainly because Africans greatly outnumbered whites. Unlike the United States, which carefully regulated the ratio of whites to Africans and often had white slaveholders directly supervise enslaved labor, Latin America and the Caribbean teemed with nonwhites. Absentee owners weren't at all uncommon, and many overseers were *mestizos.* This population imbalance, coupled with Spain and Portugal's early tendency not to separate ethnic groups, allowed for greater cultural retention. For example, in religious practices, Africans simply mingled their own religious beliefs and practices with Catholicism.

Seeking freedom

Despite being able to retain key characteristics of their African culture, Africans enslaved in the New World still desired freedom. And there were various ways through which freedom could be obtained.

Grants and purchases of freedom

Enslaved people could be granted freedom by their masters. Slaveholders sometimes freed the elderly and loyal among those they enslaved, as well as their children with enslaved mistresses and sometimes the enslaved mistresses themselves. Some enslaved people purchased their freedom. Because the Spanish felt that

Africans were inferior, freedom, itself, was relative. The Spanish believed Africans required supervision and therefore regulated African behavior, sometimes extremely. In Lima, Peru, for example, free Blacks weren't buried in coffins because coffins were reserved for whites. Skin color also distinguished free Africans, with higher social status accorded to those with fairer skin.

Escapes

For men aged 14 to 25 who were most needed in the labor force, freedom was harder to attain, so many of them escaped. Africans actually began escaping as soon as they reached the New World. In 1503, a colony governor complained to Spanish officials in Spain about such flight. Eventually the Spanish labeled those escapees *cimarrones.* Those who escaped later formed *maroon communities* in remote areas.

As long as these maroons lived quietly, the Spanish, who seemed to anticipate a certain number of runaways, seemed unconcerned. It wasn't at all uncommon for maroons to attack their former masters to help others who were still enslaved escape. Sometimes authorities insisted on re-enslaving maroons. The British fought the maroons in Jamaica for decades before agreeing to a treaty. One of the earliest and most well-known maroon communities is Yanga in Mexico (see the nearby sidebar). In 1609, Yanga and the Spanish came to an agreement that allowed the maroon community to continue.

Rebellions

In addition to escaping, those enslaved in Latin America and the Caribbean plotted their freedom through rebellions. The Spanish, however, were especially quick to quell any rebellious activity, often hanging those even rumored of conspiring. The most famous successful slave revolt is the Haitian Revolution (1791–1803), in which Africans (enslaved and free) embraced the ideals of the French Revolution and won their right to citizenship, defeating the French to establish the free republic of Haiti on January 1, 1804.

Another notable revolt included the Christmas rebellion of Jamaica. The Baptist War, also known as the Sam Sharpe Rebellion, the Christmas Rebellion, the Christmas Uprising, and the Great Jamaican Slave Revolt of 1831–32, was an 11-day rebellion that started on December 25, 1831 and involved up to 60,000 of the 300,000 slaves in Jamaica.

YANGA, MEXICO

One of the New World's earliest maroon communities, San Lorenzo de los Negros, was renamed Yanga for its founder, the formerly enslaved African Gaspar Yanga, in 1932. Yanga, whose name can also be spelled Nyanga or Ñanga, similar to a Yoruba word for "pride," is frequently referred to as the "first liberator of the Americas." Revolting against the Spanish near the port city of Veracruz (then a part of New Spain, now Mexico) in 1570, Yanga, who was also a Muslim and even rumored to be royalty, led a group into the highlands where they established their free colony. In 1606 and again in 1609, the Spanish colonial government sent troops to destroy the community, but each time they encountered greater resistance than they anticipated.

Reportedly when Yanga became too elderly to lead the active resistance, Francisco de la Matosa, an Angolan who merged Yanga's community with the maroon community he led, handled tactical confrontations with the colonial government. When Spanish troops burned the community, Yanga and his crew resettled nearby. Eventually, the Spanish agreed to a treaty.

In the late 19th century, Mexican author and historian Vicente Riva Palacio, a former Mexico City mayor and grandson of Mexico's "Black President" Vicente Guerrero, brought Yanga's story to widespread attention. A statue of Yanga can be found near Veracruz, Mexico, where the town remains.

The official abolition of slavery

Even though many Caribbean and Latin American colonies wouldn't earn independent governance until well into the 20th century, the European powers did abolish slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 19th century. Slavery ended in the British colonies in 1833 and in the French colonies in 1848. In Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Brazil, slavery wouldn't end until 1873, 1886, and 1888, respectively.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Developing the African slave trade
- Journeying to the American colonies
- Joining the fight for national freedom
- Launching a movement for equality

Chapter 3
The Founding of Black America

The year 1619 marks the official arrival of Africans to what would become the United States of America. Enslaved Africans weren't uncommon in other parts of the Americas, including some areas that would later make up the United States (refer to Chapter 2). Indentured Africans and indentured European servants weren't always treated the same.

This chapter explores slavery's early development in British North America, touching upon the transatlantic slave trade and its horrible Middle Passage before turning attention to how white colonists, in the course of their own fight for freedom, established a democracy rooted in the bondage of others.

From Servitude to Slavery

In the early 17th century, two British ships raided a Portuguese slave ship, the *San Juan Bautista*. One of those ships, the *White Lion*, which flew a Dutch flag, landed in Jamestown Colony on August 20, 1619. According to John Rolfe, Jamestown's most well-known early settler, the ship swapped "20 and odd Negroes" (presumably taken from the *San Juan Batista*) for "victuale." The other ship, *Treasurer*, arrived

later, leaving more African captives from the Ndongo region of what is now Angola.

After the arrival of these first Africans, the Black population grew steadily. Historical records show that parents Isabella and Antony (or Antoney) baptized their son, William, the first Black child born in the English colonies; however, in 1624, the vast majority of early Africans, like those early white settlers, arrived by boat. Approximately 300 Africans lived in Virginia in 1649, at a time when race still didn't absolutely predetermine one's enslaved status. Although these early Africans were enslaved, they may not have been so for life. In 1673, a Virginia court case forced a slaveholder to free Andrew Moore for his service.

The Virginia colony wasn't an anomaly. When the ship *Desire* arrived in Massachusetts in 1638, the Africans on board weren't automatically enslaved for life. The same was true in New York, then a Dutch colony known as New Netherland. In 1644, 11 Black people filed a petition for their freedom and secured it. In fact, records from 1651 and 1652 show that some Black people owned their own property and even had indentured servants themselves. This quasi-indentured status was short-lived, however. During the same time that many Africans gained their freedom through indentured servitude, measures leading to the lifelong enslavement of Africans based solely on race were falling into place.

Inching toward slavery

The 1640 sentencing of John Punch to a lifetime of servitude to his slaveholder was a pivotal event in the eventual enslavement of Black people based solely on race. Punch's sentence is noteworthy because although he ran away from his Virginia slaveholder with two white servants — and the only offense cited was running away — the white servants received only four additional years of servitude, not a lifelong sentence. It wasn't completely unexpected, however; a year before, Virginia had passed a statute to distribute arms and ammunition to "all persons except Negroes."

Laws inching the colonies closer and closer to enslaving Africans based solely on race followed in both Virginia and Maryland, especially in the 1660s:

- A 1662 Virginia statute established the mother's status determined a child's freedom.
- Both Virginia, in 1667, and Maryland, in 1671, established laws that Christian conversion didn't change one's slave status (heathenism was once a justification for slavery).
- A 1669 Virginia statute specifically equating "negroes" and "slaves" stated that a master wasn't responsible if a slave died while he was administering punishment.

The Virginia Slave Codes of 1705, a series of laws defining and regulating enslaved status and behavior, left no speculation regarding how the colonists viewed Africans. Ultimately, various factors contributed to the formal enslavement of Africans in the colonies.

Why Africans?

Like the Spanish (refer to Chapter 2), the English found that enslaving the indigenous population wasn't plausible. Not only were Native Americans sickly due to their inability to ward off the foreign ailments that the colonists brought, but they also knew the lay of the land and could escape easily. In the free-labor system that included both Black and white people, white people (designated as English, Irish, or Dutch and not by race then) proved inept workers; they had no knowledge of the land and how to grow crops in the Americas. They also had the protection of a government, and if they managed to escape, they could blend in with other non-African settlers. From the proslavery perspective, Africans offered several advantages:

- Because of their dark skin, Africans were easily identifiable.
- Africans were strong as well as skilled at agriculture and other tasks.
- Granted a monopoly on the British slave trade, the success of the Royal African Company, formed in 1672, made enslaved African labor more accessible and affordable to colonists.


REMEMBER

Slave trading became one of Britain's most competitive enterprises. All this activity coincided with the increased commercial production of rice, tobacco, cotton, and other goods, which made slavery an indispensable means to wealth in the North American colonies.

The Triangular Trade

Slavery's formal acceptance by the colonies significantly changed the lives of Africans, and the transatlantic slave trade, coupled with the goods produced by her colonies, made England a superpower. For England, the slave trade reached its peak during the 18th century as a very profitable three-way exchange, known as the *Triangular Trade*, developed. Here's how it worked:

- **Leg 1:** Typically, a shipment of goods, which could include beads, cloth, hardware, rum, salt, and guns, left England (particularly London, Bristol, or Liverpool) for West Africa.

- **Leg 2:** In West Africa, the goods were swapped for captured Africans who were packed into slave ships by the hundreds to journey across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas. They were taken to the Caribbean, Brazil, and North America.
- **Leg 3:** In the Americas, Africans were unloaded and replaced with molasses, rum, sugar, tobacco, or any other hot commodity before heading back to England.


REMEMBER

The term *Triangular Trade* stemmed from the fact that the route, which could take a full year to complete, actually formed a triangle on a map. In time, however, the "triangle" referred more to the route's three-way exchange system of goods for African captives for more goods.

Not all ships that sailed back and forth to Africa originated in England. Soon the colonies set up a triangular trade of their own that bypassed England. New England distilled sugar and molasses from Caribbean plantations and then shipped them to Africa in exchange for African captives who, in turn, produced more sugar in the Caribbean before beginning the process again. Some of those enslaved also wound up in New England; by 1755, New England had an enslaved population of more than 13,000. (The molasses and sugar also were shipped to England.)


TECHNICAL STUFF

The first slave ship from British North America left Boston in 1644. By the 1670s, Massachusetts slave traders regularly carried African captives from Africa to the Caribbean. Rhode Island entered the slave trade around 1700 and had as many as 20 ships sailing from Newport to Africa by the 1750s; an estimated 60 percent of the North American ships involved in the slave trade were from Rhode Island. The arrival of slaves to British North America reached its peak during the 18th century. Overall, it's believed that between 500,000 and 550,000 of the colonies' enslaved population came from Africa, mainly via the Caribbean.

The Middle Passage

Named for the middle leg of the Triangular Trade from Africa to the Americas, the *Middle Passage*, which involved hundreds of Africans packed into ships for months, claimed the lives of many Africans. Death toll estimates vary widely, but approximately 1 to 3 million of the estimated 11 to 18 million Africans reportedly transported to the Americas and the Caribbean through the transatlantic slave trade between the 16th and early 19th centuries died before ever reaching land.

The capture

By the slave trade's peak in the 18th century, European nations had established an intricate system of trading posts and forts along the West African coast. Largely

ignorant of the African interior, European traders relied on Africans to capture other Africans deep in the continent.



REMEMBER

Although African slavery differed greatly from the form of slavery that took hold in the Americas, greed still motivated the Africans who assisted European traders in exchange for goods or even guns to give them an advantage over other Africans with whom they were in conflict.

Principal regions from which Africans were captured included Senegambia, Sierra Leone, the Windward Coast, the Gold Coast, Bight of Benin, Bight of Biafra, and Central Africa (primarily Angola). Among the Africans captured — some were the spoils of war; others, kidnapping victims — there was no discrimination. They hailed from various ethnic cultural groups with no distinctions made between servants and royalty. No one was safe: Even the Africans selling other Africans could become enslaved.

AYUBA SULEIMAN DIALLO, OR JOB BEN SOLOMON



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

Born in the Bundu region (in today's Senegal) around 1702, Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, also Job ben Solomon, is one of the rare African captives who returned to Africa. He had been kidnapped and sold to Stephen Pike, captain of the *Arabella,* which was moored on the Gambia River. Immediately after his capture, Diallo sent a note to his wealthy father for help, but the ship sailed before his father could respond.

In Annapolis, Maryland, Alexander Tolsey, a planter from Queen Anne's County, purchased Diallo, whose job as a cattle herder gave him the opportunity to plan his escape. Easily caught, Diallo went to jail. Not giving up, Diallo, who hailed from a prominent family of Islamic religious leaders and political influence, wrote a letter in Arabic to Vachell Denton, the man who had sold him on the auction block. Curious, Denton forwarded the letter to William Hunt, an investor in the *Arabella,* in London.

Believing that Diallo's powerful relatives could prove beneficial for future African trading ventures, James Oglethorpe, a Royal African Company official, purchased Diallo's freedom. By 1733, Diallo was on a ship from Annapolis to London. He returned to the Gambia River area soon after only to find his once prosperous country poor, his father dead, and his wife living with another man. He was even seized by the French but regained his freedom again. Still Diallo, unlike numerous others, returned home to Africa. Biographer Thomas Bluett recorded his remarkable story in *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job,* published in 1734.

Capture was only the beginning. Some African captives had to walk 500 miles to the coast, often naked and barefoot and often in chains, to reach the dungeons or "negroe houses" they occupied at the forts and factories that dotted the coast. After surgeons examined them, acceptable captives were branded on the breast by a hot iron bearing the imprint of whichever company had purchased them, maybe for as little as the equivalent of $25 in goods.

The voyage

Branded and chained, African captives were packed into ships with literally no room to move for a voyage that could last anywhere from six to ten or more weeks (see Figure 3-1). Length of voyage (the shorter, the better) rather than ship size (smaller ships were more common than larger ones) determined survival rates. Diseases such as dysentery and smallpox only exacerbated already horrifically unsanitary conditions. Crews threw so many dead bodies overboard that sharks often followed slave ships. Even worse, when the journey ended, some captives remained chained to dead bodies.

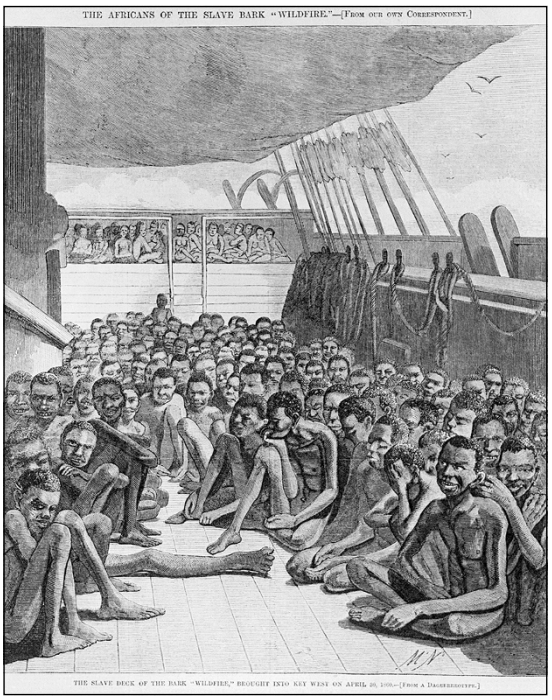


FIGURE 3-1: Slave deck of the *Wildfire.*

Bettmann/Getty Images

THE WRECK OF THE *HENRIETTA MARIE*, A SLAVE SHIP

In 1972, diver Moe Molinar, a member of renowned treasure hunter Mel Fisher's team, was searching for the sunken Spanish ship *Nuestra Señora de Atocha* off the coast of Key West, Florida. He didn't quite know what to make of the shackles he uncovered instead.

A decade after Molinar's discovery, archaeologist David Moore and salvor Henry Taylor arranged to inspect the ship more closely. They found a bell inscribed with "THE HENRIETTA MARIE 1699." Further study revealed that the ship was a 120-ton British slave ship that had set sail from London in 1700 for Africa's Guinea Coast, which spanned modern-day Sierra Leone to Lagos, Nigeria. In Africa, the ship took on 250 men, women, and children before heading to Jamaica and its wealthy sugar plantations. Fourteen weeks later, the *Henrietta Marie* reached Port Royal, Jamaica, with 190 captives for sale. It's estimated that the ship's cargo grossed more than $400,000. In June 1700, on its way back to England, the *Henrietta Marie* shipwrecked near Key West.

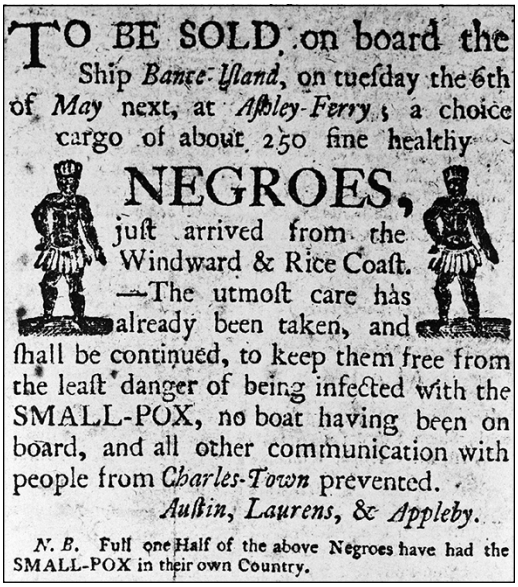
Today, the *Henrietta Marie* is the rare fully recovered slave ship in the United States. More than 7,000 artifacts, including shackles, Venetian glass trade beads, and ivory "elephant's teeth," make up the U.S.'s first major museum exhibition devoted to the transatlantic slave trade. For more info on the *Henrietta Marie,* visit `www.melfisher.org/henrietta-marie-1700`.

It's estimated that two out of every ten Africans who left the African coast didn't survive the Middle Passage. White crewmembers didn't fare well, either. Yet even with the high death tolls, these voyages were still very profitable.

Safe arrival

A captive's transatlantic journey could be torturous due to trade winds or storms, but the last leg was usually the most pleasant. With the intended destination in close proximity, captives received more food to fatten them up for sale. After the ship docked, doctors examined captives either on the ship or in quarantine stations, locations holding Africans before sale. Slave brokers determined price, discounting those captives who weren't in great health.

In the Caribbean, especially on smaller islands, buyers purchased survivors straight from the ships. Most British ships, however, headed to Jamaica and Barbados, two of Britain's largest slavery strongholds in the Caribbean. Slave traders often sold captives who reached North America in public auctions in Virginia and New England, where taverns and stores could sell captives. Figure 3-2 shows a poster announcing the arrival of slaves.


TO BE SOLD on board the Ship *Bance-Island*, on tueſday the 6th of *May* next, at *Aſhley-Ferry*; a choice cargo of about 250 fine healthy

NEGROES,

juſt arrived from the Windward & Rice Coaſt. —The utmoſt care has already been taken, and ſhall be continued, to keep them free from the leaſt danger of being infected with the SMALL-POX, no boat having been on board, and all other communication with people from *Charles-Town* prevented.

Auſtin, Laurens, & Appleby.

N. B. Full one Half of the above Negroes have had the SMALL-POX in their own Country.

FIGURE 3-2: Poster announcing the new slave arrivals.

Bettmann/Getty Images

GORÉE ISLAND AND SULLIVAN'S ISLAND

On Gorée Island near Dakar, Senegal, the House of Slaves — a prime holding station for Africans prior to their dispatch to the Americas in the transatlantic slave trade — has become a popular tourist destination for many Black Americans partaking in heritage tours. The majority of Black Americans, however, can't trace their ancestors directly back to this holding station, which was controlled mostly by the French, unless they're from the Louisiana area, including parts of Alabama (Mobile mostly) and Mississippi, which was once a French territory.

Sullivan's Island, just north of Charleston Harbor in South Carolina, is a more accurate heritage spot for many Black Americans. According to respected historian Ira Berlin, almost 400,000 enslaved Africans entered the United States through the Lowcountry or South Carolina region. Between 1787 and 1808 (the year that importing enslaved people became illegal), slaveholders purchased more than 100,000 Africans. Therefore, a substantial number of Black Americans, anywhere from 40 to 75 percent, depending on the source, can trace their ancestors' entry into the United States to Sullivan's Island.

At the auctions, such as the one depicted in the print in Figure 3-3, captives sold for $150 or more. Women of childbearing age often yielded higher prices. Usually, families were broken up prior to the voyage, and if they remained intact, those who oversaw the auction made little effort to keep them together. In the early 19th century, when the domestic slave trade replaced the transatlantic slave trade, prices and the ruthlessness of traders both rose considerably.

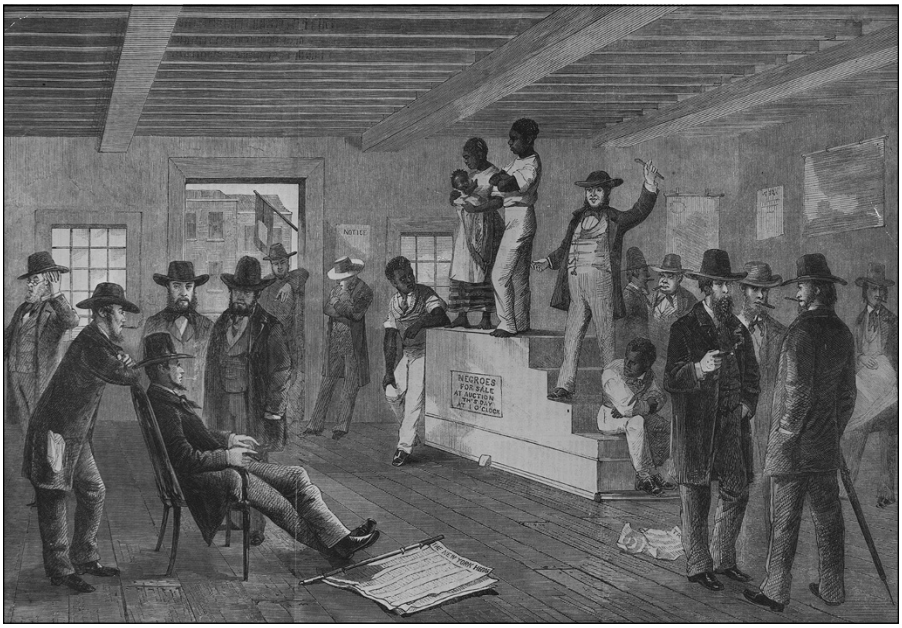


FIGURE 3-3: A slave auction.

Rischgitz/Getty Images

Black Americans and the Revolution

By the time of the American Revolution, slavery was entrenched in British North America. During this time, not one colony banned it. Despite this dim reality, when the colonists began to describe their relationship with England using the master-slave paradigm, freedom had to seem attainable to many Black Americans. Surely, those who *felt* enslaved could empathize with those who *were* enslaved. Therefore, many Black Americans embraced the American Revolution.

A bit of background

Because of various countries' extensive investment in the New World, Europe's battles for power didn't exclude the Americas. During the French and Indian War (known as the Seven Years' War in Europe), Americans such as George Washington got their first taste of military action. Although England emerged from the battle with possession of Florida and Canada, the war changed how the English interacted with the colonists.

Prior to the French and Indian War, English intrusion in the colonists' lives had been minimal. The war, however, created a lot of debt. Because England felt it couldn't afford additional wars, King George III mandated that colonists not settle beyond the crest of the Appalachian Mountains. The problem was that many colonists had supported the British precisely so that they could expand westward.

Making matters worse, the British passed a series of laws — the Revenue Act, also known as the Sugar Act (1764), the Stamp Act (1765), and the Townshend Act (1767) — that taxed the colonists for the first time. With their political and economic freedom threatened, the colonists began to entertain new ideas regarding their relationship with England, frequently referring to themselves as *slaves* to English tyranny.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Recognizing the colonists' hypocritical position, Abigail Adams bluntly expressed her sentiments in a 1774 letter to her husband John Adams, who would become the second U.S. president: "It always appeared a most iniquitous scheme to me to fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have."

Fighting for freedom

In 1770, at the Boston Massacre, Crispus Attucks (see the nearby sidebar), a Black man, was not only the first to die but also encouraged those around him, whites included, to stand their ground against the British. Because of Attucks, unarmed American colonists stood eye to eye against armed British soldiers. Yet Attucks was far from the only Black American who stood up for freedom. A couple of years shy of the official start of the American Revolution, four enslaved Bostonians petitioned the colonial legislature in Massachusetts for their freedom in 1773.

A year later, Black people directly asked Thomas Gage, the military governor of Massachusetts who was also the general who commanded all British forces in North America for more than a decade, to abolish slavery. So when the fighting actually began in the American Revolution, Black people fought on both sides. The British offered freedom to those enslaved and the ideology of freedom was linked with those fighting for independence from British.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

CRISPUS ATTUCKS

An escapee for more than 20 years, Crispus Attucks instigated the Boston Massacre of 1770, a pivotal event that led to the American Revolution. The son of an African father believed to have been enslaved and an indigenous mother from the Wampanoag (sometimes Natick, Nantucket) people, Attucks worked on a whaling crew that sailed out of Boston Harbor. His animosity toward the British was the product of a number of factors, including the competition he faced from British troops who took part-time jobs during off-duty hours for lower wages and his fear of being drafted into the British navy.

Three days prior to the fateful March 5, a fight erupted between ropemakers and three British soldiers. Thus, when a British soldier entered a pub looking for work, he found a group of angry seamen, including Attucks, instead. About 30 men tormented the job-seeker before soldiers came to his rescue. Despite being unarmed, Attucks and his crew didn't back down, and Attucks was the first of five to die. The significance of Attucks's actions wasn't lost on those who dubbed the incident the Boston Massacre and elevated Attucks to martyr status. Despite laws and customs restricting the burial of Black people, Attucks's body rested with the others in Park Street Cemetery.

Ironically, John Adams, later a U.S. president, painted Attucks a rogue in court to defend the British soldiers, who won an acquittal. That outcome outraged the colonists and made the American Revolution even more attractive. In 1858, Black abolitionists honored the revolutionary with Crispus Attucks Day. Thirty years later, in 1888, objections from both the Massachusetts Historical Society and the New England Historic Genealogical Society, which considered him a villain, couldn't prevent the erection of the Crispus Attucks Monument in Boston Common.

At the same time that Attucks and Peter Salem (who distinguished himself enough at Bunker Hill to grace a postage stamp) were siding with the revolutionaries, George Washington, who would later become the new country's first president, took steps to bar Black people from American forces. In July 1775, he sent an order to recruiting officers instructing them not to enlist Black soldiers. (Existing Black soldiers remained in service.)

Months later, Lord Dunmore of Virginia, in what is known as Lord Dunmore's Proclamation, countered by declaring free all Black people indentured or enslaved who fought for the Crown. As a result, other Black people, such as Southerners Thomas Jeremiah and a dockworker named Sambo, joined the British camp. On December 31, 1775, Washington, backed by the Continental Congress, days later reversed his policy slightly to allow free Black men to serve.

Those enslaved in New Hampshire and New York were offered their freedom to fight with the Americans. Georgia and South Carolina, however, refused to enlist anyone enslaved even when the Continental Congress offered to pay for every enslaved person recruited. Despite this, there were some Black sailors in the South who served bravely on several vessels.

In all, about 5,000 Black Americans fought for the American cause. Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island even had a few all-Black companies. Black soldiers Prince Whipple and Oliver Cromwell were with Washington when he crossed the Delaware on Christmas Day in 1776. Free Black Haitians even came to fight for the patriots' cause. Thus, Africans made substantial contributions to the victory that established the United States of America.

Hope and disappointment

Prior to the actual start of the American Revolution, Black Americans had many reasons to believe freedom was near. Although John Locke, in *The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina* (which guided the form of government and society for the colony) made it clear that the enslaved had no say in government, there were other rays of hope. In the two variations of Quaker abolitionist John Woolman's *Considerations On Keeping Negroes,* as well as works by James Otis and Thomas Paine, it was clear that some white people were questioning slavery. Even without a passage specifically decrying slavery in the Declaration of Independence, Black Americans had every reason to feel encouraged by the document's statement that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

A few encouraging signs included some white people's extension of revolutionary ideology to Black Americans and the emergence of *manumission* (freedom) societies with the intent of emancipating those still enslaved. This spirit directly resulted in the freedom of the many Black soldiers who fought in the war and their families. On a larger scale, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island made early moves to abolish slavery, with New York and New Jersey not far behind. In 1775, the Quakers began establishing antislavery organizations.

Still, it was clear that independence from England alone wouldn't change conditions for most Black Americans. Despite signs that the new Constitution would live up to the promise made in the Declaration — that all men are created equal — compromises that undermined the promise of freedom were also made. Though the Constitution included a provision to ban the slave trade in 1808, it also designated those enslaved as "three-fifths of a person" (an agreement reached to appease Southern delegates). These actions foreshadowed that long and arduous road to abolishing slavery ahead.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

THE SUPPRESSED PASSAGE

Thomas Jefferson wrote the following passage, which condemns slavery but it didn't make it into the Declaration of Independence:

"[George III] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death, in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of *infidel* powers, is warfare of the Christian King of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where Men should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative [veto] for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or to restrain this execrable commerce: and that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, and murdering the people upon whom he also obtruded them; thus paying off former crimes committed against the *liberties* of one people, with crimes he urges them to commit against the *lives* of another."

The Free African Society and the Birth of Black America

As Black people — even those who had fought for American independence — were excluded in efforts to create the new nation, eight Black men took matters into their own hands to help form the basic foundation of Black America.



REMEMBER

On April 12, 1787, a month before the U.S. Constitutional Convention, Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, along with six others, gathered in Philadelphia to create the Free African Society, a nondenominational organization formed to address the needs of the larger Black community. Unlike the Newport, Rhode Island–based Free African Union Society preceding it, members of the Free African Society weren't interested in repatriating to Africa. "This land, which we have watered with our tears and our blood is now our mother country," Allen declared years later.

The creation of the Free African Society was a pivotal first step in establishing Black America. Its mission and duties, coupled with the Black church (which you can read more about in Chapter 12) and social and fraternal organizations such as the African Lodge, the main organ of Black Masons, began to address critical issues regarding Black people. These efforts recognized the unique position Black people held in the United States, a position W.E.B. Du Bois labeled *double consciousness*, his belief that Black Americans possessed a "twoness" that made them both American and African.



HISTORICAL ROOTS

A BLACK AMERICAN LODGE

The African Lodge traces its roots back to March 6, 1775, when a British Lodge of Freemasons near Boston initiated 15 Black Americans, including Prince Hall, who hailed from Barbados. Following a rejection from white Americans to establish a Black American chapter for Masons in Boston, a subsequent appeal by Hall and others to the Grand Lodge of England in 1784 resulted in African Lodge No. 459, which received its full charter in 1787. Under Hall's leadership, Black Masons organized Grand Lodges, and their movement, which often took on civic causes such as education, steadily grew. Today, to honor its pioneer, this form of Freemasonry is labeled Prince Hall Masonry.

2 Long Road to Freedom

IN THIS PART . . .

Examine how the issue of slavery escalated. As the United States started to grow in the 19th century, the question of slavery became more contentious.

Discover how countless people impatient with how long the government was taking to end slavery began working to free the enslaved via the Underground Railroad.

See how enslaved people staged violent rebellions and how Southern slaveholders responded by pushing for stronger fugitive slave laws.

Understand what led up to the outbreak of the Civil War.

Explore the war's outcome in terms of emancipating the enslaved and the effect efforts to rebuild the union during Reconstruction had on Black Americans.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Contrasting slavery in the North and the South
- Plotting freedom
- Living with conditional freedom

Chapter 4

American Slavery, American Freedom

Banning the importation of enslaved labor in 1808 did little to reduce slavery's intensity in the United States. Despite being founded on a platform of freedom, the U.S. wasn't ready to leave slavery behind. During the early 19th century, the domestic slave trade proved as inhumane and ruthless as the transatlantic slave trade had been. Major economic changes contributed to slavery's growth.

The Industrial Revolution in England eventually created a greater demand for cotton in the booming textile industry. Similar developments in the North added to the demand and the South eagerly responded to the call. With the advent of the cotton gin in 1793, cotton plantations began to boom, requiring more enslaved labor to perform the labor-intensive work of cultivating cotton. The low cost of enslaved labor coupled with the payoff of increased cotton production, in addition to staple cash crops such as rice and sugar, meant planters needed more enslaved labor.

This chapter explores the intricacies of the domestic slave trade and the ins and outs of enslaved life in the North and the South, as well as the shaky life free Black people experienced, even in the North. Also, in the North the need for enslaved labor was dwindling. Agriculture and the growth of cotton wasn't as important in the North. Furthermore, the industrial North didn't demand enslaved labor. According to historians, the Civil War was fueled by states' rights with the major issue being slavery.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

THE LUCRATIVE DOMESTIC SLAVE TRADE

"I wish you may visit me early this Spring to make some arrangements about your Negroes. If they continue high I would advise you to sell them in this country on one and two years credit bearing 8 per ct interest. The present high price of Negroes can not continue long and if you will make me a partner in the sale on reasonable terms I will bring them out this Fall from VA and sell them for you and release you from all troubles. On a credit your Negroes would bring here about $120 to $130,000 bearing 8 per ct interest. My object is to make a fortune here as soon as possible by industry and economy, and then return [to Virginia] to enjoy myself. Therefore I am willing to aid you in any way as far as reason will permit."

(Henry A. Tayloe of Marengo County, Alabama, to "Dear Brother" [B.O. Tayloe] on January 5, 1835)

American Bondage

While the first Africans to arrive to the North American colony of Jamestown, Virginia, weren't really indentured servants, their skin color wasn't yet completely synonymous with the institution of slavery (refer to Chapter 3). As time went on, however, being born Black equated to a lifetime of enslavement, even for those of biracial parentage, most typically the father. Enslaved people who managed to win their freedom or those born free weren't safe either.

In the U.S., the law designated enslaved people as property, with a value no greater than furniture or cattle, yet slavery was practiced differently depending on region. Theses sections describe slavery in the North and South.



TECHNICAL STUFF

There is an ongoing debate of how many Africans came to the Americas via the transatlantic slave trade. On the low end 500,000 Africans arrived to the United States. Other historians cite more than 600,000 came. The later population increase among those enslaved came mainly through the birth rate, however. In 1800, more than a million people were enslaved in the nation. By the onset of the Civil War, that number was approximately 4 million.

Northern slavery

Today many still view slavery as a Southern institution, but in reality, it was an American institution. Slavery was big business that involved much of the nation either directly or indirectly. Therefore, blame doesn't rest solely with the South.

Northern slaveholders: A sampling

Northern slaveholders and slave traders are often ignored because of their small number of enslaved people and the non-existence of plantations, but they did exist. Douglas Harper, author of several books on the Civil War, launched the website Slavery in the North at `www.slavenorth.com` in the early 2000s. He identified Northern families who profited from slavery.

According to Harper, "A list of the leading slave merchants is almost identical with a list of the region's prominent families: the Faneuils, Royalls, and Cabots of Massachusetts; the Wantons, Browns, and Champlins of Rhode Island; the Whipples of New Hampshire; the Eastons of Connecticut; Willing and Morris of Philadelphia." In 1641, Massachusetts, under the leadership of Governor John Winthrop, also a slaveholder, became the first New England colony to legalize slavery. Documents show that more than 1,100 slave voyages, mainly engaged in the triangular trade, originated from New England.

UNIVERSITY TIES TO SLAVERY

Some of the North's and the world's most prestigious universities also have ties to slavery. Perhaps the most prominent is Brown University. The Brown family, an early benefactor to its eventual namesake, owned several businesses tied directly and indirectly to slavery, particularly the triangular trade. Family member John Brown was actually a prosecuted slave trader. Brown's University Hall was built by enslaved labor. Cognizant of this history, Brown's president Ruth Simmons, the descendant of enslaved people and the Ivy League's first female and first Black president, took proactive measures and organized a committee to examine those ties as well as propose how Brown could reconcile that history in 2004.

Although three Yale graduate students helped spark Brown's introspection with their 2001 report questioning Yale's ties to slavery, Yale resisted further inspection until 2020. Then Yale President Richard Levin's attitude was "American history is full of embarrassments. We know today that slavery was very widespread in the North as well as the South, at least prior to the Revolutionary War. There are a number of early leaders of this institution who were slave owners. It's simply a fact of history."

In 2016, a *New York Times* article revealed that, in 1838, Georgetown University paid its debts, thereby saving the institution, by selling 272 women, men, and children to a Louisiana plantation. Proposed reparations came in Georgetown in renaming two buildings after two Black people — Isaac Hawkins Hall, after one of the men sold in Louisiana, and Anne Marie Becraft Hall for the free Black woman who ran one of Georgetown's first schools for Black girls and became one of the nation's first Black nuns. Other renowned institutions such as Columbia, Harvard, and the University of Pennsylvania also have early ties to slavery.

Enslaved life in the North

Slavery in the North wasn't necessarily any less cruel than slavery in the South. As in the South, those enslaved in the North were also purposely bred for market, families were separated (as evidenced by a 1732 advertisement announcing that a 19-year-old Black woman and her child could be sold together or separately), and far too many suffered maltreatment at the hands of their owners. Philadelphia brickmaker John Coats, for example, reportedly kept his enslaved workers in iron collars with shackles.


REMEMBER

In the U.S., enslaved families, either from the North or the South, didn't often remain intact. Indebted slaveholders either sold the enslaved or traded them to settle their accounts. A slaveholder's heirs didn't always honor their benefactor's intention to keep those enslaved together. In other instances, wills scattered enslaved individuals throughout the family. Circumstances such as these separated children from their mothers, husbands from their wives.

Historian Ira Berlin wrote extensively about Northern slavery, noting enslaved individuals worked the fields, as domestics, in bars and hotels, in coal mines, and other menial labor. Smaller households enslaved fewer people, which meant that those individuals often lived in slaveholder households instead of in separate quarters. As cities emerged, many enslaved individuals, particularly women and children, worked as domestics.

SLAVERY, MARRIAGE, AND EVEN SEXUAL ASSAULT

Although the law didn't recognize enslaved marriages, many slaveholders encouraged them mainly because settled families were less likely to flee. *Broad marriages,* marriages between enslaved people with different owners, were less desirable, however. Although it wasn't uncommon for slaveholders to perform marriage ceremonies, that recognition didn't necessarily protect enslaved women from sexual assaults. Young women were even more vulnerable, and children fathered by male slaveholders weren't uncommon. It was even a ritual among some young white men to have their first sexual experience with an enslaved girl.

Northern slavery after the Revolution

Northern slavery declined following the American Revolution, in part because some enslaved won their freedom during the war. Increased industrialization and wage labor also contributed to slavery's decline in the North, even though some companies did rely on enslaved labor.



REMEMBER

Although most of the North legally abolished slavery following the American Revolution, that fact is misleading: Gradual emancipation was far more common than immediate freedom. According to the 1800 census, New England was home to 1,488 enslaved people. Connecticut, for example, didn't completely abolish slavery until 1848, and in 1850, 236 people were still enslaved in New Jersey. In addition, New England–based slave ships transported almost all the 156,000 people who were enslaved in the United States between 1801 and 1808. Even after Congress legally ended the slave trade in 1808, it continued, albeit to a lesser degree, due to poor enforcement. Northern ships, however, carried goods from enslaved labor to various destinations up until the Civil War. Northern factories also transformed Southern cash crops created with enslaved labor such as cotton into marketable consumer goods.

Enslaved life in the South

Slavery wasn't a hidden institution in the South, but the reality wasn't quite the same as traditional depictions in the years since. For example, large plantations resembling those seen in *Gone with the Wind* and the *North and South* miniseries weren't the norm. In reality, relatively few Southerners owned huge plantations with large numbers of enslaved people. Of the 8 million white people who lived in the South in 1860, 384,884 were slaveholders, with 200,000 of them enslaving five or fewer people. Yet even white Southerners who didn't use enslaved labor generally felt invested in the system.

There's much more information about slaveholders with plantations enslaving 20 or more. According to thorough accounts from enslaved individuals, the owning of humans on larger plantations was a serious business.

Labor on plantations

The complexion of the American plantation changed tremendously between the late 17th century and the 19th century. Plantation size and the crops cultivated greatly affected enslaved culture. Backbreaking labor, however, was consistent regardless of plantation size or crop cultivation, with the duties of those enslaved extending well beyond planting and harvesting crops.

RICE PLANTATIONS

On South Carolina's rice plantations, enslaved laborers from the Sierra Leone region of Africa, as well as the West Indies, were often more skilled in rice cultivation than their slaveholders. Consequently, they were charged with the back-breaking work of carving rice fields out of the tidal swamp area; clearing cypress and gum trees from low-lying lands; and building canals, dikes, and small floodgates that drained and flooded the fields in correlation to the high and low tides. In addition, they planted, maintained, and harvested the crop.

Rice plantations, particularly in South Carolina and Georgia, worked on the *task system*, with the enslaved receiving and performing specific duties. Tasks could include clearing the land for rice, draining the rice fields, harvesting rice, and milling the rice. Uncompleted tasks warranted punishment, usually whippings. Grueling work, as well as rampant malaria and fever, killed many enslaved young people. Life in South Carolina was so hard that few white people survived it, especially in its early years. As a result, the Black population, some of whom became immune to malaria, greatly outnumbered whites in parts of South Carolina, sometimes by as much as a three-to-one ratio.

SMOKING: NOT THE ONLY WAY TOBACCO KILLS

Tobacco cultivation included as many as 36 steps. Planting, weeding, and harvesting tobacco wasn't a simple undertaking. Beginning in January and February, some enslaved laborers selected seedbeds, cleared them, and burned them. In mid-March, they sowed tobacco seeds into a layer of ashes and covered the plants with pine branches to protect them. Because those enslaved eventually transplanted the successful plants, they cleared a field and plowed it into knee-high hills that were 3 to 4 feet apart. The plants couldn't be transferred until it rained and, even then, they might not take. Because of the fragility of the tobacco plant, these tasks sometimes had to be performed several times to ensure a decent crop.

To ward off weeds and deter cutworms, enslaved laborers cultivated the plants weekly with a hoe and their hands while also removing leaves at various stages before harvesting the crop in late August or early September. The crop then cured for four to six weeks. Before the tobacco leaves shipped, they had to "sweat" for another week or two and then go through sorting.

TOBACCO PLANTATIONS

Another crop that was labor intensive was tobacco. Slaveholders needed large numbers of enslaved labor for the long process. They also used enslaved labor to make the shipping barrels, to build the tobacco barns, to load the barrels into the ships, and, later, to work in the factories that manufactured tobacco products. In the late 1700s, however, soil depletion and falling tobacco prices tempered Virginia's once mighty tobacco plantations.

COTTON AND SUGAR PLANTATIONS

With Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793 and the advent of the Industrial Revolution, cotton became a boom crop. By efficiently separating cotton fibers from seedpods and sticky seeds, the cotton gin greatly increased cotton production from 10,000 bales in 1793 to more than 400,000 by 1820. Greater productivity created a greater demand for enslaved labor: Every 100 acres of cotton required 10 to 20 enslaved people. Jean Étienne de Boré added to that demand when he opened a successful sugar mill in Louisiana in 1794. Others followed, giving the South two huge crops with cotton and sugar.

American cotton and sugar plantations adopted the popular *gang system* of labor favored in the Caribbean and used on tobacco plantations. Considered more productive than other work systems, the gang system organized the enslaved into three groups based on physical abilities. An overseer, usually white, and a driver, usually Black, supervised the groups with enslaved laborers being told when to work, when to eat, and when to stop. In general, there was one enslaved person for every 3 acres of cotton. Clearing land, burning underbrush, spreading fertilizer, and breaking soil were just some of the duties performed, in addition to planting, cultivating, and picking cotton.

Clearing land as well as cutting and carrying the sugar cane for milling may have been the easiest part of working on a sugar plantation. The dangerous part came with transforming the sugar cane into sugar. Using a method known as "the Jamaica Train," sugar cane was boiled in four to five open kettles, arranged from largest to smallest. Teams of enslaved laborers ladled the hot liquid from kettle to kettle until it reached the right temperature and consistency to crystallize. Even with a large number of enslaved people dying (historians and researchers estimated the life of someone enslaved who worked on sugar plantations to be seven to ten years shorter), huge amounts of sugar lost, and the enormous quantities of wood needed to provide heat, sugar plantations were still hugely profitable.



The multiple-effect evaporator, an invention by Norbert Rillieux, the free offspring of a slaveholder and an enslaved person, made sugar plantations more efficient and profitable. The multiple-effect evaporator, still used today in various other industries, reduced the manpower and danger of making sugar by piping the juice from one container to the next. Instead of heating all the containers, the first

one received heat and the other chambers relied on latent heat. Around 1845, Louisiana plantations began using the new system.

House slaves and field slaves

On larger plantations, enslaved workers' duties were specialized, with the main division being between those labeled house slaves and field slaves.

- **House slaves:** *House slaves* were dedicated to the slaveholder's house and other duties outside the field. Unlike other enslaved people, they interacted with the slaveholder's family and his associates. Their primary duties included cooking and cleaning. Some enslaved women served as *mammies* caring for and, in some cases, even nursing white children. Others served as *aunties,* caring for enslaved children while their mothers worked. Because the work of house slaves placed them in close proximity to the white power structure, they received intense scrutiny. Sometimes, the benefits of domestic work included better quarters (although they often slept on a pallet at the foot of the slaveowner's bed just in case something was needed at night), more food, hand-me-down clothes from the slaveholder's household, and even an education. (They were secretly educated by the slaveowner's children or a sympathetic mistress. Sometimes the education was just enough for an enslaved to learn and understand European etiquette.)

  To serve the needs of the slaveholder's household, house slaves often lived in the big house or at least stayed overnight frequently. In some cases, loyal house slaves received their freedom when a master or mistress died, but more often than not, heirs inherited house slaves as cherished and prized possessions.

- **Field slaves:** *Field slaves* often reported to work at sunup and worked until sunset. Eighteen-hour days were typical during harvest time, with women working the same hours as men and pregnant women working until childbirth. Children were sent into the fields sometimes as early as age 5 or 6; beginner tasks included carrying water to the fields. Even though field slaves usually received less food and poorer clothing and performed harder tasks than house slaves, many preferred the field to the big house because of the camaraderie. Working in the house led to a greater sense of isolation from the rest of the enslaved community.

Regardless of whether they worked in the big house or in the fields, enslaved people typically received very little food. Weekly meal rations usually consisted of a few pounds of meat (typically salt pork) with rice, peas, corn, and/or sweet potatoes, among other vegetables. Sometimes those enslaved were fortunate enough to have their own gardens and raise chickens, but many slaveholders

discouraged such activities that could divert attention away from the primary duties given to those enslaved.

Overseers

On plantations with 20 enslaved people or more, an *overseer,* usually a white man who owned no land or any enslaved labor, supervised the work. Sometimes the overseer system yielded dramatic results. For example, in 1830, 14 people enslaved in Mississippi picked an average of 323 pounds of cotton when 150 pounds was typical. Yet plantation owners and overseers frequently complained of enslaved people being lazy and punished those they felt weren't working hard enough or whom they considered otherwise disruptive. Backbreaking work and cruel treatment only intensified the desire to be free, with the enslaved frequently taking matters into their own hands to achieve it.

Drivers

Drivers, usually physically imposing enslaved Black men, assisted overseers in supervising enslaved labor and frequently administered whippings. Although those formerly enslaved often deemed the driver as the "meanest" Black man on the plantation, in recent years, historians have argued that the driver wasn't simply the slaveholder's or overseer's flunkey. In the gang system, it wasn't uncommon for the driver to serve as the lead worker. He often set the tone and rhythm for work, even leading the group in songs.

Ultimately, the driver worked as the middleman between the slaveholder, overseer, and enslaved and sometimes negotiated perks as well as punishment. Drivers usually came to power during their late 30s, and they usually served long tenures that could last as long as 20 years. The slaveholder and overseer frequently trusted the driver's judgment regarding agricultural matters. In addition, the driver policed the living quarters (where he also resided) for potential escapes and rebellions. For these services, he received special privileges. Drivers also would often intervene in the punishment of other enslaved individuals.

Before I'd Be a Slave: Fighting the System

Africans were never content with slavery and rebelled from the start. Revolts were so common on slave ships that traders could even get insurance against it, and many of the first Africans who reached land committed suicide. Two boatloads of Africans who arrived in Charleston in 1807, for example, starved themselves to death. Even after slavery was firmly established, Africans were still unwilling to submit to it and were among the first to use the court system to secure their

freedom, even though the results rarely favored them. Laws declaring that Christian conversion didn't change one's enslaved status, for example, emanated from enslaved people's challenges for freedom.

Most enslaved people couldn't turn to the legal system for help, but they resisted slavery on a daily basis nonetheless. Some feigned illnesses to avoid work, and some even harmed themselves by cutting off their fingers or shooting themselves in the foot or hand. In many cases, slaveholders still found something for them to do. Enslaved women who found themselves pregnant would induce miscarriages through drinking teas made of roots and herbs or by other means. Sometimes enslaved mothers would kill their infants especially infant girls to prevent them from living a life of bondage.

Enslaved people also resisted slavery by directly harming their slaveholders. It wasn't uncommon for an enslaved person (usually female) to poison the slaveholder. Some enslaved people stabbed or choked unusually cruel slaveholders, despite the punishment. Any enslaved person who murdered or harmed a slaveholder rarely escaped death. Hanging was most common, but there's at least one report about an enslaved person being burned alive.


REMEMBER

With the courts ruling enslaved people as property, the law, which couldn't restrict the treatment of one's property, offered no relief from cruel slaveholders. (Some states did have laws regarding the treatment of the enslaved, but they weren't enforced on a regular basis.) Because white people feared rebellion the most, they took great measures to prevent it.

The Slave Codes

American slaveholders believed in heavily regulating enslaved behavior; they also believed maintaining a careful balance between those enslaved and white supervisors curtailed violence against white people. In 1705, Virginia passed the Slave Codes. These laws emphasized enslaved people as property and greatly restricted enslaved behavior to safeguard the white population.


REMEMBER

The Slave Codes included the following laws:

- No leaving plantations without authorization.
- Bearing weapons was banned.
- Striking a white person under any circumstances was prohibited.

Whenever word of a conspiracy surfaced or an actual attempt at rebellion occurred, colonists passed more laws similar to these.



HISTORICAL ROOTS

To enforce the Slave Codes, militia-like slave patrols were set up in which free white men served usually for one-, three-, or six-month periods. Those who didn't want to serve were fined. These patrols returned enslaved people to plantations, conducted random searches of living quarters, and generally policed those enslaved. During times of perceived or demonstrated danger, a vigilance committee that generally disregarded caution took over, often killing any Black person, enslaved or free, guilty or innocent, found during the group's rampage. These patrols were a precursor to the Ku Klux Klan, which historically had two incarnations, one in 1866 and another in 1915. Some argue that early American policing, particularly its fascination with overly criminalizing Black men especially, evolved from these patrols. A foundation for that argument can be found in Sally E. Hadden's 2001 book *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Harvard University Press).

Rebellions

The Slave Codes made it difficult to rebel, but they didn't prevent insurrection. The four rebellions that U.S. historians generally consider most important are the Stono Rebellion (1739), Gabriel's Rebellion (1800), Denmark Vesey's Uprising (1822), and Nat Turner's Rebellion (1831).

STONO REBELLION

On September 9, 1739, an enslaved Angolan named Jemmy led 20 enslaved people at the Stono River outside of Charleston, South Carolina, in a rebellion. First they marched to a local shop and armed themselves before killing the two shopkeepers. From there, they marched to the home of a local man, killing him and his son and daughter. Although they stopped at Wallace's Tavern, they spared the owner, reportedly because he was kind to those he enslaved. The people at the next six or so houses weren't so lucky. As the march continued, more people joined, with numbers growing as large as 100 according to some historians.

By the time they reached the Edisto River the following afternoon, they had killed 20 to 25 white people and had a group of white people hot on their trail. In the ensuing gunfire, at least 30 members of the Stono Rebellion lay dead while 30 others escaped. Colonists captured and executed most of them within a month, however. The Negro Act, which reinforced restrictions against Black people assembling in groups and reading, among other things, quickly passed after the Stono Rebellion.



TECHNICAL STUFF

The timing of the Stono Rebellion and the fact that it occurred on a Sunday has led some to suggest that it triggered the Security Act, which required all white men to carry guns on Sundays to ward off possible insurrections. Those who didn't were fined. The Stono Rebellion also resulted in a ban against drums. Slaveholders discovered the enslaved used them to communicate between plantations.

GABRIEL'S REBELLION

Gabriel Prosser was a trained blacksmith on Thomas Prosser's tobacco plantation in Henrico County, Virginia. When Thomas died, his son took over the plantation operations and hired out Gabriel and his brother Solomon. While working outside the plantation in Richmond, Gabriel encountered enslaved and free Black people, as well as working-class white people, who exposed him to the ideas of the American Revolution and alerted him to the successful uprising in Haiti (1791–1803) led by enslaved men, which inspired him.

Following a month spent in jail for stealing a pig, Gabriel started plotting an outright rebellion. He recruited several enslaved people and at least two Frenchmen. His plan included seizing Capitol Square in Richmond and taking Governor James Monroe hostage.

Originally, the rebellion was to occur on August 30, 1800. The goal of gathering 1,000 enslaved people at the appointed meeting place on that day was thwarted, however, by heavy rain. That forced them to postpone action until the next day. In the interim, two enslaved people gave the group away. Within days, authorities captured 30 enslaved people, but Gabriel remained at large. To crack the case, officials offered pardons in exchange for testimonies. Assisted by a former overseer who had since changed his mind about slavery, Gabriel attempted to escape by boat, but an enslaved man with hopes of buying his own freedom with the reward money alerted authorities of Gabriel's presence. After a speedy trial, Gabriel was hanged.

Estimates of the number of enslaved people involved range from 500 to 5,000. In all, authorities tried at least 65 enslaved people, executing an estimated 35 of them for participating in the rebellion. They then transported arrested enslaved and free Black people they hadn't executed out of the area. The silence of the majority of the participants astounded and scared white people. Like Gabriel, most accepted their deaths and refused to divulge any significant information regarding the rebellion. Long after discovering the plot, Virginians remained paranoid. The rebellion also proved costly. Hanging 25 people, for instance, cost $8,899.91 in compensation to their slaveholders, with the militia alone costing $5,431, according to Douglas R. Egerton's 1993 book *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (University of North Carolina Press). At that time, those were hefty sums.

DENMARK VESEY'S UPRISING

Denmark Vesey's unsuccessful 1822 plot captivated many historians not for its effectiveness but rather for its organization. A successful carpenter and property owner, Vesey, who purchased his own freedom in 1800, plotted for several years to free others in the Charleston, South Carolina, area. He carefully selected his

collaborators, even reaching out to Haitians for assistance. Vesey reportedly collected 250 pike heads and bayonets along with 300 daggers. When details of his plot leaked, he moved up the original July date for action, but white authorities had already started responding. Although estimates of involvement in Vesey's Uprising ran as high as 9,000 and included enslaved and free Black people, as well as a few white people, authorities arrested 131 Black people, killing 35, including Vesey. In 2014, the Denmark Vesey monument, in the works since 1996 and designed by Black American sculptor Ed Dwight, was finally revealed in Charleston's Hampton Park.



With his 2001 article "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators," published in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, an academic journal dedicated to early American history, historian Michael P. Johnson revived a claim made in 1964 by Richard C. Wade questioning whether Denmark Vesey's Uprising was real. According to Johnson, Charleston's mayor used the alleged plot to discredit his political rival and advance his own career. Plus, white Charlestonians wanted to rid the city of free Black people. For some years, scholars debated Johnson's claim. Those claims, however, have never matched the initial accounts of the uprising.

THE FAR REACH OF THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION

Once known as Saint-Domingue, modern-day Haiti traces its roots back to a rebellion that began in 1791, when enslaved Black people murdered their white slaveholders for refusing to extend the same freedoms white Frenchmen were fighting for in the French Revolution. France sent forces immediately to Haiti, but the conflict lasted at least two years. In 1794, enslaved Haitians received their freedom, and relative calm returned under the rule of Toussaint L'Ouverture, a self-educated former house slave. However, in 1800, Napoleon, anxious to dominate the entire Western Hemisphere, sent additional French troops to Haiti and ousted L'Ouverture. France believed it had won back control, but when Napoleon tried to reinstitute slavery, others took up the fight. Aided by a number of factors, including yellow fever, which decimated the French troops, Haiti remained free and, on January 1, 1804, Haiti declared its independence to the world.

The United States watched the events in Haiti intensely. Thomas Jefferson denounced the revolution and later refused to engage in trade with Haiti. American slaveholders, fearing those they enslaved would also rise up, placed more restrictions on them. Efforts to keep word of the Haitian Revolution from those enslaved in the U.S. failed. Gabriel Prosser and Denmark Vesey weren't the only Black Americans inspired by the Haitian Revolution; although they all didn't attempt rebellions of their own, many others were inspired to keep the struggle for freedom alive.

NAT TURNER'S REBELLION

Without a doubt, Nat Turner's Rebellion is the most well-known American slave revolt. Unlike other leaders of rebellions, Nat Turner left little to speculation and provided his own version of events that fell in line with his Christian beliefs. Although born enslaved in Virginia, Turner successfully escaped slavery at age 21 but later returned to Virginia to fulfill a greater vision. A deeply religious man and a powerful figure, Turner's alleged mystical powers, coupled with his distant and pious nature, made an impression on both Black and white people.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Driven by a vision he saw during a rare solar eclipse on February 12, 1831, Turner, labeled a prophet by some, concluded, "I should arise and prepare myself and slay my enemies with their own weapons."

Turner quickly chose his four disciples and decided that July 4 would be the fateful day as he headed toward Jerusalem, Virginia. Turner postponed his plan when he became ill. Another sign received on August 13 prompted him to take action on August 21.

Convening on the banks of Cabin Pond, Turner, his disciples, and two other men, armed with a hatchet and a broadax, first went to the home of Turner's slaveholder, Joseph Travis. They killed Travis, his wife, and three children before moving on to other homes. (One poor white family who weren't slaveholders was spared.) Traveling by horse, Turner and his crew continued on to Jerusalem, picking up more participants along the way. Three miles from Jerusalem, they encountered a group of armed whites, but Turner escaped, waiting for his disciples at Cabin Pond before digging a cave for his hideout.

Meanwhile, overseers received orders to single out any enslaved individuals they distrusted and shoot them if they tried to escape. By the time they captured Turner on October 30 (see Figure 4-1), 60 white people and more than 100 enslaved people had died. Turner was executed on November 11.



TECHNICAL STUFF

On November 11, Turner was killed and skinned like an animal. Legend has it that one white man owned a money purse made of Turner's hide and another one kept his skeleton for years.

Nat Turner's Rebellion sent ripples throughout the South and the nation. Whites everywhere, North and South, passed even more laws restricting the actions of enslaved people. Fearing another insurrection of this magnitude, some slaveholders tried to improve how they treated those they enslaved. One of the major turning points in American history, Nat Turner's Rebellion underscored slavery's true cycle of viciousness. In 2016, actor Nate Parker made headlines with a bidding war for his directorial debut, *The Birth of a Nation,* a film version of Nat Turner's Rebellion in which he also starred, at Sundance.



FIGURE 4-1: Print showing the discovery of Nat Turner.

Universal History Archive/Getty Images

Running away

Running away was far more common than rebellions as a form of resistance. Sometimes enslaved people who could read and write forged papers of freedom and successfully left enslaved life behind them. Many others took their chances in unfamiliar swamps and forests. Hiding during the day and scouring for food with bloodhounds on their trails, many enslaved people had little more than the North Star to guide them as they traveled at night. Most failed in their escape attempts. Once captured, most times within days, they often received severe punishment — some unsuccessful runaways suffered more than 100 lashes for their effort (see Figure 4-2).

These conditions are the reason Harriet Tubman, the famous conductor of the Underground Railroad (see Chapter 5), is so heralded. Not only did she make it to freedom, but she also risked it and her own life repeatedly to free many others. She and Frederick Douglass are two of the best-known runaways.



TECHNICAL STUFF

The many runaways who escaped to the North are documented more in history than the others who remained in the South (particularly in Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Florida), in some cases living solo in caves or dugouts or forming pods of enslaved runaways known as *maroon communities.* One such

community was the Black Seminoles or Seminole Maroons, enslaved people from coastal South Carolina and Georgia who fled to Florida and lived among the Seminole Indians as early as the 1600s. The Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia and North Carolina is a maroon community that thrived in the 1700s and 1800s. Sylviane A. Diouf's 2014 book *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (NYU Press) is one of the rare and accessible deep dives into marronage.

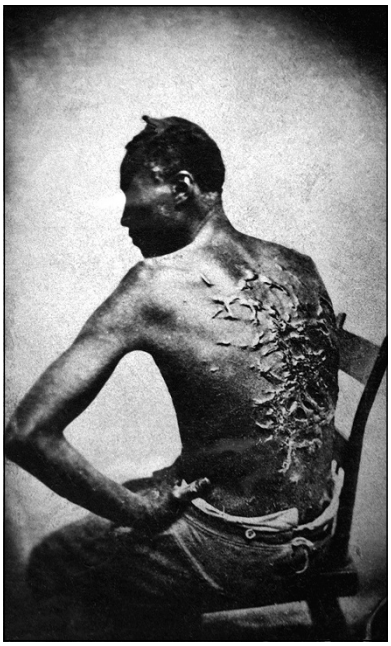


FIGURE 4-2: Scars from a brutal beating.

MPI/Getty Images

Escaping slavery was extremely difficult, and some people developed ingenious plans for success. There was no end to the lengths enslaved people would go to obtain their freedom. Here are a few examples:

- No longer able to cope with her slaveholder's sexual advances, Harriet Jacobs hid in a crawl space in her grandmother's attic for seven years to escape molestation before finally fleeing North to freedom.
- Husband and wife William and Ellen Craft escaped slavery in Macon, Georgia, when the fair-skinned Ellen posed as a young and sickly slaveholder accompanied by his property.
- Henry "Box" Brown placed himself in a box with a jug of water and some biscuits and mailed himself from Richmond, Virginia, to Philadelphia.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

THE EXPERIENCE OF A CAPTURED RUNAWAY

"Some weeks after his escape, he was captured, tied, and carried back to his master's plantation. This man considered punishment in his jail, on bread and water, after receiving hundreds of lashes, too mild for the poor slave's offence. Therefore he decided, after the overseer should have whipped him to his satisfaction, to have him placed between the screws of the cotton gin, to stay as long as he had been in the woods. This wretched creature was cut with the whip from his head to his foot, then washed with strong brine, to prevent the flesh from mortifying, and make it heal sooner than it otherwise would. He was then put into the cotton gin, which was screwed down, only allowing him room to turn on his side when he could not lie on his back. Every morning a slave was sent with a piece of bread and bowl of water, which were placed within reach of the poor fellow. The slave was charged, under penalty of severe punishment, not to speak to him. . .. When he had been in the press four days and five nights, the slave informed his master that the water had not been used for four mornings, and that a horrible stench came from the gin house. The overseer was sent to examine into it. When the press was unscrewed, the dead body was found partly eaten by rats and vermin. Perhaps the rats that devoured his bread had gnawed him before life was extinct."

(Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* published in 1861)



TECHNICAL STUFF

It has been estimated that 89 percent of all enslaved runaways were male, with 76 percent of them under age 35. Women, especially mothers, rarely ran away, and husbands often were reluctant to leave their wives, children, and other close family members, which is why many historians now argue that slaveholders encouraged family life on their plantations. More closely supervised house slaves rarely had opportunities to flee. However, enslaved individuals who worked in the house did help those enslaved who were seeking to run away.

"Free" Black People

Not all Black Americans in the United States were enslaved. But "free" Black Americans were far from free; often resented by white people (both slaveholders and non-slaveholders), free Black people faced tremendous restrictions. In the South especially, they had to carry papers proving their freedom to avoid enslavement. In addition, slave codes regularly included restrictions on free Black people. For example, they had to have sponsors if they wanted to purchase property.

Different paths to freedom

Enslaved Black people gained their freedom in several ways:

- By running away from slaveholders and moving to the North.
- By being freed by slaveholders who became Christians and had a change of heart regarding slavery. As the years wore on, some states discouraged this activity, which sometimes resulted in as many as 400 enslaved people receiving their freedom at once.
- By being freed upon their slaveholders' deaths.
- By being fathered by slaveholders, who sometimes felt compelled to free their children and their children's mothers. In his will, Thomas Jefferson legally freed two of his four surviving children with Sally Hemings. Prior to his death, the other two were reportedly allowed to leave but not legally freed.
- By performing such exceptional acts as fighting valiantly in the American Revolution.
- By purchasing their freedom. With the permission of their slaveholders, enslaved people such as blacksmiths and carpenters hired themselves out, collected pay for their work, and purchased their freedom. The price could range from $800 to more than $1,200. Husbands in the North sometimes labored for years to purchase the freedom of their children and wives.
- By being born to a free mother. The mother's condition determined freedom (laws dictated that children born to free women were free). For this reason, many Black men who could purchase their freedom opted to free their wives first, particularly if they hadn't had children yet, so that their children would be born free.
- Be being born to a white mother. Although it was very uncommon, there are a few documented incidences of white women fleeing with their Black lovers.

Perhaps free, but not equal

Regardless of how free Black people came to be free, they did enjoy some of freedom's benefits. In 1800, Philadelphia's free Black community owned almost 100 houses and lots. In 1837, New York's Black community owned $1.4 million in property. Free Blacks in the South also owned property, with some amassing considerable amounts. Despite the backlash following Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831 (see the section "Nat Turner's Rebellion" earlier in the chapter), Virginia's free

Black population owned 60,000 acres of farmland in 1860. By far, New Orleans had the wealthiest community of free Black people: In 1860, they owned in excess of $15 million worth of property. Thomy Lafon, a wealthy New Orleans real estate broker born free in 1810, was so philanthropic that the Louisiana State Legislature commissioned a bust of him following his death in 1893.

Some few free Black people like Mississippi's William Johnson, known as the Barber of Natchez, were slaveholders (see the nearby sidebar). However, a larger number of wealthy free Black people purchased their own family members out of bondage as well as helped fund various antislavery causes.

Amassing wealth wasn't easy, but many Black Americans were very industrious. Free Black people in Massachusetts (Boston in particular) worked as engravers, tailors, teachers, and lawyers. Skilled Black people working as blacksmiths and carpenters weren't uncommon in such Southern cities as Charleston, Atlanta, and Richmond. There were also Black shopkeepers, barbers, and builders. Domestic work was common as well. Whites who objected to Black people working in factories or in the shipyards relented when western expansion created a shortage of white workers. European immigrants who began coming to the U.S. in droves, however, greatly threatened the economic stability of many free Black people.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

BLACK SLAVEHOLDER WILLIAM JOHNSON

Born enslaved in 1809 and emancipated by his slaveholder, most likely his father, in 1820, William Johnson, a barber by trade, established a barbershop and bathhouse in Natchez, Mississippi, and acquired several landholdings. He has become a notable figure not because of his achievements but because his personal journals are a rare glimpse into the life of a Black slaveholder.

In his diaries, Johnson, who legally owned 15 people when he died in 1851, details attending auctions and purchasing and enslaving other Black people. He even discusses whipping them. Sometimes, being cognizant of the limitations placed on his race, Johnson arranged for white associates to attend auctions and make purchases on his behalf. He also recounts witnessing a free Black person being kidnapped into slavery.

To historians' dismay, Johnson never explored his own feelings regarding his contradictory status. In 1951, Johnson's diaries were published in the book *William Johnson's Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro* (LSU Press).

Despite the wealth free Black people amassed or the industriousness with which they worked and lived, they weren't equal to white Americans. In order to sell corn, wheat, or tobacco in Maryland in 1805, for example, free Black people needed a license; white people didn't. Although states such as Maryland, Tennessee, New York, and Pennsylvania gave free Black people the right to vote prior to the American Revolution, that privilege ended in the 19th century. Maryland's free Black community lost the right to vote in 1810, while those in Tennessee and North Carolina lost the right in 1834 and 1835, respectively. Thomas Jefferson signed an 1802 bill banning free Black people from voting in the nation's capital of Washington, D.C., and, in 1821, New York instituted a voting-related property qualification that applied only to Black people. Ironically, even without the right to vote, Black people were still required to pay taxes, sometimes more than their white counterparts who could vote.

Toward the middle of the 19th century, some Southerners advocated enslaving all Black people. Already this new nation based in freedom had purchased the liberty of its white citizens by denying the same right to its Black citizens. Perhaps no other group recognized this hypocrisy as clearly as free Black people. Throughout the early 19th century, proslavery and antislavery camps galvanized. In the decades leading up to the Civil War, the majority of Black Americans, enslaved and free, assisted by some moral and courageous white people, inched closer and closer to ending slavery.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Organizing to end slavery
- Spreading the abolitionist message
- Considering the emigration option
- Going underground
- Stretching the divided nation too far

Chapter 5

Bringing Down the House: Marching toward Civil War and Freedom

The American Revolution that I discuss in Chapter 3, awakened many white Americans to the paradox of American slavery and American freedom. That awakening profoundly affected Black people and the nation overall. As a number of white Americans enlisted in the fight to end slavery, emotions rose considerably in the new nation. After the War of 1812, antislavery and proslavery arguments grew more intense. While the North moved toward manufacturing and nonagricultural work where enslaved labor wasn't needed, the South remained committed to agriculture and enslaved labor.

Those two disparate economic realities created a form of sectionalism that still marks the nation. Expanding the new nation westward only exacerbated those tensions. With lines drawn, mainly along the lines of North and South, tensions spilled over into many facets of American life. Nowhere was the animosity more dramatic than in the halls of government.

This chapter explores the abolition movement and its impact on a growing complex nation. It delves into the Underground Railroad and the founding of the Black press, as well as examines the key legal cases and governmental showdowns that finally brought the nation to civil war.

Picking Fights

Prior to the American Revolution, some white colonists began questioning the institution of slavery. In 1763, James Otis of Massachusetts, who is credited with coining the phrase "no taxation without representation," argued in his pamphlet *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* that all men, white and Black, are born free. The Quakers, popularly known as the Society of Friends, were the first white people to organize against slavery, although some Quakers did own slaves at one time. They began speaking out against slavery as early as 1688 and published their first antislavery tract in 1693. Most of the Quakers' antislavery activity filtered through the Society of Friends, which championed religious freedom, education, and egalitarianism.

Abolitionist societies such as the following were formed (interestingly, abolition and manumission societies, especially early organizations, didn't necessarily include Black members):

- **Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS):** Founded by well-known Quaker Anthony Benezet in 1775, the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage was the first acknowledged American abolition society. The organization, later known as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, suspended meetings during the American Revolution but reorganized itself in 1784 and 1787, incorporating in 1789. Former slaveholder Benjamin Franklin served as president, even bringing a petition for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade to the nation's first Congress just months prior to his death in 1790.
- **New York Manumission Society:** Founded in 1785, this organization, with leadership from Founding Fathers John Jay and Alexander Hamilton, succeeded in ending slavery in New York. ***Note:*** Hamilton had a history of buying and trading enslaved people during his early years it was revealed in 2020, and it's been said he also bought and sold enslaved Africans for his wife's family.
- **New England Anti-Slavery Society:** Massachusetts, particularly Boston, became another abolition stronghold. Prominent white abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison helped establish this society in 1832. The Society's goals were to abolish slavery in the United States and secure equal civil and political rights for Black Americans.
- **American Anti-Slavery Society:** Established in Philadelphia in 1833 and led by William Lloyd Garrison, the society's stated goal was to end slavery in the United States.

Although relatively few in number, antislavery organizations did exist in the South during the early 19th century. That changed in time, particularly following Nat Turner's Rebellion (refer to Chapter 4), when all abolitionist activity in the South came under fire and the mere suspicion of antislavery behavior invited retaliation. Individuals who were involved were faced with the possibility of arrest and charged with criminal activity.

Of course, proslavery forces sprouted to counter antislavery activity. Prominent proslavery supporters included Southern politician John C. Calhoun, who proclaimed slavery "a positive good" before the U.S. Senate in 1837, and Samuel F.B. Morse, the man behind the telegraph and Morse code. White Southerners had a number of proslavery organizations, but the American Colonization Society, with its mission to send free Black Americans back to Africa, is among their more well-known efforts.

During this charged period, antislavery and proslavery forces defined and refined their arguments. With sides clearly drawn, they fought steadily well into the Civil War. The following sections outline key arguments for both sides.

Arguing against slavery



Ironically, much of the credit for the increased intensity in antislavery efforts goes to the English and other Europeans, who began to question slavery as an institution. Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith, the author of fundamental texts on capitalism, free trade, and economics in general, claimed slavery wasn't profitable and actually retarded progress. "From the experience of all ages and nations, I believe, that the work done by free men comes cheaper in the end than the work performed by slaves. Whatever work he does, beyond what is sufficient to purchase his own maintenance, can be squeezed out of him by violence only, and not by any interest of his own," he wrote in his influential *The Wealth of Nations.*

Other arguments against slavery included the following:

- **It was anti-Christian.** Many antislavery advocates were deeply religious and used Christianity to argue against slavery. They insisted Jesus Christ taught universal brotherhood and established the equality of all men as a cardinal principle of Christianity.
- **It violated American values.** Antislavery factions argued that slavery violated the core American value of freedom that Americans had fought for and won during the American Revolution.

- **It threatened the security of the nation.** Slavery not only was inefficient but also threatened the peace and security of the nation because white Southerners lived in fear of slave revolts such as Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831 (see Chapter 4 for more on rebellions).

Arguing for slavery

"Black inferiority" formed the cornerstone of the proslavery argument. According to slavery's strongest supporters, Black people weren't quite fully human and retained childlike qualities even in adulthood. Because Black people weren't intellectually and socially equipped for freedom, this *social paternalism* argument continued, slavery was a public good borne out of necessity. Proslavery supporters often denied slavery's brutality, insisting only extreme misbehavior prompted extreme force.

Following are other arguments supporting slavery:

- **It was biblical.** Proslavery proponents noted the many instances of slavery in the Bible. The curse of Ham, when Noah punished Ham's son Canaan to life as a servant, was immediate proof of God's intention that Black people (then often referred to as the children of Ham) be enslaved. Jesus, according to proslavery supporters, never denounced slavery.

  
  IN THEIR OWN WORDS

  "We assert that the Bible teaches that the relation of master and slave is perfectly lawful and right, provided only its duties be lawfully fulfilled," wrote Southern theologian Robert Lewis Dabney in his proslavery book *A Defence of Virginia* (1867).

- **It was used to "tame" and proselytize.** Slavery was used as a means for "civilizing" Africans and introducing Christianity.

- **It allowed American advancement.** According to Edward Brown in *Notes on the Origin and Necessity of Slavery* (1826), "slavery has ever been the step-ladder by which countries have passed from barbarism to civilization." South Carolina Governor and one-time U.S. Senator James Henry Hammond in his 1858 address to the Senate contributed his mudsill theory to that rationale, proclaiming that "in all social systems there must be a class to do the menial duties, to perform the drudgery of life."

- **It ensured the security of the nation.** Proslavery forces contended that slavery helped maintain the social order. Without it, they argued, violence would erupt and white people, especially white women, would be unsafe. Slavery, in their assessment, was a positive good.

Leading the Antislavery Assault: Key Abolitionists

Some of the most outspoken Black antislavery advocates had been formerly enslaved. Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Isabella Baumfree, better known as Sojourner Truth, are the most well-known among the once enslaved turned abolitionists, but author William Wells Brown and activist Henry Highland Garnet were also popular. Free-born Black Americans also identified with the struggle against enslavement. Siblings Charles Lenox Redmond and Sarah Parker Redmond, as well as author Frances E.W. Harper, frequently lectured against enslavement. Noted mathematician Benjamin Banneker, who was born free, even sent a plea for justice and equality to Thomas Jefferson.

Although Black Americans spearheaded their own freedom efforts, the nation was predominantly white. Thus, white abolitionists and their resources were critical in the fight to end the institution. Two such abolitionists, Anthony Benezet and William Lloyd Garrison, were among the movement's most revered figures. This section provides details about a handful of the many abolitionists who were particularly influential in the fight against slavery.


REMEMBER

As free Black people increased their resources, they became more vocal not just about ending slavery but also about Black Americans attaining true equality. The latter was especially important because white abolitionists didn't necessarily believe that Black Americans should receive the same treatment as white Americans.

Anthony Benezet

Anthony Benezet, whose family fled religious persecution in France, was one of the first in the abolition movement. A Quaker convert who studied Africa to better aid his cause, Benezet wrote influential antislavery pamphlets:

- His *A Short Account of That Part of Africa, Inhabited by the Negroes* (1762) helped British antislavery leader Thomas Clarkson clarify his position on slavery.
- Methodism's founder John Wesley incorporated Benezet's *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (1771) into his sermons in Britain against the slave trade.

Benezet, a pioneering force behind the nation's first abolition society better known as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (see the earlier section "Picking Fights"), also worked overtime to ensure the passage of the Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery by the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1780.

David Walker

Few abolitionists, Black or white, matched David Walker's revolutionary spirit, especially in the 1820s when calls for gradual emancipation prevailed.



REMEMBER

In 1829, David Walker, born in North Carolina to a free mother and an enslaved father, published his highly controversial *Walker's Appeal.* In his *Appeal,* Walker praised enslaved people who defended themselves against their masters. At a time when many Black people, even abolitionists, refrained from advocating violent and rebellious action against slavery, Walker dared to suggest enslaved people kill their masters for their freedom. Of course, this scared many slaveholders who already feared slave rebellions. It also scared many white abolitionists who usually favored gradual emancipation. Walker's direct address to enslaved and free Black people to take the fight for freedom into their own hands, even if it meant using violence, distinguished his *Appeal* the most.

Walker's message was deemed so incendiary that a bounty of $3,000 was placed on his head, with some Southern states offering $10,000 to anyone who brought him in alive. In some places in the South, those caught with *Walker's Appeal* risked fines and imprisonment. When Nat Turner and others enslaved later rebelled, white Southerners didn't blame slavery for the rebellion but rather *Walker's Appeal* for encouraging it. Despite the risks, Walker refused to hide and instead produced more editions of the controversial treatise. Shortly after the third edition was distributed in 1830, Walker was found dead. At the time, it was assumed to be murder, but today many historians believe he died of tuberculosis, which also killed his daughter.

William Lloyd Garrison

Born in Massachusetts, William Lloyd Garrison, mentored by abolitionist publisher Benjamin Lundy, initially advocated for gradual emancipation and supported recolonization efforts in Africa to free Black people. By the 1830s, however, he supported immediate emancipation and distanced himself from the American Colonization Society.

To reinforce his newfound advocacy of *militant abolitionism,* or the immediate abolishment of slavery without violence, Garrison launched his own antislavery publication, *Liberator,* in 1831. Garrison didn't relegate his brand of militant abolitionism (known as *Garrisonism*) to his newspaper. Instead, he established the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1832 and spearheaded the American Anti-Slavery Society, which began publishing the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* in 1840.



Over the years, Garrison rejected not only slavery but the Constitution as well. He and Frederick Douglass were divided on this issue. Garrison supported burning the Constitution, which he contended was a proslavery document, whereas Douglass favored using it as a tool to end slavery. Undoubtedly, the House of Representatives' 1836 decision to ignore petitions against slavery, a policy that lasted until 1845, only reinforced Garrison's point. Garrison's unwillingness to accept Douglass's independence also created a rift between them. When the two disagreed on John Brown and his actions, for instance, Garrison presumed Douglass wasn't thinking independently. He also discouraged Douglass from pursuits independent of him.

Frederick Douglass

Born into slavery in Maryland in 1818, Frederick Douglass, shown in Figure 5-1, is perhaps America's most well-known abolitionist. One of the first truly prominent Black Americans on both a national and international level, Douglass, the son of a slave mother who died when he was 7 and an unknown white man, learned to read and write at an early age. Set on freedom, Douglass, after one failed escape attempt, finally succeeded in 1838. After spending a brief time in New York where he was also married, he and his new wife settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts.

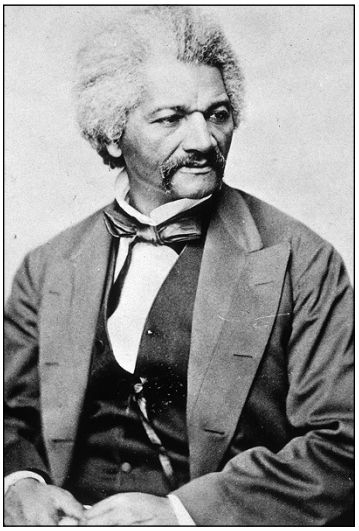


FIGURE 5-1: Frederick Douglass.

MPI/Getty Images

A *Liberator* subscriber, Douglass went to see Garrison speak in 1841 and impressed Garrison, who became a mentor. Days after that meeting, Douglass delivered a speech of his own, and his career as a master orator began. Encouraged to write

about his personal experience with slavery, Douglass published his classic text *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in 1845. Fearing that the text could prompt his re-enslavement, Douglass went to Europe, where he lectured in England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Back in the United States, Douglass began publishing his own newspaper and developing his own ideas about freedom. He campaigned relentlessly to end slavery and procure equal rights for Black Americans. Thus, he became a titan within the Black American community until his death in 1895.

Fighting with Words

Many Black abolitionists favored moderate and strategic action over violence to end slavery. Because white Americans outnumbered Black Americans, violence wasn't a viable option. Even in communities where Black people weren't outnumbered, their behavior was so restricted that amassing substantial firepower would have been difficult. So the pen became one of the biggest weapons against slavery.


REMEMBER

Fearing Black literacy, proslavery factions passed many laws restricting the teaching of reading and writing to Black people. Mere suspicion of being able to read and write posed a danger to many Black Southerners, enslaved or free (read more about education in Chapter 13).

Slave narratives

Early accounts of how enslaved Blacks lived was distorted and didn't show how they actually lived. Slave narratives were open testimony from those who actually survived the horrors, and they enlightened those who were clueless about life in bondage. Slave narratives such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and Solomon Northrup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853) were important antislavery treatises that in the United States and in England.

Douglass's narrative like other slave narratives created an emotional connection with readers; his provided details about slavery's horrors that made readers feel how horrible slavery was. Other narratives outlined the injustices, but Douglass tugged at readers' heartstrings. His work underscored the fact that Black people were indeed human beings. Slave narratives' ability to create a human connection also played an important role in the early development of Black American literature, which you can read about in Chapter 14.

Origins of the Black press

White abolitionists proved that newspapers such as Benjamin Lundy's two publications, *The Philanthropist* and *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*, and Garrison's *Liberator* could be very effective tools in the fight against slavery. Black publishers found that newspapers specifically targeting Black people created forums in which they could truly express who they were and where they were going. Early Black newspapers began the important legacy of providing the Black community with a voice that celebrated Black milestones as well as agitated for equal rights. The Black press also became an important mechanism for galvanizing Black people nationally.

Prior to the Civil War, more than 40 newspapers emerged, but *Freedom's Journal*, launched by Samuel E. Cornish and John B. Russwurm, and *The North Star*, launched by Frederick Douglas, were two of the most important.



- ***Freedom's Journal:*** The nation's first Black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal* pushed for an end to slavery and informed the more than 300,000 free Black people in the U.S. about national and international news. The newspaper included profiles of great Black Americans as well as stories about often-ignored historic achievements.

  At its height, *Freedom's Journal*'s distribution spanned 11 states; Washington, D.C.; Haiti; Europe; and Canada. Unfortunately, it folded in March 1829, in part because coeditors Russwurm and Cornish disagreed over the issue of colonization.

- ***The North Star:*** Frederick Douglass's *The North Star,* first published in 1847, became the most prominent of all early Black newspapers mainly because of Douglass's stature. *The North Star* went beyond just advocating slavery's end and equal rights for Black Americans; it also championed equal rights for women. Its motto was "Right is of no Sex — Truth is of no Color — God is the Father of us all, and we are all brethren."

  Within these pages, Douglass expanded his vision of freedom and, like *Freedom's Journal,* provided a forum for critical Black issues overlooked by white abolitionist papers. The paper was far from a financial success, however. To stay afloat, Douglass continued lecturing. In 1851, he merged his paper with the *Liberty Party Paper* to form *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, which published until 1860. Douglass published a monthly before settling into political life in the 1870s.



CORNISH AND RUSSWURM ADDRESS THEIR READERS

"We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the publick been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us dearly, though in the estimation of some mere trifles; for though there are many in society who exercise towards us benevolent feelings; still (with sorrow we confess it) there are others who make it their business to enlarge upon the least trifle, which tends to the discredit of any person of colour. . ..

"Our vices and our degradation are ever arrayed against us, but our virtues are passed by unnoticed. And what is still more lamentable, our friends, to whom we concede all the principles of humanity and religion, from these very causes seem to have fallen into the current of popular feeling and are imperceptibly floating on the stream — actually living in the practice of prejudice, while they abjure it in theory, and feel it not in their hearts. Is it not very desirable that such should know more of our actual condition; and of our efforts and feelings, that in forming or advancing plans for our amelioration, they may do it more understandingly? In the spirit of candor and humility, we intend by a simple representation of the facts to lay our case before the publick, with a view to arrest the progress of prejudice, and to shield ourselves against the consequent evils."

(Comments made in "To Our Patrons," *Freedom's Journal,* Volume 1, Number 1, March 16, 1827)

Colonization (or Emigration) Movement

Proslavery Southerners frequently argued that liberating Black people would create chaos and endanger the republic. Ironically, many white abolitionists didn't necessarily intend for Black Americans to live among them. For members of both camps, *colonization* answered the question of what to do with emancipated Black people.

Colonization became one of the main objectives for the Connecticut Emancipation Society, and in 1777, Thomas Jefferson headed a Virginia legislative committee intended to gradually emancipate and deport enslaved people. Interestingly, some of the most definitive steps taken toward colonization came from Black Americans, who preferred the term emigration.

Early resettlement efforts

Prompted by the poor treatment free Black people who didn't live in bondage received, leaders of the Free African Union Society (founded in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1780) decided in January 1787 to create their own settlement in Africa.

The Free African Union Society eventually connected with free Black people in Boston whose goals matched their own. Led by Prince Hall, founder of the first Black lodge of Freemasons (refer to Chapter 3), 75 Black Americans had already petitioned the Massachusetts legislature for its assistance in relocating them back to Africa. The Society also connected with London's Granville Sharp, who was working with the proposed Sierra Leone settlement intended to rid England of unemployed Africans, many of whom were former enslaved Americans freed by the British during the American Revolution.

Despite its best intentions, the Free African Union Society never succeeded in its goal to resettle Black people in Africa. (Internal wars with natives of Sierra Leone also hampered efforts.)

Cuffe: Man on a mission

The efforts of Paul Cuffe, a successful Black maritime entrepreneur and whaling captain with Native American roots, met with different results, however. Dismayed by the treatment of free Black people, Cuffe, a converted Quaker, felt that for most Black people, returning to Africa would be better than remaining in the United States.

He consulted with the African Institution, a British organization established in 1807 to address the welfare of Africans and the suppression of the slave trade with special interests in Sierra Leone, before traveling to Sierra Leone with a crew of nine Black seamen. He met with chiefs and other local officials to assess Sierra Leone's potential as a home for Black people. From there, he visited England, which received him well. Pressured by the African Institution, England granted Cuffe a trading license as well as land in Sierra Leone.

The War of 1812 and family trials delayed but didn't destroy Cuffe's plans. In December 1815, using his own money, Cuffe departed the United States for Sierra Leone. In February 1816, he delivered 38 Black settlers, nine families comprising 18 adults and 20 children, with settling in Sierra Leone.



Although Cuffe, who died in 1817, never emigrated himself, his success in resettling others prompted white colonization proponents to form the American Colonization Society in 1816. In 1820, the American Colonization Society, whose membership included prominent white Americans such as Henry Clay, sent its

first group of free Black people to Sierra Leone. By 1830, 1,420 Black people had settled near Sierra Leone in their own colony, Liberia, whose capital Monrovia they named in honor of U.S. President James Monroe.

Questioning motives

Public positions on the issue of Black colonization varied. Slaveholders supported colonization efforts primarily because they viewed colonization as a solution to dealing with free Black people. Many free Black people opposed to colonization because they felt that their removal would allow slavery to flourish. Black abolitionist and politician Martin R. Delany didn't oppose Black emigration but did object to the American Colonization Society. Delany, who later established his own organization to resettle Black Americans in Liberia, charged that the society's goal was to eliminate Black people from the United States and labeled its leaders "anti-Christian" and "hypocrites."

Some free Black people participated in colonization efforts in Africa in order to spread Christianity, but overwhelmingly, Black people refused to leave the United States and chose to fight for the emancipation of all Black people in it.

The Effects of Proslavery Politics

Of course, antislavery activity didn't sit well with proslavery factions. Each year, proslavery and antislavery forces appeared more divided. Those tensions only intensified as new territories sought entry into the union. As the antislavery factions tried to tilt the nation toward freedom, proslavery supporters put more pressure on the government and the legal system. They focused their efforts on the U.S. Constitution and the new Western territories.

The Fugitive Slave Clause

Since antislavery activity began prior to the American Revolution, slavery was a major issue during the formation of the United States. Some Northern states had already made the decision to abolish slavery before the Constitution became a reality.



Vermont, with its 1777 constitution, has the distinction of being the first state to ban slavery.

Unlike the three-fifths compromise and the agreement to abolish the slave trade in 1808, the Fugitive Slave Clause came late in the proceedings at the Constitutional Convention and curiously invited little resistance from Northerners. Without specifically using the terms "slave" or "slavery," Article IV, Section 2 of the Constitution established the following protocol:

> No person engaged in service in one state could escape that service by fleeing to another state. Once the person to whom service was due made a claim, that person had to return.

Stronger fugitive slave measures: Fugitive Slave Act of 1793

It didn't take long for Southerners and Northerners to clash over the fugitive slave issue. When three Virginia men kidnapped a fugitive slave living freely in Pennsylvania, the governor there demanded that Virginia expedite the captured. Virginia's noncompliance prompted Pennsylvania to appeal to President George Washington who referred the matter to Congress. In response, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, which made the recovery of fugitives a federal matter.

With the federal government's blessing, slaveholders could follow those who escaped slavery to the North, seize them, and appear before a judge who could side with them without allowing the enslaved person to present his or her side of the story. This one-sidedness also left free Black people and children born to fugitives vulnerable to enslavement. That reality compelled more Northerners to join the Underground Railroad.

Battling over the slave status of new land

Originally, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 (passed under the Articles of Confederation a few months before the ratification of the U.S. Constitution) banned slavery in new territories but mandated the return of fugitive slaves. As the United States expanded, however, that policy changed, with new territories becoming fair game for slavery or freedom. Westward expansion, a movement largely facilitated by the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, ignited tension between the North and the South. The purchase garnered the U.S. land encompassing all or parts of modern-day Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming, among other areas.

The issue of whether these areas were free or slave territories came to a head in 1819 when Missouri applied for statehood. Attempts to balance the number of slave and free states and various territories only created greater division between the two sides of the argument.

The Missouri Compromise

When Missouri sought statehood in 1819, Northerners attempted to block its entry as a slave state, a major problem because slavery already existed in the territory. (***Remember:*** Missouri was considered a southern state.) New York Congressman James Tallmadge introduced an amendment that limited slavery in Missouri and even proposed to free the children of those already enslaved. The measure passed the House but failed the Senate. Complicating matters further, Alabama gained admission to the Union as a slave state in 1819, balancing the number of slave states and free states. Known as the Missouri Compromise of 1820 (sometimes the Compromise of 1820), Maine entered the Union as a free state, thus allowing Missouri to enter the Union as a slave state, making the count 12 slave states and 12 free states.



REMEMBER

The Missouri Compromise extended the Mason-Dixon line, which divided the North from the South, free states from slave states, westward.

The Underground Railroad

In the face of Constitutional amendments protecting slavery and rancorous debate over whether new states would be free or slave (as described in the preceding section), some abolitionists decided to take stronger proactive measures to end slavery by helping enslaved people escape to freedom.

Runaways or freedom seekers from the South often found liberty in Northern states, especially as the North began to ban slavery. Yet the odds of successfully eluding a slaveholder and actually making it to the North was nearly impossible, especially if one was unassisted. To increase the success rate of such bold action, the Underground Railroad developed. Although scholars believe that this complex system of escape tactics and routes, secret agents, and safe houses began in 1787, it reached its height between 1810 and 1850. An estimated 30,000 to 100,000 slaves escaped via the Underground Railroad over the course of its operation.

Heavily staffed by Quakers and free Black people, the Underground Railroad evolved over time. Initially some slaveholders permitted the purchase of runaways, so members of the Underground Railroad gathered funds to facilitate

freedom in that manner. As more enslaved people fled, however, slaveholders insisted on their return. Underground Railroad supporters remained undaunted. Sometimes entire towns backed the Underground Railroad and stood firm against slaveholders or their agents who tried to retrieve fugitives.

Operation Freedom

To avoid capture, runaways typically traveled at night, using the North Star as their guide and travelling along rivers. Therefore, the Underground Railroad became most useful during the day, so abolitionists established secret stations along the way to provide places to rest.

These stations were particularly critical in the South, where the free Black population remained small and recovery efforts were particularly intense. Either someone escorted those seeking freedom to stations or safe houses or the runaway slaves typically identified safe houses by a quilt hanging in the window, a lit lantern at the front of the house, or other signs (like clovers). Secrecy was required within the safe houses as well, so they often contained secret passageways, water wells, and attics where runaways could hide.

Usually, it was the responsibility of enslaved people to plan their own escape. Sometimes, free Black people came to plantations posing as enslaved people to help others flee. Other times runaway slaves had to reach certain points where agents known as conductors greeted them. The journey north was usually a combination of travel by foot, by horse and buggy, and even by boat. For example, Calvin Fairbanks, a white man who developed his distaste for slavery while attending Oberlin College, regularly transported fugitives who made it to Kentucky across the Ohio River to freedom. Because slave catchers also patrolled the North, some runaways settled in Canada.

In order to escape from slavery, individuals needed money, food, and clothes. Participating in the Underground Railroad was very dangerous, even for white people. Fairbanks spent more than a decade in a Kentucky prison for his role in aiding fugitives. It was also costly. Thomas Garrett of Wilmington, Delaware, went bankrupt paying a $10,000 fine for his admitted role in assisting fugitives.

Key people along the line

Historians believe that the Underground Railroad may have originated with the Quakers in the late 1780s (or when the first enslaved person ran away), so it's no surprise that they compose a large portion of white supporters. White participants, even those who weren't Quakers, tended to be religious and included

Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, and Catholics. For them, God's law superseded human laws. Their occupations ranged from preachers and politicians to ordinary citizens. Jacob M. Howard, a Michigan Underground Railroad supporter who later became a Republican senator, introduced the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery.

Ohio, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Michigan were just a few Underground Railroad strongholds. It wasn't completely uncommon for entire towns to participate. Oberlin and Ripley in Ohio had a large number of participants, many of them unknown. Levi Coffin and John Fairfield were two of the more prominent white participants of the Underground Railroad:

- **Levi Coffin:** Sometimes called "the President of the Underground Railroad," North Carolina–born Levi Coffin and his wife Catharine used their strategic location in southern Indiana, the modern-day Fountain City, to help more than 2,000 enslaved people escape to freedom over the course of nearly 20 years. A successful merchant, Coffin personally helped finance many Underground Railroad efforts, so many fugitives came through his home that people renamed it "Grand Central Station." Coffin's reputation as a model citizen inspired other white people to become involved with the Underground Railroad. His 1847 relocation to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he died many years later, didn't end his Underground Railroad activities.
- **John Fairfield:** Hailing from a slaveholding family in Virginia, John Fairfield, who abhorred slavery, became involved in the Underground Railroad when he helped an enslaved friend escape to Canada. Subsequently, other Black people, presumably in the Ohio area where he spent a lot of time, sought him out and paid him to help their relatives and friends escape. Posing as a slaveholder, a slave trader, and sometimes a peddler, Fairfield was able to gain the confidence of white people, which made it easier for him to lead escapees to freedom. One of his most impressive feats was helping to free 28 enslaved people by staging a funeral procession. While he led many of his charges to Canada, others he delivered to Coffin, who handled the remainder of their escape.

Black people were intrinsically involved in the Underground Railroad beyond just being fugitives. It was understandably harder for white participants to convince Black Americans to flee. Fugitives were particularly convincing, and a large number risked their own freedom to free others. Besides, it was also easier for Black people to blend in, especially on large plantations.

Black people had a higher emotional investment because many had relatives and close friends still in bondage. Their job didn't end with the escape though. Fugitives often stayed with other Black folks. They frequently settled in Black

communities where they learned where to look for work as well as how to conduct themselves, among other things. Despite the tremendous risks of recapture or becoming enslaved for the first time, Black people on all levels vigorously participated in the Underground Railroad and other antislavery efforts. Douglass's Rochester, New York, home was a well-known station.

Other courageous figures of the Underground Railroad include the following:

- **William Still:** Philadelphia abolitionist Still, revered as "the Father of the Underground Railroad," assisted as many as 60 escapees a month. Despite the great need for secrecy, the New Jersey–born Still kept meticulous records. Those biographies and details of how each individual escaped later composed the book *The Underground Railroad* (1872).
- **Elijah Anderson:** Anderson, a fugitive with light skin who sometimes posed as a slaveholder, reportedly led 1,000 fellow escapees to freedom. Following a conviction for violating the Kentucky law against "enticing slaves to run away," he was suspiciously found dead in a Kentucky prison the day of his release.
- **Jane Lewis:** New Lebanon, Ohio, resident Lewis rowed countless escapees across the Ohio River to freedom.
- **Arnold Gragston:** Though enslaved himself in Kentucky, Gragston rowed countless others across the river to freedom in Ohio for at least four years until having to seek freedom himself to avoid being killed.
- **John Mason:** Mason, a fugitive from Kentucky who was once recaptured only to escape again, helped more than 1,000 escapees to freedom. In just 19 months, he reportedly delivered 256 escapees to Rev. W. M. Mitchell's Ohio home.
- **Rev. W. M. Mitchell:** Mitchell was born free to a Native American mother and a Black father in North Carolina but was orphaned at a young age. As a child, he was an apprentice to a plantation owner and witnessed the horror of enslavement up close. In Ohio, he operated the Underground Railroad safe house utilized by Mason. Mitchell, who later continued his work as a reverend and missionary in Canada, is said to be the only person to write a book, *The Under-ground Railroad* (1860), about the network while it was illegal.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

- **Harriet Tubman:** No Underground Railroad figure matches the legend of Harriet Tubman, one of its rare known female conductors (see Figure 5-2). Even as a young enslaved girl, Tubman, born Araminta Ross in Maryland around 1820, selflessly protected others: While shielding a field slave from an angry overseer, she received a blow on the head that made her prone to falling into a deep sleep at times throughout her life. Unwilling to be sold, Tubman fled north in 1849. She got a job in Philadelphia but traveled back the next year to free her sister and her sister's two children. Tubman made an amazing

19 trips back South, personally freeing at least 70 other enslaved people, including her parents.

Often dubbed "Moses" for leading "her people" out of bondage, Tubman died in 1913 in her adopted home of Auburn, New York. "[I]n the point of courage, shrewdness, and disinterested exertions to rescue her fellowman," wrote William Still, "she was without equal."

IN THEIR OWN WORDS



FIGURE 5-2: Harriet Tubman.

Historical/Getty Images

TECHNICAL STUFF

Because runaway notices weren't posted until Monday, Tubman favored traveling on Saturdays, often carrying a drug to silence crying babies and a gun to urge on fugitives who wanted to give up along the way. Tubman, who reportedly made her last trip south in 1860, was never caught. During the Civil War, she worked various jobs, sometimes concurrently, as a laundress, nurse, and spy. As a mastermind and key strategist of the Combahee Ferry Raid in South Carolina in June 1863, she and 150 Black Union soldiers rescued more than 700 enslaved people, making her the first American woman to lead a major military operation.

Message in the music

When it came to the Underground Railroad, spirituals were much more than songs of worship. As Douglass indicated in *My Bondage, My Freedom*, spirituals held deep meaning. Just as the drums had allowed the enslaved to communicate from plantation to plantation, so did the spirituals. Countless numbers of enslaved people were able to escape through the Underground Railroad in part due to spirituals.

Certain songs delivered messages about secret meetings or clues about escape routes. "Follow the Drinkin' Gourd" directed runaways to travel in the direction of the Big Dipper while "Steal Away" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" often signaled someone was going to flee. (It also indicated when the river was low enough to cross or an individual would be nearby to help anyone wanting to run.) When Tubman went to forage for food for her "passengers," she would reportedly assure them she had returned by singing "Dark and thorny is de pathway/Where de pilgrim makes his ways/But beyond dis vale of sorrow/Lie de fields of endless days." Another song, "Go Down Moses" — with the lyrics "Oh go down, Moses/Way down into Egypt's land/Tell old Pharoah/Let my people go" — is often sung in tribute to Tubman, honoring her as the Moses of her people. Read more about music in Chapter 16.

The Breaking Point

Marching into the 1850s, the divide between slavery and freedom became harder to manage. Foreseeing victory in the Mexican-American War (1846–1848) and the new territory that would come with it, political leaders sought ways to determine the status of any new territory:

- The Wilmot Proviso proposed to outlaw slavery in any annexed territory.
- Some leaders insisted that new territory follow the precedent of the Missouri Compromise and be equally divided into slave and free states (refer to the section, "The Missouri Compromise," earlier in the chapter).
- Illinois Congressman Stephen A. Douglas, who championed popular sovereignty to allow the people of those territories to side with slavery or freedom, voted against the Wilmot Proviso.
- Proslavery stalwart John C. Calhoun argued that slavery couldn't be excluded anywhere.

Straining North-South relations

The Fugitive Slave Law (or Fugitive Slave Act) caused the most aggravation for Black Americans (refer to the section, "Stronger fugitive slave measures: Fugitive Slave Act of 1793," earlier in this chapter). Claiming fugitives was difficult for Southern slaveholders, but the Fugitive Slave Law mandated that officials arrest people fleeing slavery and return them to their legal owners or be fined heavily. This law threatened the success of the Underground Railroad, which depended on the lax enforcement of fugitive slave laws. For many abolitionists and those straddling the fence, the Fugitive Slave Law spurred them to greater action. As Southern slaveholders intensified their efforts to capture fugitives in the North, many Northerners chose to stand their ground, which only flamed the seething tensions between North and South.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) further strained North–South relations. Not only did the influential book sell more than 300,000 copies in its first year, but the theatrical counterpart also did well. By humanizing the suffering of those enslaved, Stowe took many white Americans beyond the facts of slavery. Proslavery supporters denounced the book as fervently as antislavery proponents welcomed it. Many proslavery supporters contended that Stowe exaggerated slavery's brutality. Still, Stowe's novel became the rallying cry that shocked more white Americans into action against slavery.

The Compromise of 1850

When California petitioned for statehood, there were 15 slave states and 15 free states. Accepting California as a free state would have tilted that balance, and that proposition angered Southerners. The situation was so critical that several Southern states, led by elder South Carolina statesman John C. Calhoun, seriously considered seceding from the Union. A series of dramatic debates produced the pivotal Compromise of 1850 under which the following occurred:

- California entered the Union as a free state.
- Other territories deferred the slavery question until later.
- Texas received compensation for ceding land to New Mexico.
- The District of Columbia abolished the slave trade.
- A stricter fugitive slave law passed to appease Southern slaveholders.

Only a temporary fix to the country's much larger problem, the Compromise of 1850 couldn't stop the Union from unraveling.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act

In 1854, Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas accelerated the probability of civil war with the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which repealed the Missouri Compromise and allowed the legislatures of territories that should have been free to determine their own slave or free status. Kansas literally became a battleground as proslavery and antislavery factions flocked there.

In the midst of this chaos, the Northern Whigs, Free Soilers, and antislavery Democrats united to form the Republican Party, which set out to attract both antislavery and indifferent voters. Unlike the South, where many non-slaveholders vehemently defended slavery, a sizable number of Northerners opposed to slavery were reluctant to end it. Thus, attracting those voters would strengthen the Republicans and their political base.

Bleeding Kansas was a mini civil war between proslavery and antislavery forces that occurred in Kansas from 1856 to 1865. The government's approval of the Kansas-Nebraska Act helped lead to the formation of the Republican Party, a political party, which was centered in the North, dedicated to preventing slavery's expansion.

Slavery continues

Southerners pushed the envelope beyond just insisting upon slavery's expansion; they also demanded that the slave trade (early human trafficking) reopen, a sore spot because the slave trade's illegal continuation already agitated Northerners. As late as the 1850s, a complex web of illegal trafficking persisted in the nation. The ship the *Echo* and its crew traveled from New York and New Orleans to Cuba, the African coast, and Charleston. Other instances of illegal slave trading include the following:

- The *Wanderer,* which sailed between New York and Africa, delivered roughly 400 Africans to Jekyll Island, Georgia, in 1858. Although William Corrie and Charles Lamar were among those charged for slave trading and piracy, a conviction never followed, dismaying antislavery supporters. The Wanderer Memorial honors those survivors.
- Timothy Meaher, a wealthy shipyard owner in Mobile, Alabama, bet a Northerner he could defy the slave trade ban without punishment, so he sent the *Clotilda* to Africa. In 1860, the ship returned with more than 100 Africans. Officials apprehended Meaher, his brother Burns, and his associate John Dabney but later dismissed the charges. In 1927, writer Zora Neale Hurston

interviewed Cudjo Lewis, the ship's last living survivor, in Africatown (the Mobile, Alabama, community he and other *Clotilda* survivors helped found); however, *Barracoon* (Amistad), her book telling the story, wasn't published until 2018. Official announcement of the *Clotilda*'s discovery came the next year, in 2019.

Dred Scott: A strike against freedom

The Supreme Court's 1857 Dred Scott decision showed the Civil War's inevitably. In 1847, Scott went to trial in Missouri to gain freedom for himself and his wife Harriet. Under the Missouri Compromise, Scott claimed he was entitled to freedom because his legal owner Dr. John Emerson (since deceased) had taken him into Illinois and other free areas. When a lower court ruled that Scott and his family were free, the Missouri Supreme Court reversed the decision, with the United States Circuit Court in Missouri upholding the decision. Scott and his lawyers appealed it to the United States Supreme Court but fared even worse at the hands of the highest court in the land.



REMEMBER

Stacked with proslavery justices, the Supreme Court decided that because Scott was Black, he wasn't a citizen and therefore couldn't sue anybody. To top it off, the Court ruled that the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional. While the South cheered, abolitionists struggled to remain optimistic.

Defining events at Harpers Ferry

If it wasn't already clear that the nation was headed toward civil war, John Brown and his actions in Harpers Ferry, Virginia, left little doubt. A stalwart abolitionist, Brown was born into a religious family in Connecticut in 1800. Although never rich, Brown didn't let lack of funds prevent him from supporting the antislavery cause. He helped finance the publication of *Walker's Appeal* (see the section, "David Walker," earlier in this chapter) and was among the few who supported Henry Highland Garnet's very radical "Call To Rebellion" speech at the 1843 National Negro Convention in Buffalo, New York. Apparently, Brown took Garnet's message to rebel to heart.

With Kansas up for grabs (courtesy of the Kansas-Nebraska Act), Kansans had to determine whether it would have free or slave status. To sway the decision, Brown and five of his sons went to Kansas and fought proslavery forces in Lawrence, with Brown killing five proslavery settlers in another town. Still, these feats paled in comparison to his plan for Harpers Ferry.



HENRY HIGHLAND GARNET'S "CALL TO REBELLION"

"Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberties. Now is the day and the hour. Let every slave throughout the land do this, and the days of slavery are numbered. You cannot be more oppressed than you have been — you cannot suffer greater cruelties than you have already. Rather die freemen than live to be slaves. Remember that you are FOUR MILLIONS!"

(Given at the National Negro Convention, Buffalo, New York, 1843)

Increasingly convinced that only violence would end slavery, Brown raised money throughout the North for a dramatic scheme to arm his own army against slavery. On October 16, 1859, Brown and 21 men (5 Black and 16 white) raided the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry. They planned to secure enough firepower to battle Virginia slaveholders but didn't get very far. Federal and state troops swooped in almost immediately and captured Brown, who was hanged on December 2, 1859. Although the plot failed, Brown's actions terrified Southerners and inspired Northerners. (In 2020, Showtime aired the limited series *The Good Lord Bird*, adapted from the novel of the same name by Black author James McBride, dramatizing Brown's actions.)



Before his hearing sentence, Brown addressed the court: "Now, if it be deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children, and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I submit: so let it be done."

Facing the Moment of Truth

A year prior to Brown's 1859 rebellion at Harpers Ferry, Abraham Lincoln delivered his famous declaration that "a house divided against itself cannot stand" when he accepted the Republican nomination to represent Illinois in the Senate:



"A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved — I do not expect the house to fall — but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other."

A pivotal figure in establishing a strong Republican party, Lincoln became the Republican nominee for president in 1860. When he won with nearly 60 percent of electoral votes (but less than 40 percent of the popular vote), Southern states didn't secede immediately. Speculation regarding their actions ended on April 12, 1861, when shots rang out at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, to launch the Civil War.



States' rights notwithstanding, the Confederate States of America and its president Jefferson Davis made it clear that the Civil War was about enslaving Black Americans. Lincoln wasn't as clear. In 1862, *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley wrote an open letter to Lincoln urging him to end slavery. Lincoln responded: "If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it: and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that." Lincoln wasn't alone. Many white Northerners weren't sure how slavery factored into the Civil War. In time, the North changed its course and waged a war not just to save the Union but to finally end slavery.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Observing Lincoln's balancing act on the issue of slavery
- Seeing the impact of emancipation on the war effort
- Constructing a new union with freed Black people in mind
- Tracking the end of Reconstruction

Chapter 6

Up from Slavery: Civil War and Reconstruction

After decades of trying to balance slavery and freedom, the United States finally reached the breaking point and ended up at war with itself. Although the Confederacy was clearly of the view that slavery was at the heart of the disagreement (even if later cries for states' rights veiled that sentiment), President Abraham Lincoln initially refused to acknowledge slavery's role at all. Many Black people knew that the Civil War ran deeper than keeping the Union together, and they fought hard off the battlefield — and eventually on it — to determine their own destiny and have the government formally acknowledge what they knew to be truth that they were indeed people as well as Americans.

This chapter delves into the struggle to make the Civil War a final blow to the institution of slavery. It also discusses the issues that initially prevented Black Americans from fighting. The Black American resolve for freedom manifested itself during Reconstruction, the nation's brief experiment to achieve true democracy, largely through political participation and the quest for an education, following the war. The Union victory in the war, however, was only the beginning of how hard securing change in the United States would be. In this chapter, you also find out about the complex struggles between Lincoln's successor and Congress, the North and the South, and white Southerners and newly freed Black Americans.

The Question: To End Slavery or Not?

To the dismay of Black people and white abolitionists, Lincoln, during the early part of his presidency and in the early years of the Civil War, refused to take a firm stance about ending slavery. But he felt trapped; to save the Union, he had to avoid pushing slaveholding states that hadn't seceded (and that physically separated the North from the South) into the ranks of the Confederacy. Not offending other white Southerners further wasn't Lincoln's only worry. He also had to avoid riling proslavery factions and Northerners fearful of ending slavery. Eventually, however, Lincoln moved toward emancipation, one of the defining triumphs of his presidency.

Teetering on a tightrope

Before Lincoln took office in February 1861, seven states had seceded. Aware that the nation was at stake, Lincoln hoped to prevent further defections and took care in his inaugural address to condemn individuals for secession and not the South overall. His guarded words, however, didn't prevent the new nation of seceding states, the Confederate States of America (CSA), led by Mississippian Jefferson Davis, from firing the shot that launched the Civil War on April 12, 1861.

Initially, the North, even those who voted against Lincoln, lent their support to restoring the Union. The North had more people and greater resources, and Lincoln and his supporters felt the war would end quickly, with the Union victorious. As the Union lost several battles, that support began to fizzle. White and Black Northern abolitionists wanted the war to end slavery, but that prospect scared other Northerners, many of whom feared Black people uprising.

In addition, slavery was alive and well in the border states that stuck with the Union. Lincoln understood that keeping these states was critical to the Union's success, and he worked overtime not to lose them.



The key border states were Maryland, Missouri, Kentucky, and Delaware. Some historians also include West Virginia, even though it didn't officially become a state until 1863.

Lincoln hoped the *Crittenden-Johnson Resolution* would reassure border states practicing slavery. The resolution, sponsored by Kentucky Senator John J. Crittenden and Tennessee's Andrew Johnson (the only Southern senator not to quit his post even when Tennessee seceded), emphasized that the federal government was fighting to preserve the Union and not to disturb any institutions already in practice.

The first Confiscation Act, 1861

As the war progressed, the issue of what to do about slavery became even more relevant. When Union forces began penetrating the South, able-bodied enslaved men sought refuge, but Union generals didn't know what to do with them. Their varying reactions, as evident in the following, only underscored that there was no federal policy pertaining to the scores of enslaved people fleeing:

- Some generals proclaimed those fleeing slavery free.
- Some generals seized those claiming freedom as contraband and put them to work.
- Some refused to take in those enslaved seeking freedom.
- Some actively returned those fleeing to their slaveholders.
- One Union general requested permission to allow slaveholders to cross Union lines and recover those they enslaved.

In response to all this confusion, Congress passed its first Confiscation Act in August 1861. This act established a federal policy for dealing with enslaved people. With this act, it became federal policy to seize enslaved people directly used in military action in support of the Confederacy, but the act made no direct mention of freeing anyone. Instead, it simply deprived rebelling slaveholders of any enslaved labor used against the Union. Even with no mention of freeing anyone, Lincoln worried how the Union's bordering proslavery states would react to the legislation.

Black People in the Early Days of the Civil War

As Lincoln pondered how slavery factored into the Civil War and moved toward emancipation, many Black Americans never doubted that this was the war to end slavery. When the Civil War began, Black Americans were eager to contribute.

Even though Black men wanted to fight for the Union and freedom, the War Department initially turned them away. Lincoln and other Unionists feared that allowing Black men to fight would imply that the war was about ending slavery and not preserving the Union, an action that would alienate border states that they felt were crucial to winning the war. Also, there was a fear that allowing

Black Americans to fight would turn the Civil War into a rebellion, forcing white soldiers to battle both Black Americans and the Confederacy. Thus, Black Americans had to fight to enlist in the Union army. A few Black Americans did serve in the navy early on, however. Others formed military clubs such as the Hannibal Guards of Pittsburgh and the Crispus Attucks Guards of Albany, Ohio, to prepare for battle should the call come.

Serving the Union

The rising death toll of white Union soldiers convinced white Northerners that white soldiers shouldn't be the only ones sacrificed to win the war. In addition, slim Union victories like Shiloh and defeats such as the Second Bull Run threatened recruitment. When a voluntary call for 300,000 Union soldiers yielded only 90,000, Lincoln had to consider his options.

With the Militia Act passed in July 1862 (essentially overturning a 1792 law prohibiting Black men from bearing arms), Lincoln and Congress started paving the way for Black Americans to join Union forces. Several sections of that act specifically addressed Black American enlistment, establishing pay rates as well as potentially emancipating the mothers, wives, and children of these soldiers.

Surviving in the South

The Confederacy faced its own crisis: As enslaved people realized that their freedom was indeed within reach, instead of running away, some just walked off plantations and other places where they were enslaved. Many individuals ended up in Union camps and eventually enlisted with the Union to defeat the Confederacy. Some enslaved people who didn't leave refused to submit to white authority.

Tempering reactions by those enslaved to what was happening with the war became a big concern for the Confederacy, so strengthening *slave patrols,* militia-like units that regulated enslaved behavior, including hunting down runaways, was first on the list (go to Chapter 4 for more information about slave patrols). All the proslavery rhetoric from previous decades about enslaved people loving their masters flew out the window. Exemptions from patrol duties ended as the Confederacy instituted punishments in the form of fines and imprisonment to those who didn't attend to their duties.

Moving toward the Emancipation Proclamation

Long before becoming president, Lincoln favored setting aside money for Black Americans' voluntary emigration or colonization to Haiti or Liberia and compensating slaveholders for their losses. That position didn't change with the Civil War, especially because Lincoln needed to keep the Union's bordering slaveholding states loyal. His repeated pleas to Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri in 1862 to accept compensated emancipation may have gone unheard, but the wheels of emancipation were already in motion.

Shutting down the illegal slave trade

Shutting down the illegal slave trade was one of Lincoln's first moves toward eventual emancipation. Despite numerous bans spanning several decades, an illegal slave trade continued well into the 1860s, with the last official slave ship to the U.S., the *Clotilda*, arriving in 1860 (refer to Chapter 5). To stop the trade, Lincoln did the following during the first half of 1862:

- **Sanctioned the hanging of Captain Nathaniel Gordon, a known enslaver from Portland, Maine.** Gordon was the first slave trader ever executed under the Piracy Act of 1820, which defined slave trading as piracy.
- **Launched negotiations to allow Britain, which had become one of the world's leading antislavery forces, to search American ships.** For decades, the U.S. had refused these searches; as a result, the illegal slave trade flourished. The resulting treaty with Britain (signed April 25, 1862) helped end the slave trade. More importantly, the treaty attracted British sympathy to the Union's cause.
- **Approved a bill to end slavery in Washington, D.C.** This bill was the Civil War's only instance of compensated emancipation: $1 million was set aside to pay D.C. slaveholders up to $300 per enslaved person, and there was another $100,000 to fund voluntary emigration.
- **Signed a law outlawing slavery in the territories.** The debate about the status of slavery in the territories had arguably led the country to the Civil War in the first place (check out Chapter 5 for more details).

Passing the Second Confiscation Act

With the illegal slave trade finally quashed, the nation's priority was to get through the Civil War. The Second Confiscation Act became a pivotal turning point. Signed by Lincoln in July 1862, the Second Confiscation Act was an important step toward the Emancipation Proclamation because it freed those enslaved by rebelling citizens, in addition to allowing for the seizure of other property. (The First Confiscation Act purposely avoided any reference to emancipation.)

Courting England's support

The Confederacy was actively seeking England's support. Cotton was one of the primary reasons the Southern states had been so quick to secede. Because the South enjoyed a virtual monopoly over one of the world's most dominant crops, leaders figured that world powers had to side with their main cotton supplier, even if they opposed slavery. Obviously, if England supported the South, the Union would be at a distinct disadvantage.

Lincoln believed that European powers, particularly England, wouldn't support a proslavery government; the problem was that the Union didn't necessarily stand for freedom. Officially, federal forces were fighting to keep the United States unified rather than to end slavery. Winning England's support became another factor leading Lincoln toward the Emancipation Proclamation.

Free at Last (Well, Sort of): The Emancipation Proclamation

On July 22, Lincoln surprised his cabinet members by reading a preliminary draft of his executive order for emancipation. Only two cabinet members fully endorsed the Proclamation, and one cabinet member suggested that Lincoln share his decision with the public after a Union battle victory, advice Lincoln heeded.

His moment came after the September 17, 1862 Battle of Antietam (also known as the Battle of Sharpsburg) in Maryland, in which Major General George B. McClellan successfully pushed back Confederate forces commanded by General Robert E. Lee. Lincoln readdressed his cabinet on September 22 for advice on the document's wording, not on the issue of whether he should deliver it or not, and shortly thereafter issued a preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. He issued the formal Emancipation Proclamation 100 days later on January 1, 1863.

What the Proclamation did

In the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln vowed that if rebellion continued, "all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thence-forward, and forever free."



REMEMBER

Although many people assume the Proclamation freed all those enslaved in the U.S., it actually didn't. Here are the finer points:

- The Proclamation declared those enslaved in *rebelling* states free.
- It did *not* free those in slaveholding border states or areas within Confederate territory already under Union control.
- It welcomed acceptably freed enslaved people to join the armed services.

Reaction to the order

Despite Lincoln's great strategic pains in taking the Emancipation Proclamation public, he pleased no one at first:

- **Northern whites:** The perceived shift from saving the Union to ending slavery so angered many Northern white people that some soldiers resigned. During the fall elections, Republicans lost key seats to Democrats who didn't generally support such so-called radical changes, narrowing the Republican advantage in the House to just 18 votes.
- **Abolitionists:** Because Lincoln's proposed emancipation was more than he had committed to since the war began, white and Black abolitionists didn't criticize it publicly. Privately, they didn't think Lincoln had gone far enough and wished that he had abolished slavery completely. Still, they considered the Proclamation a step in the right direction.
- **The English:** The proclamation didn't move the English populace. Commenting on Lincoln's proposed emancipation, one London newspaper wrote, "the principle is not that a human being cannot justly own another, but that he cannot own him unless he is loyal to the United States."

  In fact, England may have never committed to either side in the U.S. Civil War had Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederate States, not demanded the return of enslaved people back to slaveholding states, where death awaited them, with his own proclamation. After that, the working population of Manchester, England, let Lincoln know that their sympathies rested with the Union. A short time later, England supported the Union.



TECHNICAL STUFF

» **Black Americans:** Although many Black people, especially in the targeted South, were unaware of the Emancipation Proclamation, those who did know of it assigned the document greater value than Lincoln intended. Although heralded as "the Great Emancipator" throughout history, that title stems from the war's end result and not from any definitive stance Lincoln took against slavery as president.

Finally in the Fight

After the Emancipation Proclamation, it became easier for Black American soldiers to join the Union army. Many historians agree that these extra bodies, along with a few other factors, ultimately secured a Union victory.

With the ground cleared for Black men to enlist in the military, recruitment became ferocious. Luminaries such as Frederick Douglass served as recruiting agents, and recruitment rallies took place throughout the North. A number of Black soldiers were already prepared for war and quickly stepped up. An estimated 180,000 Black men — roughly 10 percent of the total forces — joined the Union cause.

As Union soldiers

Bringing about an end to slavery may have become the Union's new direction in the Civil War, but many Black Americans didn't feel the love. The War Department established the U.S. Bureau of Colored Troops and created the U.S. Colored Troops to segregate Black and white soldiers. White Americans doubted the courage of Black soldiers early on but were proved wrong when Black soldiers repeatedly demonstrated the depths of their courage.

One such display occurred just days after the official establishment of the U.S. Colored Troops at Port Hudson, Louisiana, when two Black American units charged the Confederate enemy repeatedly, suffering 200 casualties. One such casualty was Captain André Cailloux. Born enslaved but freed at age 21, the beloved New Orleans native valiantly lost his life on that battlefield on May 27, 1863, where it laid for weeks. Thousands attended his funeral on July 29, 1863, in New Orleans.

Their role

Even though large numbers of Black Americans served as cooks and performed other duties, the establishment of the U.S. Colored Troops created more combat

opportunities for Black Americans. On the field, Black Americans fought fiercely and bravely, giving Union forces a significant and much-needed lift. Serving as spies and scouts by passing themselves off as being enslaved, Black Americans also offered the Union unique advantages.

In the last stages of the Civil War especially, Black men and some women were present and critical in key battles, including the Battle of Vicksburg in Mississippi, Milliken's Bend in Louisiana, and the all-important surrender at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865, in Virginia. A few soldiers such as Decatur Dorsey and James Daniel Gardner (sometimes Gardiner) did receive medals for their services, but some received their just due posthumously.



TECHNICAL STUFF

Black soldiers participated in 410 military battles overall, 39 of them deemed major. According to some scholars, more than 38,000 Black soldiers died during the Civil War, a figure some argue is almost 40 percent greater than that of white soldiers.

Their pay

Black soldiers received $7 a month for service whereas white soldiers received $13. Members of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment protested the discriminatory policy by serving for an entire year uncompensated. The protests worked, and in 1864, the War Department granted Black soldiers equal pay.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

SUSIE KING TAYLOR: BLACK AMERICAN WOMEN AND THE CIVIL WAR

In *A Black Woman's Civil War Memoirs* (1902), Susie King Taylor provides unmatched insight into the life of a Black American woman during the Civil War. Born enslaved near Savannah, Georgia, the former Susie Baker secretly learned to read and write as a child. When the Union forces arrived in 1862, her uncle took her along with his family to safety behind Union lines.

King Taylor's many talents served the Union well. She worked as a laundress, nurse, and teacher, among other things. Not content to share her accomplishments only, King Taylor, who married a Union soldier, noted, "There were hundreds of [Black women] who assisted the Union soldiers by hiding them and helping them escape. Many were punished for taking food to the prison stockades for the prisoners." King Taylor, who died in 1912, believed "these things should be kept in history before the people."

Soldiering alongside whites

White and Black soldiers served in separate regiments. Even in segregated units, however, Black officers rarely led Black soldiers. Exceptions included two regiments of General Butler's Corps d'Afrique that were led by Major F.E. Dumas and Captain P.B.S. Pinchback, who would become the first Black governor of Louisiana, albeit briefly. Major Martin R. Delany (who was also a surgeon, abolitionist, and journalist), Captain O.S.B. Wall, Captain H. Ford Douglass, and First Lieutenant W.D. Matthews were also Black officers. Black surgeons and chaplains were a bit more numerous.

Convincing white people to lead all-Black forces wasn't easy at first. Those who were willing usually became officers. Thanks to the film *Glory* (1989), Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the 54th Massachusetts Regiment commander who wrote more than 200 letters to family and friends during the Civil War, is the best-known white leader of Black troops.

The dangers they faced

Fighting for the Union was particularly dangerous for Black soldiers because Confederate forces didn't care for them. In 1862, Jefferson Davis threatened to return all enslaved people captured in arms to the slaveholding states to which they belonged. Lincoln countered that for every Union soldier killed in a manner that violated the laws of war a Confederate soldier would also die. For those enslaved by the Confederates, Lincoln promised that a Rebel soldier would also endure hard labor.

Still, Confederate soldiers treated Black prisoners of war differently. By the war's end, there were many Black prisoners of war, but to make examples of them, Confederates killed Black prisoners more readily than they did white prisoners. Sometimes Confederate units didn't even report Black captives. When Fort Pillow in Tennessee fell to Confederate forces led by Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest in April 1864, Black soldiers overwhelmingly weren't even allowed to surrender; Confederates shot some and burned others alive. An estimated 300 Black soldiers died in what is known as the Fort Pillow Massacre.

As Confederate soldiers

Some Black men also served with the Confederacy. Determining their actual numbers, however, is difficult because many were enslaved, especially early in the war. Gauging how many Black men fought for the Confederacy after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation is also difficult, given that many Black Southerners didn't learn of the Proclamation until months after it went public.

Black men in the Confederate military often served as cooks, as musicians, as guards, and in other noncombatant positions. Some operated as double agents, like Charleston's Robert Smalls, who along with his wife, Hannah, successfully delivered a Confederate boat to Union forces.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

THOMAS MORRIS CHESTER: CIVIL WAR CORRESPONDENT

Liberian émigré Thomas Morris Chester, the college-educated son of a mother who was a fugitive, served an important and unique function during the Civil War. An early U.S. Colored Troops recruiter, Chester, who helped form the Massachusetts 54th and 55th Regiments as well as two Black companies in his native Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, was reluctant to join the military himself because Black soldiers rarely rose above the rank of sergeant. Instead, Chester served as a Civil War correspondent for *The Philadelphia Press* in 1864 and 1865. In that position, he covered Black American troops in Virginia, especially during the critical fall of Richmond.

Captured in the book *Thomas Morris Chester, Black Civil War Correspondent,* his observations are the only detailed firsthand accounts of Black American soldiers in combat during the Civil War. In addition to describing camp life for Black troops, Chester also wrote about how Confederate soldiers and civilians reacted to them. After the war, Chester, who died in 1892, also helped with Reconstruction.



REMEMBER

Well into 1864, the Confederacy was understandably reluctant to arm those they enslaved. Early in the war, many white Southerners feared uprisings from the enslaved. But with an ever-growing number of wounded and dead, the Confederacy, like the Union, had little choice but to turn to free and enslaved Black men. Although the 1865 Confederate Senate committed to enlisting 200,000 Black men, there's little evidence the Confederacy ever reached anywhere near that number. Continued fear of arming enslaved people prompted Jefferson Davis to sign a bill on March 13, 1865, mandating that the number of enslaved people enlisted not exceed 25 percent of the total able-bodied enslaved male population of each state. It's especially important to note that enslaved Black people who fought for the Confederacy were promised their own freedom.

The War's End and the Thirteenth Amendment

With Lincoln newly reelected in 1864 and the South's surrender, the future looked bright for America in 1865. On January 31, 1865, the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery passed the House with considerable political maneuvering by Lincoln.

On April 9, 1865, General Lee surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant. But five days later, John Wilkes Booth, a Confederate sympathizer, crept into the presidential box of Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., and shot Lincoln, who died the next day, April 15.

As the constitutional amendment made the rounds from state to state, seeking the critical three-fourths vote needed for ratification, Black men, like those in Figure 6-1, realized that their world had changed. The Civil War was over, but the important work of reconstructing the nation was only beginning. Tensions ran as high in "peace" as they had in conflict.



FIGURE 6-1: Freed slaves.

Historical/Getty Images



TECHNICAL STUFF

Mississippi, a state that sent two Black American men to the U.S. Senate and a few more to the House of Representatives during Reconstruction, didn't ratify the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery until 1995, not 1895.

(Re)constructing Democracy

Reconstruction, the period roughly spanning 1865 to 1877, presented the United States with the unique opportunity to exercise true democracy. For his part, Lincoln devised a plan to reestablish the Union long before the Civil War ended. On December 8, 1863, he proposed his Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, which carried these key points:

- Amnesty didn't extend to high-ranking Confederate government and military officials or soldiers who had abused Black and white prisoners of war.
- In accordance with the Ten Percent Plan, a state could gain readmission to the Union if no less than one-tenth of the number of its citizens who voted in the 1860 election took an oath of loyalty to the Union and accepted emancipation.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Lincoln's assassination profoundly affected Black Americans, and there was reason to worry. Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's Southern vice-president, didn't share Lincoln's views. Johnson proclaimed, "This is a country for white men, and by God, as long as I am President, it shall be a government for white men." Unfortunately, he was true to his words.

Undermining Lincoln's plan

In May 1865, President Johnson issued his own plan for Reconstruction. On paper, the plan differed little from Lincoln's plan. By issuing his plan while Congress wasn't in session, however, Johnson showed that he intended to act by presidential authority alone, eliminating Congress from the process. Some refer to Johnson's proposal as *Presidential Reconstruction.* Black Americans suffered due to Congress not participating in Reconstruction plans.



TECHNICAL STUFF

Lincoln and the Republican Party had selected Johnson as their vice presidential candidate in order to appeal to the more moderate Democrats who didn't support emancipation. Johnson was a former slaveholder and the only Southern senator not to resign during secession.

Still, there were those in Congress who continued to work toward the original intent of Lincoln's plans for Reconstruction. Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner, labeled Radical Republicans, were the key forces behind much of the progressive legislation benefiting Black Americans. Stevens, a Northerner whom white Southerners considered a *carpetbagger* (usually a white Northerner active in Republican politics who "interfered" with the South after the Civil War), had been critical in repealing the 1861 Crittenden-Johnson Resolution, a bill cosponsored by then-Senator Johnson that emphasized the Union's intention to preserve the Union and not to end slavery.

The Black Codes

With a president sympathetic to ex-Confederates, Reconstruction took a turn for the worse. Southern states may have been willing to concede to the 13th Amendment (refer to the earlier section "The War's End and the 13th Amendment"), but they weren't ready to embrace Black Americans fully. Insisting that Black Americans required white supervision, Southern states passed the Black Codes in 1865 to regulate Black American behavior and social movement. Reminiscent of the Slave Codes (refer to Chapter 4), the Black Codes, which varied from state to state, did the following:

- Restricted where Black Americans could live
- Regulated their work habits, even arresting and imprisoning them if they quit their jobs
- Prohibited Black citizens from testifying against white citizens

Presidential vetoes

With many of the former Confederacy's top brass in critical Congressional seats again, national politics looked as vulnerable as local politics. Pennsylvania senator Thaddeus Stevens fought to restore Congressional control over Reconstruction, but Johnson used his veto power to quash many of the bills that Stevens tried to push through. Luckily, Congress overrode Johnson's veto of the Civil Rights Act of 1866. Intended to counter the Black Codes, this act reaffirmed the rights of *all* citizens to sue and be sued; to testify in court against anyone, regardless of race; and to buy or rent any piece of property anywhere, among other things.

Emergence of white supremacist groups

Angry Southerners refused to back down in the face of federal legislation. Just as they had resurrected the Slave Codes in the form of the Black Codes, they brought back the essence of slave patrols. In no time, white supremacist organizations emerged, such as the Knights of the White Camellia, the White Brotherhood, and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), to name only a few.

As Reconstruction continued, membership in these organizations increased, and new organizations formed. If they couldn't intimidate Black Americans legally, the organization's members were determined to do it with violence, regularly beating and lynching Black Americans they felt stepped out of line. With law enforcement personnel in their ranks as well as a willingness by nonmembers to turn a blind eye, the pre- and post–Civil War South differed little for many Black Americans.

Taking back the power: Reconstruction Act of 1867

Stevens, who didn't take the turn of events in the South lightly, established the Joint Committee on Reconstruction. Around the same time, more Radical Republicans won offices in the 1866 elections. With the Reconstruction Act of 1867, Congress took back the reins. The act

- Divided the South into five military districts ruled by a governor
- Declared that in order to have federal troops removed, Southern states had to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment, which maintains that all persons born or naturalized in the U.S. are citizens of both the U.S. and the state in which they reside and are subject to equal protection under the law

Things looked brighter for Black Americans with Congress back in control. For example, when Johnson wanted to pull the plug on the Freedmen's Bureau, which provided much-needed assistance for newly freed Black Americans, Congress revived it. That light wouldn't shine long, however.

A Mixed Bag of Hope and Despair

Leading abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass worked so hard to end slavery that they'd given little thought to what freedom would actually mean. What would newly emancipated Black people do to support themselves? Private Northern mutual aid societies were among the first to address the need and descended on the South in droves as early as 1861. For them, education and religious piety was a positive start, and Black Americans poured themselves into both. (Read more about education in Chapter 13 and religion in Chapter 12.) Yet, despite best efforts, many of the leaders of these organizations realized that only government intervention could sufficiently address the problems confronting Black Americans. Some began appealing to the government as early as 1863 for a government organization that could fulfill this purpose.

The Freedmen's Bureau

Just before the war officially ended, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, better known as the *Freedmen's Bureau,* came into formal existence in March 1865. Assisting the newly emancipated and transitioning them to freedom was the Bureau's priority, and its duties varied widely. For example, many of those formerly enslaved wanted to make their marriages official, so the Bureau

issued countless marriage licenses. But the Bureau also helped a small number of poor whites as well. A laundry list of primary functions included

- **Food rations:** Hunger was a major problem among the newly emancipated, so the Bureau distributed food rations. Between 1865 and 1869, the Bureau distributed approximately 21 million food rations, with an estimated 5 million going to poor white people.
- **Education:** Illiteracy was a major problem among the recently freed, so establishing schools became one of the Bureau's main functions. Expanded educational opportunities didn't just benefit the newly emancipated; they also helped poor white Southerners who were also mostly illiterate.
- **Hospitals:** Many of the newly emancipated needed medical care but had no money to pay for it nor facilities available to them for treatment. Amazingly, the Freedmen's Bureau established 46 hospitals in just two years. By June 1869, more than 500,000 patients had received treatment.
- **Labor mediation:** Freedmen were concerned about working for white Southerners, and many tried to avoid returning to the land, mainly because it reminded them of slavery. With little recourse, freedmen often appealed to the Bureau to help negotiate fairer wages with white employers. For serious grievances, the Bureau had its own courts because justice, especially against white Southerners, was difficult for Black Americans to achieve in Southern courts.

Dedicated workers and beneficiaries truly appreciated the Freedmen's Bureau, but some white Northerners questioned the need for such an agency because the Civil War had ended. White Southerners simply objected to government intervention of any kind but particularly to an agency whose main intention, they felt, was to enfranchise Black Americans.

In addition to trying to sabotage Bureau posts by intimidating its workers or raiding its ration houses, angry white Southerners burned houses, raped Black women, boldly robbed hardworking Black citizens, and shot at or killed others. In Memphis and New Orleans, angry white people massacred scores of Black Americans, killing nearly 100 men, women, and children and injuring countless others. Shocked by these incidents, Congress authorized an investigation. But without troops, the Freedmen's Bureau could do little more than file incident reports and document the injustices.

Where's my 40 acres and a mule?

Resolving the issue of abandoned or confiscated land was complex. During the war, Rufus Saxton, Union head of the Department of the South, proposed the

general plan of allotting Black families 2 acres per working hand and furnishing them with tools necessary to plant corn and potatoes for their own use as they cultivated a specified amount of cotton for the government. The Treasury Department, however, contested the War Department's right to take such action. When both Lincoln's and Johnson's Amnesty Proclamations returned a large portion of confiscated land to the original owners, the matter was complicated further.

Special Field Order No. 15

On January 16, 1865, General William T. Sherman issued his Special Field Order No. 15, in which approximately 40,000 Black Americans received roughly 400,000 acres of confiscated land in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Section 4 of the Freedmen's Bureau Act (passed in March 1865) supported Sherman's order by allowing for the lease of not more than 40 acres of land for a period of three years to freedmen, who could purchase the land when the lease ended. But by the summer of 1865, President Johnson, who had promised to return confiscated land to those he had pardoned, ordered the Freedmen's Bureau to comply with his promises. He ignored the fact that Black families were already living on the land in question.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Freedmen's Bureau Chief General Oliver Howard came face to face with some of those families in October 1865 on South Carolina's Edisto Island. As expected, the bad news wasn't well-received. When Howard suggested that the families "lay aside their bitter feelings" and "become reconciled to their old masters," one response was "You only lost your right arm in war and might forgive them."

For his part, Saxton stood by the freedmen and helped them fight to keep their land. Those with deeds from government sales were able to keep their land. Ironically, the government sent in Black soldiers to remove many Black South Carolinians from their land. By the end of 1866, only 1,565 out of 40,000 who received land through Sherman's Special Field Order remained on that land in South Carolina.

Some scholars contend that the government never promised Black Americans 40 acres and a mule, that the policy was just a rumor borne from Sherman's Special Field Order and the Army's practice of loaning extra mules out to Black American families.

Southern Homestead Act of 1866

Some freedmen received land through the Southern Homestead Act of 1866 when the government placed 46 million acres of public land in Alabama, Arkansas,

Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi up for sale. Many Black Southerners benefited, as evidenced by the following statistics:

- In Florida, the newly emancipated gained possession of around 160,960 acres in just one year.
- In Arkansas, the newly emancipated possessed 116 of the 243 homesteads granted.
- In Georgia, Black Americans held more than 350,000 acres in 1874.

By June 1876, however, Congress repealed the Southern Homestead Act, along with other Reconstruction-era legislation. Acting independently of the federal government, South Carolina, which enjoyed a Black majority and a high number of Black American state legislators, helped freedmen purchase land. As plantations came up for sale, a local land commissioner bought, divided, and sold the land, often on credit.

The Treaty of 1866

In the Treaty of 1866 with various slaveholding indigenous nations like the Choctaw, Cherokee, and Chickasaw, Congress ended the practice of communal landownership, forcing indigenous nations to divide up the land as well as adopt Black people as citizens that they had once enslaved. Over time, especially around 1902, Black freedmen in Indigenous nations generally received 40 acres of land at the very least.

Mary Grayson, born in the Creek nation because her mother was transported to Oklahoma by her Creek slaveholder as part of the Trail of Tears, shared this history in her 1937 Works Progress Administration (WPA) interview in Oklahoma. Indigenous nations like the Chickasaw objected to being forced to actions the United States refused to do itself. "The Chickasaw people cannot see any reason or just cause why they should be required to do more for their freed slaves than the white people have done in the slave-holding states for theirs," they stated in a resolution.

In 2008, scholar Henry Louis Gates's PBS special *African American Lives 2* traced some of actor Don Cheadle's (*Hotel Rwanda*, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, *House of Lives*) ancestry back to the Chickasaw Nation. Respected historian Barbara Krauthamer's 2015 book, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South* (University of North Carolina Press), is among the handful of books offering insight into this history.

Back to the land

During Reconstruction, most of the newly emancipated received no land and had to return to agricultural work, many to the same plantations they had fled. Interestingly, a model for what would become sharecropping emerged during the Civil War.

Working for hire

At the end of the Civil War and into Reconstruction, many of the newly emancipated agreed to work contracts in which they were to receive monthly wages ranging from $9 to $15 for men and $5 to $10 for women. The contracts often included provisions for food and shelter.



Work contract agreements trace their roots to 1862, when General Grant delegated fugitives to Chaplain John Eaton. The chaplain set up a special camp for them at Grand Junction, Tennessee, where he supervised hiring them out. General Benjamin Butler did the same in Louisiana.

Work contracts weren't always honored, even those negotiated by the Freedmen's Bureau. Some had loopholes, but quite simply, good faith was essential to the agreements' success, and it was in short supply. As power returned to white Southerners (many of them former high-ranking Confederate officials), Black Americans had no recourse if the contracts were broken.

Sharecropping

Sharecropping was a system in which Black people and some poor white people worked the land in exchange for anywhere from a quarter to half of a crop, usually cotton or corn. It eventually became the more dangerous system compared to work contracts. Sharecroppers received land and housing as well as seeds, animals, and equipment, but they had to wait until harvest time to receive any payment for their share of a crop.

Martin R. Delany, who served as a high-ranking Black official in the Freedmen's Bureau, worked overtime to safeguard freedmen's rights. In addition to distributing copies of fair contracts for sharecroppers to use, Delany, who was based in Hilton Head, South Carolina, also negotiated more favorable cotton prices for freedmen. When a Freedmen's Bureau agent ran off with some of those funds, however, Delany's Cotton Agency closed. By September 1868, Delany was out of the Freedmen's Bureau.

As time went on, the dangers of sharecropping became more apparent. Sharecroppers faced the unavoidable evil of purchasing necessities on credit at local stores, often owned by their landowners. High interest rates made it nearly impossible for sharecroppers to bury their debt, which often meant that they had to continue working for the landowners. Falling cotton prices and a depression in 1873 only worsened the sharecroppers' plight. From Reconstruction into the early 20th century, sharecropping adversely affected Black Southerners.

Finding a new way

Moving north wasn't a much better option for Black Americans in the South than working the land because white workers in the North feared an influx of Black labor. Employers pounced on these fears and purposely hired Black workers to undermine white labor unions. Suspicious of Black workers, many white labor unions refused to accept Black workers. Unable to join the National Labor Union, Black Americans founded the National Negro Labor Union in 1869. Blacksmiths, bricklayers, and other artisans had trouble finding work because white employers favored white immigrant labor, thus forcing skilled Black men to work menial and low-paying jobs. Black women usually became domestics or independent washerwomen.

Many Black men chose to move west to work as cooks and cowboys, which for Black men was often the same. Some used the Homestead Act to become farmers, whereas others joined the U.S. Army, which formed the all-Black 9th and 10th Cavalry in 1866 and the 24th and 25th Infantry, more popularly known as Buffalo Soldiers, in 1869. In addition to protecting settlers mainly from Native Americans being forced from the land, Black troops built roads, installed telegraph lines, and performed other duties that further aided westward expansion. Some became railroad workers, miners, and sailors.

Banking on wealth

Even before the Civil War ended, those formerly enslaved were encouraged to save their money. More popularly known as the Freedman's Bank, the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company was the primary beneficiary of this thrifty spirit. By 1872, the bank had 34 branches, mostly in the South, as well as $3,299,201 in total deposits in 1874. Unfortunately, poor accounting, speculation, and bogus loans by its white board, led by Henry Cooke (brother of Jay Cooke, a Union financier whose dubious financial practices helped bring on the nation's 1873 depression), sank the Freedman's Bank.

When the board faltered in 1873, Frederick Douglass stepped in and, when he realized the extent of the financial difficulties, even pumped some of his own money into the bank to keep it afloat. He was too late. In 1874, the Freedman's Bank failed, literally swallowing up the nickels and dimes of far too many of the newly emancipated. Although the public blamed many of the nation's Black leaders for the crash, the real culprits, Cooke and his gang, weren't held accountable

Taking office

Politically, Black Americans fared better when Congress controlled Reconstruction. To regain admission to the Union, states were required to draft new constitutions, and Black Americans were present at the constitutional conventions held to accomplish this task. Only South Carolina boasted a Black majority, but even states like Texas, which had a small Black population, had Black American representation. In addition to abolishing slavery, many of these new state constitutions further enhanced the democratic process by ending property qualifications for voting and holding office.

Attending state constitutional conventions was just the beginning of the Black political presence. At one point, the South Carolina legislature had 87 Black and just 40 white members. Black Americans Alonzo J. Ransier and Richard H. Gleaves served as lieutenant governors of the state in 1870 and 1872, respectively. In 1872 and 1874, the speaker of the house was Black, and a Black man, Francis L. Cardozo, served as secretary of state and treasurer between 1868 and 1876.

Mississippi also had a significant number of Black politicians. A.K. Davis, James Hill, T.W. Cardozo, and John Roy Lynch served as lieutenant governor, secretary of state, superintendent of education, and speaker of the house, respectively. (Years later, Lynch published *The Facts of Reconstruction* in 1913.) Louisiana didn't match South Carolina and Mississippi in great numbers of significant political positions held by Black Americans, but Oscar J. Dunn, P.B.S. Pinchback, and C.C. Antoine served as lieutenant governors of the state. Pinchback even became the governor for 43 days after Henry C. Warmoth's removal in 1872.



Despite these early political gains, a Black man wasn't *elected* governor in the United States until Virginia's L. Douglas Wilder, who served from 1990 to 1994. In 2006, Massachusetts elected Deval Patrick as its governor. In 2018, Stacey Abrams in Georgia almost became the nation's first and only Black female governor, coming within 1.4 percent or roughly just 55,000 votes of a win. Chapter 11 discusses Abrams in more detail.

Many of these Black political leaders rose to national prominence. Ironically, in 1870, the nation's first Black American senator, Hiram Revels, filled a seat vacated by former president of the Confederate States Jefferson Davis. Blanche K. Bruce,

another Mississippian, became the first Black American elected to a full Senate term in 1874, a feat not matched again until Massachusetts elected Edward Brooke in 1966. With his knack for amassing public offices, P.B.S. Pinchback got himself elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1872 and to the Senate in 1873. After a long debate, however, the Senate denied Pinchback his seat because of charges of campaign fraud and election errors.

The U.S. House of Representatives was more colorful and, at various times, included South Carolina's J.H. Rainey (the nation's first Black Congressman), war hero Robert Smalls, Robert De Large, and Robert Brown Elliott, as well as John Roy Lynch, Florida's Josiah T. Walls, Alabama's Benjamin Turner, and Georgia's Jefferson Long, among others. At least one Black American remained in Congress until 1901.

The Fifteenth Amendment

Civil War general Ulysses S. Grant won the 1868 presidential election, which was a fortuitous turn of events in the fight for equal rights. Had Grant not been elected, it's doubtful if the all-important Fifteenth Amendment, giving Black men the right to vote, would have made it to the ratification phase.

But Grant did win, and the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in 1870. This amendment states, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."



The Fifteenth Amendment created a rift between longtime women's rights supporter Frederick Douglass and prominent suffragists Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Anthony and Stanton took issue with the Fifteenth Amendment not including gender. It came to a head during the third annual meeting of the American Equal Rights Association on May 12, 1869. Douglass argued that of the two, it was more life or death for Black men to have the vote than white women. Stanton argued that educated white women deserved the vote more and even stated "Think of Patrick and Sambo and Hans and Yung Tung, who do not know the difference between a monarchy and a republic, who cannot read the Declaration of Independence or Webster's spelling book, making laws. . .," a sentiment she had also shared earlier in the year. Anthony backed that up with various arguments, including "if you will not give the whole loaf of suffrage to the entire people, give it to the most intelligent first." By "most intelligent," Anthony meant white women. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Sojourner Truth addressed the exclusion of Black women throughout the entire discussion of the Fifteenth Amendment and women's suffrage.

A Turn for the Worse: The End of Reconstruction

Despite the ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, all wasn't well in the fight for civil rights. White Southerners were determined to regain power and turn back civil rights advances, and white Northerners were growing weary of the fight.

The Redeemers

Known as Redeemers, white Southerners who were determined to seize back power from Black Americans by any means unleashed another reign of violence throughout the South. During elections, they intimidated Black voters at the polls and at their homes. If that didn't work, murder was also an option. Frequently outgunned, Black Americans often suffered as they tried to defend themselves:

- **Massacre at Colfax Courthouse, Louisiana (1873):** When Louisiana's progressive-minded Radical Republican governor William Kellogg replaced the sheriff and judge from the opposing party with Radical Republicans, Black men, anticipating trouble, went on the offensive and turned the courthouse into a fortress. Almost 200 members of the White League descended on the courthouse on behalf of the ousted sheriff, shooting and setting the building on fire. Although only two white people died, more than 50 Black men, including those who surrendered, died.
- **Attacks in Opelousas, Louisiana (1868):** A mob killed as many as 200 Black Americans in days. The attackers had been angry that Black people had come to the rescue of a white editor of the local Republican newspaper and a Freedmen's Bureau teacher whom three local whites had attacked.
- **Murders in Coushatta, Louisiana (1874):** When white Northerner and Union veteran Marshall Twitchell attempted to extend Black civil rights, members of the White League rounded up Black and white Republicans, forced them to leave town, and then murdered at least 24 of them on their way out.

The murders in Coushatta, Louisiana, prompted President Grant to send in federal troops, a move unpopular with white Southerners and many white Northerners who had grown tired of Reconstruction. Months later, when the White Man's Party went on a killing spree in Vicksburg, Mississippi, in an attempt to oust the Black sheriff Peter Crosby, Grant sent troops to Mississippi.

The Mississippi Plan

As Mississippi marched into the critical 1875 elections, white Democrats enacted the *Mississippi Plan* to gain back the government from the more progressive Republicans. Because Mississippi had a Black majority population that was solidly Republican, Democrats used economic intimidation such as firing those who voted Republican and violent attacks such as riots and burning homes to either keep Black Americans from the polls or force them to vote Democrat. There were some claims that white people actually held guns on Black Americans brave enough to go to the polls to ensure they voted for Democrats.

Mississippi Governor Adelbert Ames asked President Grant several times to send federal troops to Mississippi to stop the Mississippi Plan, but Grant, scarred by white Northerners' criticism of his earlier use of federal troops, refused Ames's requests in order to protect Republican chances for the presidency in 1876. Not so coincidentally, Democrats won big at the polls that November, carrying a 30,000 or more margin of votes in a state considered a Republican stronghold. Not only did Mississippi's Democrats practice this intimidation tactic in elections well into the 1960s, but Louisiana, South Carolina, and other Southern states emulated the plan.

Civil Rights Act of 1875

Distressed by the harsh reality of his Reconstruction efforts, President Grant, no doubt unsure of his options, made a frustrated appeal to Congress in January 1875 for some type of action. They responded with the Civil Rights Act originally proposed in 1870. Although school desegregation was no longer included in the bill, it did contain an important provision regarding equal access to public accommodations.

By the time it passed, however, there wasn't much fight left in Congress as far as Reconstruction was concerned. Both Stevens and Sumner were dead. White Southerners opposed to Reconstruction were regaining congressional and Senate seats. Worse yet, white Northerners appeared less and less interested in Reconstruction.

Pulling the plug

By 1870, the Union was back together, but as President Grant's trials attest, it was far from smooth sailing. After winning reelection in 1872, scandal rocked Grant's administration, and with him out of the race for the 1876 election, white Democrats and Redeemers knew that ending Reconstruction was within reach.

Discontinuing the Freedmen's Bureau in 1872 wasn't enough. The process of ending Reconstruction really began to take form in 1873, 1874, and 1875 with confrontations like Colfax and Coushatta in Louisiana and various disturbances in Mississippi (refer to the earlier section 'The Redeemers"). With the Democratic candidate Samuel Tilden (former governor of New York who rose to national prominence for crushing a corruption ring there) and the Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes (whose scrupulousness also scored him points) both opposed to Reconstruction, the end was inevitable.

Reconstruction was essentially over before its official ending as white Southerners killed and terrorized Black Americans and some white Republicans with impunity. In its March 1876 decision in the case *United States v. Cruikshank*, the Supreme Court overturned the federal convictions of the Colfax Massacre participants and undermined the Enforcement Act of 1870, which sought to repel the KKK and other white supremacist organizations and which had made the Colfax convictions possible.


REMEMBER

The Supreme Court's decision in *United States v. Cruikshank* under Chief Justice Morrison Remick "Mott" Waite set the dangerous precedent that only local and state authorities could prosecute individual crimes against others. The Supreme Court maintained that the due process and equal protection clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment permitted federal government intervention only when states denied rights to citizens.

Another critical blow came in the 1876 case of *United States v. Reese* regarding the Kentucky voting tax intended to prevent Black Americans from voting. The Supreme Court ruled that the Fifteenth Amendment, which guaranteed Black men the right to vote, only meant that citizens couldn't be denied the right to vote based on "race, color, or previous condition of servitude."


REMEMBER

With this ruling, the United States sanctioned — or rather encouraged — the development of poll taxes, *grandfather clauses* (exemptions from certain laws and practices based on past privilege), and other strategies later used to disenfranchise Black Americans, therefore undermining Reconstruction's purpose.

With slavery abolished, key pro-Reconstruction activists dead, and President Hayes opposed to Reconstruction, white Americans willing to wage the good fight on behalf of Black Americans were hard to find. After the Civil War and 12 long years of wrestling for democracy, Black Americans were again out in the cold. Adding insult to injury, Jefferson Davis, who led the Confederacy, spent just two years in jail and never stood trial for treason. Other key ex-Confederates also escaped significant punishment.

In 1877, a year after the U.S.'s centennial celebration of independence, Black Americans didn't know how far the tide would turn. They were free and educating themselves and each other in record numbers, but the war wasn't over. Although temporarily scorned, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments would prove to be invaluable building blocks for true democracy. Despite the disappointment of Reconstruction's end, Black Americans continued the fight for equality, even when despair greatly overshadowed hope.

3 Pillars of Change: The Civil Rights Movement

IN THIS PART . . .

Examine the early days of Jim Crow, noting the subjugation of Black Americans as well as the impact of community leaders, such as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, who stepped up and proposed ways of executing change.

Look closer at the civil rights era and discover the various organizations that sprouted to bring about change by raising awareness of ongoing injustices against Black Americans.

Read about the actions of key figures including the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements.

Track how post-Civil Rights America, despite its promise of integrated life, including sports teams, colleges, workplaces, political offices and more, came with other challenges still largely rooted in racism.

Find out how electing the country's first Black president further exposed the nation's racial scars, with the killings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown among others, mostly by the police, providing fuel to Black Lives Matter, the 21st century civil rights movement.

See how battling Trump, along with COVID-19 and the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor by Minneapolis and Louisville police spurred new political action determined to build a new future even in the wake of a white supremacist attack on the U.S. Capitol.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Experiencing the daily impact of Jim Crow
- Finding ways to escape segregation in the South
- Surveying Black American leaders of varying positions
- Falling in line behind Marcus Garvey
- Taking a turn in the mid–20th century

Chapter 7
Living Jim Crow

Black Americans soon felt the pinch of Reconstruction's end. White Southerners made it no secret that they longed for the good ole days, and although slavery's return was doubtful, racial equality eluded Black Americans. The racial oppression Black Americans faced in the South was given a name, and that name was Jim Crow, making Black Americans free in name only. In the North, the situation was only slightly better.

This chapter addresses the legal institution of Jim Crow and how it affected Black Americans, particularly in the South. But more than just dwelling on the injustices perpetrated against Black Americans, this chapter shows the various ways Black Americans fought Jim Crow, even highlighting how they disagreed with one another on which direction to take. Most importantly, it connects the fight to abolish slavery with the fight to abolish inequality and sets the stage for the culmination of these struggles in the 1950s and 1960s.

Post-Reconstruction Blues

As turbulent as Reconstruction had been (refer to Chapter 6), there were many hopeful moments. Black Americans were pursuing education; joining the professional ranks as teachers, congressmen, and doctors; becoming landowners; and

voting in record numbers for the first time. Throughout Reconstruction, especially toward its end, some white Southerners began to employ shady means to disenfranchise Black Americans. With the federal government's withdrawal from the South in 1877, Black Southerners were largely on their own. White Southerners knew this and went to extreme lengths to return their part of the country as close to slavery as possible.



Black American historian Rayford Logan, who received his M.A. and Ph.D. from Harvard University, called the period spanning from Reconstruction's end in 1877 to roughly around 1901 the *nadir,* or the lowest point of race relations at that time in history. The longtime Howard University historian outlined this history in his 1954 book, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877–1901*. Other scholars like John Hope Franklin extended the nadir's end to the 1920s.

Expanding *sharecropping,* a system in which farmers worked the land first in hopes of "sharing the crops" (and/or profits) later, and completely disenfranchising Black Americans became the two chief strategies used by white Southerners to turn back the clock. In addition, they threatened economic repercussions such as firing workers or using violence to prevent Black Southerners from voting Republican. White Southerners believed that white Northerners would rule over them if they were given political power. (White Southerners began to institute poll taxes, literacy tests, and grandfather clauses to keep Black Southerners from voting. Many giving the literacy tests didn't know the answers to the questions.)

Wealthy white Southerners also feared the rise of the Populist Party, also known as the People's Party, which advocated having poor white and Black Americans set aside their racial differences in favor of economic self-interest for both. In 1888, for example, Black farmers in Lovejoy, Texas, formed the Colored Farmers' National Alliance and Cooperative Union, which later aligned itself with similar white organizations in the South and Midwest to improve conditions for all farmers.

When some Black Americans thrived economically, white Southerners used *lynching* (death by a mob without due process of the law) as a warning to other Black Americans to stay in their place. White Southerners also began to pass laws mandating racial segregation in restaurants, on railroad cars, and in any other areas of social interaction. As during slavery, white Southerners forced Black Americans to defer to them or suffer the consequences. Some Black Americans didn't wait for things to get worse to make a move — literally.

The Exoduster Movement

As conditions worsened in the South, many Black Americans began to believe that leaving the South was the only solution. Benjamin "Pap" Singleton, who was formerly enslaved, was one of the many Black Americans who believed that greater

freedom awaited Black Americans elsewhere (specifically, in the Great Plains). He and his partner Columbus M. Johnson established a colony for Black Americans near Dunlap, Kansas.

Known as the *Black Exodus* (as well as the Great Exodus or the Exoduster Movement of 1879), thousands of Black Southerners responded enthusiastically to such efforts. Between 1879 and 1881, at least 50,000 Black Americans fled Southern states for Kansas, Missouri, Indiana, and Illinois.



The sheer numbers in the Black Exodus shocked white Northerners. In 1880, the U.S. Senate conducted hearings to discern the forces behind the exodus. In addition to Singleton, who dubbed himself the "Moses of the Colored Exodus," exodus supporter Henry Adams, a war veteran who was formerly enslaved, testified. Adams explained that he based his support for the exodus on the findings by a secret council of Black Americans who, after Reconstruction ended, traveled the South to investigate the true conditions of Black Southerners. Adams also claimed he and his group had sent President Hayes and Congress a petition signed by 98,000 Black Southerners asking that a territory be set aside for them to live in peace. When the petition went unanswered, Adams, through the Colonization Council, encouraged Black Americans to leave the South for Kansas without the government's support.

Not all Black Americans supported exodus. Established Black leadership such as Frederick Douglass felt that leaving the South acknowledged defeat and, to win their freedom, Black Americans had to stand their ground and remain. Many others disagreed. Less than three decades later, Black Americans would once again turn to migration to escape the South's injustice.

Black Town, U.S.A.

Celebrated writer Zora Neale Hurston wrote often about Eatonville, Florida, the all-Black town where she grew up, but it was far from the only Black incorporated town. Between 1865 and 1900, Black Americans founded more than 100 predominantly Black towns. Still, all-Black towns got a boon from the Exoduster Movement.

In Oklahoma, more than 50 Black towns or settlements sprouted from 1865 to 1920. Oklahoma had so many Black towns, in fact, that Edwin T. McCabe, who founded all-Black Langston, Oklahoma, tried to convince President Benjamin Harrison to designate Oklahoma a Black state. Ironically, Jim Crow laws immediately followed Oklahoma's statehood.



TECHNICAL STUFF

Founded in 1887 by Isaiah T. Montgomery and his cousin Benjamin T. Green, both born into slavery, Mississippi's Mound Bayou was one of the most prosperous all-Black towns. Designated the Jewel of the Delta by President Teddy Roosevelt, Mound Bayou, home to the nation's only Black-owned cottonseed mill, boasted a nearly 100 percent literacy rate before 1900.



REMEMBER

A philosophy of self-help and self-reliance permeated the Black town movement. As the focus of the American economy moved from agriculture to industry, Black towns, which were largely agricultural, declined around 1910. Already hard-hit, surviving towns couldn't withstand the later onset of the Great Depression.

Lynchings and riots/massacres

Rural areas in the South were especially vulnerable to riots during and after Reconstruction. Cities weren't safe either. Ida B. Wells-Barnett's investigative reporting shed more light on the details surrounding the lynching deaths of Black Americans. Through examining statistics and combing newspapers for details around reported lynchings, she found 728 Black men and women were killed via lynching (see Figure 7-1) between 1883 and 1891. Of that number, roughly a third had been accused of rape.



FIGURE 7-1: An all-too-common sight in America during the early 20th century.

George Rinhart/Getty Images



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

IDA B. WELLS-BARNETT

Segregated railroad cars served as the Mississippian Ida B. Wells-Barnett's formal induction into the Black American fight for equality. In May 1884, she refused to move when a railroad conductor insisted she leave the first-class car she'd paid for simply because of her race. To enforce the 1882 Tennessee law requiring separate accommodations for white and Black people, the conductor and two other railroad employees literally dragged Wells-Barnett off the train. Confident of a victory, Wells-Barnett immediately filed suit, but the December 1884 decision in her favor was short-lived. In 1887, the Tennessee Supreme Court overturned the decision.

When angry white Memphians lynched her friends Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Henry Stewart — successful grocers in direct competition with a white grocer — Wells-Barnett, a partner in *The Free Speech,* a Black newspaper in Memphis, became one of the foremost authorities on lynching, investigating 728 of them by traveling to actual sites and interviewing eyewitnesses. After the publication of her editorial that questioned the "moral reputation" of Southern white women, Wells couldn't return to the South and eventually settled in Chicago. *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (University of Chicago Press), published decades after her 1931 death, offers insight into her life and work.

Particularly angered by claims that Black male lynching victims had raped white women, Wells-Barnett found that economic success, not rape, often prompted deadly action against Black men. She also discovered that false rape charges often masked consensual sex between Black men and white women. Equally important, Wells-Barnett exposed the lynchings of Black women, which are often overlooked. She initially published her findings in *The New York Age* in 1892. With financial assistance from various organizations, she expanded that work by publishing the pamphlets *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* and *Red Record*.

Most often, riots (or, more accurately, massacres) and lynchings went hand and hand. And sadly, they were far too common. Some pretty well-known ones from 1898 into the early 1920s include the following.

Wilmington, North Carolina (1898)

The Wilmington Massacre, Insurrection, or Coup of 1898 occurred after a coalition of Black Republicans and white Populists won statewide political power (including a progressive white governor and, in turn, a progressive white mayor of majority Black Wilmington) in the 1896 election. To counter this inclusive leadership, especially that of Black men, an extensive statewide white supremacy campaign was launched in 1897.

Months prior to the statewide November 1898 election, Alex Manly, editor and co-owner of *Daily Record*, Wilmington's Black newspaper, had published an editorial in response to published comments that Rebecca Felton had made in Georgia in support of lynching Black men to protect white women from rape. The state's white newspapers used it to fan the white supremacist flames. On November 10, two days after the election, a coup, engineered by white supremacists, forcibly replaced Mayor Silas P. Wright, whose administration included Black men, with Alfred M. Waddell. White men, including those of influence — bankers, lawyers, merchants, and even clergymen — also went on a violent spree against Wilmington's Black population, torching the *Daily Record*'s office and killing anywhere between 60 and 300 Black people. Their actions decimated the city's Black voter rolls, with many residents permanently fleeing.

Atlanta, Georgia (1906)

To gain favor with white voters, Georgia's two gubernatorial candidates debated how best to manage Atlanta's growing Black populace, which had grown from roughly 9,000 in 1880 to 35,000 in 1900. Meanwhile, local newspapers boasted of lynchings and called for a revival of the Ku Klux Klan, which, despite its secrecy, was generally well-regarded among segregationist white people (see Figure 7-2).



FIGURE 7-2: A family affair for white segregationists.

Bettmann/Getty Images

Reports of four assaults of white women, presumably by Black men, drove white people to mob action. On September 22, thousands of white people from the country and the city gathered in downtown Atlanta and began randomly assaulting innocent Black people. For three days, the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906 continued. When it ended, at least 25 Black Atlantans had died.



Walter White, who would become an important civil rights activist, was just a boy at the time of the riot, when he witnessed a mob club a defenseless young boy to death outside a Black-owned barbershop. Evelyn Witherspoon, a 10-year-old white girl, awakened in the middle of night and joined her sister and mother kneeling by the window. "And there I saw a man strung up to the light pole," she remembered. "Men and boys on the street below were shooting at him, until they riddled his body with bullets. He was kicking, flailing his legs, when I looked out."

Springfield, Illinois (1908)

Violence erupted in Springfield, Illinois, in 1908 when George Richardson, accused by a white woman of sexual assault, and Joe James, another Black man accused of murdering a white man, were moved to a neighboring town. The move angered Springfield's white residents, who seized guns and other weapons and burned buildings. Over the course of the violence, two Black men were lynched, four white men died, and more than 70 people suffered injuries. Hundreds of Springfield's Black residents fled for safety, with many later returning to rebuild their lives.

East St. Louis, Illinois (1917)

In July 1917, an aluminum plant in East St. Louis hired Black workers to break a strike, and white trade unionists met with the mayor and demanded that the city stop Black people from migrating there. After the meeting, a rumor circulated that a Black man had intentionally shot a white man in an altercation that included insults against white women. Unchecked by local officials, white mobs took to the streets and drove through Black neighborhoods, firing shots indiscriminately. In the end, nearly 40 Black people died, with hundreds more injured. An estimated 6,000 Black people were driven from their homes. At least 300 buildings were destroyed.

Houston, Texas (1917)

Almost immediately when the army ordered the Third Battalion of the Black Twenty-Fourth U.S. Infantry to Camp Logan in Houston, problems occurred. Whenever the soldiers went into town, they encountered racial backlash, which all came to a head August 23, 1917, when two white police officers arrested one Black soldier for interfering with their arrest of a Black woman. When Black military policeman Corporal Charles Baltimore inquired about the arrest, an argument ensued and he was hit over the head, fired on three times, chased into an unoccupied house, and taken to police headquarters.

News spread that Baltimore had been killed and that a white mob was headed to the camp. A group of more than 100 Black soldiers marched into the city. The Black soldiers were accused of killing 15 white people, including two police officers, and wounding 12 people, out of which another police officer died. Four Black soldiers died, with two believed to have been shot by their own men. A curfew was imposed on Houston the next day.

On August 25, the Third Battalion was taken to Columbus, New Mexico, where seven of the Black soldiers agreed to testify against their fellow soldiers in exchange for clemency. The military tribunals resulted in the indictment of 118 Black soldiers, with 110 being found guilty. Nineteen Black soldiers were hanged, and 63 received life sentences in federal prison. The two white officers who faced court-martial were released. No white civilians were brought to trial. (Filmmaker Kevin Willmott, a longtime Spike Lee collaborator, dramatized the tragedy in the 2020 feature film *The 24th*.)

Various cities, the Red Summer of 1919

So many race riots or massacres — 26 to be exact — took place in the summer and fall of 1919 in the North and the South that writer and civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson dubbed it "the Red Summer of 1919." Following are just two:

- **Longview, Texas:** Anger over a *Chicago Defender* article about the bullet-riddled body of Lemuel Walters by a white mob, who had taken him from the Longview jail where he was being held for allegedly making advances toward a white woman, resulted in more violence. When white townspeople ordered Samuel L. Jones (the Black high school teacher they believed had penned the article suggesting a consensual interracial relationship) and Dr. Calvin P. Davis to leave town, a group of armed Black men gathered at the teacher's house instead and fired back when a white mob attacked them, killing four white people and wounding several others. White townspeople then burned several houses and murdered the doctor's father-in-law before order was restored.
- **Chicago, Illinois:** When several Black youth drifted into the waters of a public beach whites claimed as their own, white bathers threw rocks at the boys, one of whom drowned during the attack. When a Black man was arrested and a white man identified as the rock thrower wasn't, Black Chicagoans attacked the arresting officer. For five days, violence raged on Chicago's South Side. When the violence ended, 15 white people and 23 Black people were dead, 537 people (mostly Black) were injured, and between 1,000 to 2,000 people (mostly Black) were homeless.



Violence also erupted in Knoxville, Tennessee; Omaha, Nebraska; and Elaine, Arkansas. Although differing in specifics, all the riots (massacres) during Red Summer highlighted the growing racial tension and divide, and in all, Black Americans actively fought back against their attackers. Led by the summer's tumultuous events, Claude McKay summed up this "New Negro" at the end of his classic poem "If We Must Die": "Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack/Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!"

Tulsa, Oklahoma (1921)

When the *Tulsa Tribune* published a story on May 31, 1921, exaggerating the details of an alleged sexual assault of a white woman by a Black man who was arrested and jailed, a white mob surrounded the jail that night intending to lynch Dick Rowland, the accused Black man. Determined to prevent Rowland's death, an armed group of Black men showed up. Trouble escalated when a member of the white mob tried to grab the gun of one of the Black men and it went off. Mayhem ensued as the mob went wild, assaulting Black Americans on the streets and burning down Greenwood, which had a reputation as the Negro's Wall Street of America for its prosperity.

By the time the National Guard stepped in, most of the violence, now known as the Tulsa Massacre of 1921, had ended. The official death toll was 39, but subsequent investigations have estimated the number to be as high as 300. The homeless numbered into the thousands. Using its own resources, Black Tulsa eventually rebuilt itself but never achieved its previous stature. (Tulsa figured prominently in the storylines of two HBO series: *Watchmen* (2019) and *Lovecraft Country* (2020).)

Rosewood, Florida (1923)

The massacre that occurred in Rosewood, Florida, in January 1923 began after a white woman reported being attacked by an unidentified Black man. Convinced that Black residents were hiding the guilty Black prisoner who had reportedly escaped a chain gang, a white mob apprehended one Black man, whom the sheriff got out of town, only to kill another Black man later. In the ensuing mayhem, the white mob attacked the homes of Black people. During the attack, two white men died; meanwhile, the people in the house were either killed or seriously injured, prompting other Black people in the area to flee into the swamps.

Over a course of days, white people from surrounding areas converged on Rosewood, killing more Black Americans as well as burning their homes and churches. When the attacks finally ended, a grand jury convened to investigate the incident but found "insufficient evidence" to move forward. (John Singleton directed the 1997 film *Rosewood* about the Rosewood Massacre of 1923. Florida paid reparations to nine Rosewood survivors in 1994.)

WE'RE SORRY — WELL, SOME OF US ARE, ANYWAY

On June 13, 2005, the majority of the U.S. Senate formally apologized for the body's failure to pass the nearly 200 anti-lynching bills presented to it to curb the despicable act that claimed the lives of 4,749 known victims. "There is a power in acknowledging error and mistake," Illinois Senator Barack Obama stated. "It is a power that potentially transforms not only those who were impacted directly by the lynchings but also those who are the progeny of the perpetrators of these crimes." More than a dozen senators, including Mississippi Senators Trent Lott and Thad Cochran, however, declined to cosponsor the resolution, even as nearly 200 descendants of lynching victims looked on from the visitors' gallery. In 2020, controversy ensued again as Kentucky Senator Rand Paul was accused of stalling the Emmett Till Antilynching Act.

Instituting Jim Crow: Plessy v. Ferguson

Quite literally, as noted scholar and political activist W.E.B. Du Bois wrote in his classic work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), "The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line." This was certainly evident in the efforts to deny Black Americans full rights as citizens. Their rights under attack, Black Americans looked to the courts for redress. Yet in 1896, instead of protecting those rights, the Supreme Court's *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling legalized the color line that divided the nation.



REMEMBER

For years, the Supreme Court had inched toward legalizing segregation. With its devastating *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896, it formally sanctioned Jim Crow in the South and across the country.



TECHNICAL STUFF

The term *Jim Crow* comes from a popular tune by white minstrel show performer Thomas "Daddy" Rice. See Chapter 15 for more on minstrel shows.

Court cases before Plessy

With its 1876 rulings in *United States v. Cruikshank* and *United States v. Reese*, the Supreme Court curtailed the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments' protection for Black Americans. According to *Cruikshank*, the Fourteenth Amendment gave the federal government jurisdiction over state actions, not individual actions. Therefore, the federal government couldn't prosecute individuals for intimidating Black Americans at the polls; states had to address it. *Reese* allowed states to enact poll taxes (refer to Chapter 6 for the details surrounding these decisions).

If that weren't enough, in the *Civil Rights Cases of 1883* (a consolidation of five lower court cases), the Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 prohibiting private institutions from discriminating against Black Americans unconstitutional. Justice Joseph P. Bradley noted that neither the Thirteenth nor Fourteenth Amendment allowed Congress to address racial discrimination in the private sector. John Marshall Harlan, in his lone dissent, noted that Congress was only attempting to secure the same rights of white citizens for Black Americans.

The actual case: Plessy v. Ferguson

When the Louisiana Separate Car Act of 1890 requiring "equal but separate" accommodations for white and Black people passed, New Orleans's Creole community attacked the law in various ways, including newspaper editorials. Enlisting the help of Homer Plessy, whom authorities arrested in 1892, the Creole community never anticipated that the U.S. Supreme Court would rule in favor of such discriminatory law.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Although "separate but equal" doesn't actually appear in the decision, the court upheld the 1890 law, stating that "We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff's argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it." As in the Civil Rights Cases of 1883, Justice John Marshall Harlan was the lone dissenter.

After the ruling, Southern states passed even more Jim Crow laws. "White Only" and "Colored Only" eventually marked everything from restaurants to railroad stations. Although racial discrimination also existed in the North, the South wore its discriminatory practices like a badge of honor. From lynchings to political disenfranchisement via poll taxes and literacy tests (not to mention the pettiest of human degradation), Black Americans, an overwhelming 90 percent of whom lived in the South, bore the brunt of "living" Jim Crow.

Strategies for Achieving Equality

How to address racism's latest tactics became the primary question facing Black leadership as it underwent tremendous change at the turn of the 20th century. In February 1895, Frederick Douglass died at the age of 77, and two Black American intellectuals — Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois — were polar opposites in their ideologies regarding how to achieve equality. Washington favored the *accommodationist* policy of forgoing political power in favor of economic progress,

whereas Du Bois advocated the *integrationist* policy advocating immediate political agitation to achieve social equality. Quite simply, one accepted Jim Crow, and the other rejected it.

Booker T. Washington: The Accommodationist

A year before the *Plessy* decision, Booker T. Washington, the man born enslaved who built Alabama's Tuskegee Institute into an institution of national renown, delivered his highly controversial address known as the Atlanta Compromise at the Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta on September 18, 1895. The Atlanta Compromise articulated Washington's message of accommodation.


REMEMBER

Aware of the potential threat European immigrants posed to positions traditionally held by Black Americans, Washington emphasized Black Americans' loyalty, reminding his audience of who had nursed their children and cared for their dying parents. Washington advised white and Black people to "cast your bucket down where you are." If whites "cast their buckets" with Black Americans, he insisted, the South would progress economically without upsetting the social balance. "In all things that are purely social," he reassured his audience, "we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress."

In the context of the times, Washington's message wasn't outlandish. "We wear the mask that grins and lies," wrote Paul Laurence Dunbar in his famous poem "We Wear the Mask." Especially during slavery, many Black Americans learned to mask their true feelings from slaveholders and other white people for survival. Few wore that mask as expertly as Washington did. In public, he advised Black Americans to focus on industrial education and work, not on political injustices, and he, in the eyes of others, ignored or excused lynchings. Privately, Washington supported lawsuits challenging the disenfranchisement of Black American voters and consistently funded efforts to pass an anti-lynching bill. Defying Jim Crow laws, Washington often rode alongside whites in first-class train cars, dined in whites-only facilities, and met with President Teddy Roosevelt at the White House.

W.E.B. Du Bois: The Integrationist

W.E.B. Du Bois's criticism of Washington's Atlanta Compromise address in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) helped establish him as a Black leader in opposition to Washington (see Figure 7-3). Du Bois, reversing his earlier support for Washington's 1895 speech, later disagreed with Washington's acceptance of Jim Crow and believed that Black Americans should agitate for political change.



FIGURE 7-3: W.E.B. Du Bois.

Library of Congress/Getty Images

At the time of their break, however, there were few Black organizations — or any white or integrated organizations for that matter — dedicated to Du Bois's strategy. There had been various antislavery organizations during slavery, but after slavery ended, they disbanded and nothing concerted sprouted in their place until the early 1890s and the early 20th century. In 1905, Du Bois cofounded the Niagara Movement with William Monroe Trotter before later settling in with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). (Read more about these organizations in the next section.)

Although Du Bois believed in first-class citizenship for Black Americans, which included full voting rights, his approach was elitist by some people's standards. Du Bois supported the concept of a "Talented Tenth," first proposed by abolitionist and elder statesman Alexander Crummell in 1897 at the founding of the American Negro Academy, the nation's first major Black intellectual society. The Talented Tenth were the best and brightest of the Black race charged with the responsibility of leading the masses and shaping their goals and aspirations. These men (although some women were included) also represented Black American interests to the white power structure (Chapter 13 has more on the Talented Tenth).

Organizing for Freedom

The horrendous experiences of Black Americans post-Reconstruction underscored the absence of organizations addressing racial violence, job discrimination, segregated housing, and the many other ills confronting Black Americans. At the turn of the 20th century, that need was recognized and several organizations, such as those outlined in the following sections, emerged. By the time of Washington's death in 1915, two of these organizations in particular — the NAACP and the National Urban League — would play especially strong roles in addressing some of Black America's greatest challenges in the 20th century.

National Afro-American Council

New York Age publisher T. Thomas Fortune helped spearhead the 1890 formation of the National Afro-American League, a precursor to the NAACP. When the league failed in 1893, Fortune didn't give up. Instead, he helped form the National Afro-American Council in 1898, which adopted a form of militant protest. The council's objectives included

- Investigating and reporting lynchings
- Assisting efforts that tested the constitutionality of laws oppressing Black Americans
- Encouraging both industrial and higher education among Black Americans

By 1902, followers of Washington, known as *Bookerites,* had taken over the organization. They tempered the organization's militancy and diverted its economic initiatives to the National Negro Business League before its demise in 1906.

The National Negro Business League

The National Negro Business League (NNBL) had controversial beginnings. Following an 1899 conference talk titled "The Negro in Business," in which Du Bois documented an estimated 5,000 Black entrepreneurs, he became the director of the Business Bureau of the National Afro-American Council. In what probably wasn't a coincidence, Washington asked Du Bois for a list of potential members before hosting the first conference of the NNBL in Boston in August 1900, without Du Bois.



Because white Americans weren't interested in employing Black Americans, it was only reasonable for Black Americans to employ each other. Recognizing the need to cultivate Black businesses, Washington said in his last annual address to the NNBL, "At the bottom of education, at the bottom of politics, even at the bottom of religion itself there must be for our race, as for all races, an economic foundation, economic prosperity, [and] economic independence."

WOMEN'S WORK

In addition to supporting general organizations dedicated to racial and social equality, Black women formed their own organizations. The First National Conference of the Colored Women of America resulted in the formation of the National Federation of Afro-American Women, headed by Booker T. Washington's wife, Margaret Murray Washington. In 1896, that organization merged with the National League of Colored Women, headed by Mary Church Terrell, and spawned the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), whose membership boasted the nation's most prominent Black women.

While the NACW supported the women's suffrage movement, some white women who were opposed to integration excluded Black women from their suffrage efforts. This prompted Mary Ann Shad Cary to form the Colored Women's Progressive Franchise Association as an auxiliary of the predominantly white National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA). (To keep Black female suffragists in the South in the loop, Adella Hunt Logan often passed for white to attend NAWSA's Southern meetings.)

The overall goal for Black women, as articulated by writer Frances Ellen Watkins Harper at the predominantly white World's Congress of Representative Women, held in Chicago in 1893, was "Demand justice, simple justice, as the right of every race."

Under Washington's direct leadership, the NNBL and its national convention in particular served several functions:

- Fostering economic development as a primary means of obtaining racial equality
- Uniting Black business owners to fellowship and to exchange innovative ideas to promote economic growth
- Tracking Black business development and growth

NNBL participants such as William Pettiford (an early pastor of what is now the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and founder of Penny Savings Bank in Birmingham, established in 1890) clearly understood their important role in the community. Pettiford, for example, knew that 90 percent of his customers had never held a bank account before, so his bank took great pains to educate customers on how to save and invest wisely. He believed this knowledge stimulated the desire for property ownership and other responsible fiscal behavior that contributed to the overall well-being of the Black American community.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

MADAM C.J. WALKER

Of the early Black female entrepreneurs, Madam C.J. Walker, born Sarah Breedlove in Louisiana two years after the Civil War ended, is the most famous. Despite being orphaned at age 7 and becoming a widow by age 20, Walker built a national empire around Black haircare and cosmetics by 1917. She was so successful that she owned a manufacturing plant in Indianapolis and employed almost 1,000 sales agents nationally.

Arguably one of the most successful Black entrepreneurs — male or female — of her time, Walker was also a noted philanthropist who donated to the NAACP and such educational institutions as Tuskegee Institute. Although Walker's former employer, Annie Turnbo Malone, who first patented the straightening (or pressing) comb, might have achieved the millionaire status first, Walker served as the prototype for the Black female entrepreneur for many years. Walker's great-great-granddaughter A'Lelia Bundles published *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C.J. Walker*, a definitive biography, in 2001 (Scribner).

The Niagara Movement

Former Harvard schoolmates William Monroe Trotter (founder of the Black newspaper *The Guardian* and who had long opposed Washington's accommodationist politics) and Du Bois convened a group of prominent Black Americans in June 1905 in Fort Erie, Ontario, near Niagara Falls. The purpose of the conference was to discuss a more proactive strategy to achieve first-class citizenship for Black Americans and to launch the Niagara Movement.



REMEMBER

The Niagara Movement marked the official launch of the 20th-century movement for civil rights and produced a clear platform that included demands for freedom of speech, full voting rights, and the end of segregation.



TECHNICAL STUFF

Unlike many other prominent Black Americans, Trotter routinely criticized Washington. Consequently, Washington reportedly planted spies to stay abreast of the Niagara Movement's actions. He even used his influence with the Black press to limit the organization's press attention.

Despite having fewer than 200 members and virtually no press attention, the Niagara Movement distributed pamphlets, lobbied against Jim Crow, and even sent protest letters to the President. Ultimately, clashes between the more radical Trotter and the comparatively reserved Du Bois (not scant funding and organizational weakness) led to the Niagara Movement's demise.

The NAACP



HISTORICAL ROOTS

Contrary to popular belief, DuBois didn't conceive the NAACP. Instead, the NAACP began with a group of white activists spurred to action by the horrendous Springfield Race Riot of 1908 (refer to the earlier section "Lynchings and riots"). William English Walling, the son of a former slaveholding family, and his wife were in Illinois when violence erupted. Particularly disturbed that this type of violence occurred in a city so closely aligned with Abraham Lincoln, Walling wrote an article, "Race War in the North," that provoked a response from Mary White Ovington, a white social worker who had served Black Americans in New York City. Early in 1909, Walling, Ovington, and Dr. Henry Moskowitz met in a New York City apartment and conceived what would become the NAACP. They issued a call for a national conference to tackle the problems of Black Americans on Lincoln's birthday, February 10, 1909.

Endorsers of the NAACP, evident through their attendance at the national conference, included Du Bois, social reformer and Nobel Peace Prize winner Jane Addams, psychologist and education reformer John Dewey, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, among many others. On May 31 and June 1, 1909, conference attendees laid the groundwork necessary for the NAACP. (Highly suspicious of white people, William Monroe Trotter didn't attend.)

In 1910, the NAACP began formal operations with one Black member among its officers: Du Bois served as Director of Publicity and Research. Under his leadership, *The Crisis,* the NAACP's official magazine, took a strong stance against lynching and mob violence. People responded enthusiastically and, three years later, the NAACP had 1,100 members. By 1921, it claimed more than 400 branches.



REMEMBER

Spearheaded by Arthur Spingarn, the NAACP's legal team became one of its most enduring legacies. With white and Black attorneys working together, the NAACP began a diligent legal assault that chipped away at Jim Crow. Almost immediately, the team won three key Supreme Court cases:

- *Guinn v. United States* (1915) upheld the 15th Amendment, voiding Oklahoma's grandfather clauses.
- *Buchanan v. Warley* (1917) declared Louisville ordinances forcing Black Americans to live in certain areas unconstitutional.
- *Moore v. Dempsey* (1923) forced a new trial for a Black man convicted of murder in Arkansas, partially because no Black Americans sat on the jury.

The National Urban League

A direct result of Black Southerners moving North to escape Jim Crow, the National Urban League (NUL) sought to address the problems of Black migrants. It combined the goals of all the civil rights organizations with the economic concerns of the National Negro Business League. As more migrants flooded into the cities, the NUL grew rapidly, opening a Chicago office in 1912. By 1941, it had expanded to 30 cities. During the Great Migration, the NUL was at the forefront of one of Black America's most tumultuous times of change and opportunity.

Fulfilling its primary mission of aiding migrants in their transition to life in the North, the NUL battled employment discrimination; poor housing, education, and healthcare; and discriminatory local, state, and federal economic and social policies.



Anticipating the Great Migration, the mass relocation of Black Americans from the South spanning roughly from 1914 to 1940, the NUL was the brainchild of Ruth Standish Baldwin (the widow of a railroad magnate) and Dr. Edmund Haynes (a Fisk graduate and Columbia University's first Black Ph.D. recipient). They established the Committee on Urban Conditions Among Negroes in 1910, merging it with the Committee for the Improvement of Industrial Conditions Among Negroes in New York (founded in 1906) and the National League for the Protection of Colored Women (founded in 1905) to create the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes in 1911. It became simply the National Urban League in 1920.

Keep on Moving: The Great Migration

As Du Bois and others argued about top-down Black leadership, the Black masses didn't wait for the Court to make decisions. In search of better jobs, educational opportunities, and an escape from racial violence, the Black population of Northern cities swelled. New York City's Black population rose 66 percent between 1910 and 1920 — a modest increase compared to Chicago's 148 percent, Philadelphia's amazing 500 percent, and Detroit's unbelievable 611 percent. The Great Migration profoundly changed life in the U.S.

Leaving the South

In addition to lynchings and other forms of terrorism (refer to the earlier section "Post-Reconstruction Blues"), two key reasons Black Southerners left the South included

- **Mother Nature:** Beginning in 1898, boll weevils infested cotton crops in Texas and spread that devastation all over the South well into the 1910s. Because the South was slow to industrialize, it couldn't rebound as quickly, and agricultural work became scarce. Next to the boll weevils, the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 sent Southerners north. Poor treatment after the flood — insufficient relief funds and inadequate or no housing, for example — drove Black Southerners out of the South.
- **Better jobs and opportunities:** World War I significantly curtailed European immigration at the same time that white American men joined the war effort, leaving an abundance of factory jobs unfilled. In Detroit, Henry Ford offered Black Americans jobs with equal pay. Some companies were so desperate for workers that they paid people's way north. In addition to better wages, schooling was slightly improved. The *Chicago Defender,* with its front-page stories on lynchings and tales of migrants who struck it rich, played such a prominent role in motivating Black Southerners to leave that it was banned in many parts of the South.

Hard choices and sacrifices followed the decision to migrate. Potential migrants, typically Black men ages 18 to 35, saved money for months. Some families chipped in to help with tickets. Others sold their last possessions. Sometimes migrants stopped en route and worked in smaller towns until they could make it to bigger cities like Chicago or Philadelphia. Children sometimes stayed with grandparents and relatives until their parents could afford to send for them. Unfortunately, for many migrants, the North wasn't as welcoming as they believed.

OH, WON'T YOU STAY, JUST A LITTLE BIT LONGER?

Curiously, white Southerners had difficulty understanding why Black Americans wanted to leave the South. During the Great Migration, local authorities blocked white recruiting agents' access to Black communities, and they pulled willing migrants off trains. In addition, white employers refused to hire Black Americans in order to keep them from earning the money they needed for the trip. In a case of twisted logic, Southern whites felt that further terrorizing Black people and keeping them impoverished would make them want to stay.

Life up North

The National Urban League, as well as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and its sister organization, Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), were a huge help in providing migrants with housing information and job leads. Yet life in the North was far from grand for most Black Americans. Racism, they discovered, was a national problem. Key challenges for Black Americans included

- **Substandard housing:** Migrants paid substantially more than white workers for housing, most often *kitchenettes,* one-room apartments created by greedy landlords capitalizing on the limited housing for Black Americans. Often four to five adults lived in one room. In addition, landlords were slow to perform necessary maintenance, but migrants were so afraid of not finding other housing that they usually didn't complain.
- **Poor healthcare and crime:** Overcrowding, poverty, and inadequate healthcare created innumerable health concerns. Infectious disease raged, and many migrants, especially children under the age of 10, died in high numbers. Black babies frequently died at twice the rate of white babies. These conditions also produced crime. The hungry stole food. The broke robbed others. Some confrontations turned violent and resulted in death.

In time, migrants and their leaders learned to parlay their significant population into politics, as astute leaders realized that there was strength in numbers. At the very least, Black Northerners could vote, and they began to use that right more effectively with each passing year.

Marcus Garvey: Man with a Plan

The racial pride and self-reliance that were respected qualities during Booker T. Washington's reign reached even greater heights during the Great Migration. Jamaican immigrant Marcus Mosiah Garvey recognized the power of racial pride as well as the alienation that migrants felt from middle-class leaders; in response, he offered his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) movement as the solution. The UNIA was the first mass movement among Black Americans in the 20th century.



Garvey brought the UNIA, established in 1914 in Jamaica, to Harlem, New York, in 1916. By 1924, there were more than 700 branches of the UNIA in 38 states and more than 200 branches throughout the world, including the African continent. Within the United States, the circulation of *Negro World,* the UNIA's official newspaper, reached a height of 50,000 to 60,000 subscribers in the mid-1920s and boasted an overall domestic and international circulation of 200,000 *weekly.*

Advocating racial pride

Seizing upon the ideology and rhetoric of self-determination surrounding World War I, Garvey spoke strongly of racial pride as a basis of global unity among African descendants. "Africa for the Africans at home and abroad" is just one of the slogans he popularized to reinforce his Pan-African perspective.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Garvey encouraged his followers to have Black heroes. He also preached Africa's greatness to them and insisted that they possessed that greatness as well. "When Europe was inhabited by savages, heathens, and pagans," he told them, "Africa was peopled with a race of cultured Black men, who were masters in art, science, and literature. Whatsoever a Black man has done, a Black man can do."

Like Washington (refer to the earlier section "Booker T. Washington: The Accommodationist"), Garvey emphasized Black self-reliance and solidarity to ameliorate economic conditions for Black Americans and African people globally. In 1919, he established the Negro Factories Corporation, which operated several businesses, including grocery stores, restaurants, a printing plant, and a steam laundry.

Going "Back to Africa"

Imperialism thrived during the 1920s as European nations began dividing countries (and continents) among themselves. Garvey believed that it was up to people of African descent to stop them. "Whether it is saving this one nation or that one government," he declared in 1923, "we are going to seek a method of saving Africa first. Why? And why Africa? Because Africa has become the grand prize of the nations. Africa has become the big game of the nation hunters."



REMEMBER

Garvey's "Back to Africa" message was more complex than is generally perceived. Unlike the colonization movement of the 19th century (refer to Chapter 5), Garvey didn't necessarily advocate going "back to Africa" to flee white racism. Instead, his message was one of empowerment.

Black Americans and Black people from various parts of the world responded strongly to Garvey's message. Regardless of whether they wanted to immigrate to Africa, they believed they had a responsibility to support any efforts to restore her greatness. In June 1919, Garvey established his Black Star Line Steamship Corporation and later purchased three ships to carry Africans back to Africa. Garvey's lack of shipping knowledge, coupled with the incompetence or greed of his accountants, not to mention outside sabotage, doomed the Black Star Line, however.



REMEMBER

Garvey's message of African nations, Black businesses, and institutions free of white influence resonated strongly, along with his mantra of "Up, you mighty race, you can accomplish what you will."

Powerful enemies

Established Black leadership didn't applaud Garvey's success. His broad appeal confounded them. They couldn't comprehend how he launched so many successful ventures with no white support. Garvey further alienated the established Black leadership, some near white in appearance, with charges of "brown" racism (discrimination against Black Americans of darker hues). One leader was so angry he sued Garvey for libel and won.

Du Bois and Garvey had a tenuous relationship that developed early. In 1919, Garvey suspected that Du Bois was responsible for the State Department's denying passports to special UNIA delegates who were to attend the Versailles Peace Conference and blasted Du Bois personally. For his part, Du Bois secretly tried to dig up information on Garvey from the State Department with no success before publishing an article on Garvey titled "Lunatic or Traitor" in *The Crisis.*

Garvey's actions also attracted the attention of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, who built a case for Garvey's deportation. In 1923, Garvey received a mail fraud conviction in association with the Black Star Line and served three months. Arrested again in 1925, he was sent to an Atlanta penitentiary to serve a five-year sentence. In 1927, President Calvin Coolidge pardoned and deported Garvey, who eventually died in London in 1940.

Can't Catch a Break: The Depression Years and FDR

The Great Depression was especially brutal for Black Americans. A drastic drop in cotton prices crushed about 2 million Black farmers, and many white Southerners refused to give federal relief to Black Southerners. Conditions were only slightly better in cities. The end of World War I halted the wartime economy that had produced jobs for both Black and white Americans, but Black Americans were especially vulnerable as they competed with unemployed whites. In both the South and the North, white workers demanded that employers replace Black workers with white workers, even in the most menial of jobs. Black women lost their lower-level jobs to white women, and the Depression forced Black domestics to work for as little as $5 a week.

Relief rates for Black Americans in the North and South were as much as four times that of white Americans. In Norfolk, Virginia, for example, an estimated 80 percent of the Black population required public assistance. Yet Black Americans who received relief got just over half of what white Americans received. Even in the face of national starvation, racism prevailed when many soup kitchens, some run by churches, refused to feed Black Americans.

Dissatisfied with President Herbert Hoover's response to the Great Depression, white Americans replaced him with Franklin D. Roosevelt. Although Black Americans were still largely Republican, Black Americans who voted for FDR in the 1932 election foreshadowed Black America's seismic Democratic shift.

FDR: Friend or foe?

Initially, Black Americans saw little to encourage them that Roosevelt's policies would address their needs. In lobbying for his New Deal legislation, Roosevelt argued that supporting anti-lynching efforts would alienate Congress's Southern politicians, jeopardizing the crucial legislation needed to battle the Great Depression. In addition, the provisions of some New Deal initiatives didn't necessarily extend to Black Americans:

- **NIRA (National Industrial Recovery Act):** The NIRA attempted to set a minimum wage and standard work hours and recommended that employers recognize unions; however, accepting these changes was voluntary, not mandatory, and therefore offered no real protection for Black — or any — employees. In addition, many who accepted the NIRA fired Black Americans instead of extending the NIRA recommendations to them. Black domestic workers and those in other menial jobs weren't covered by the NIRA.
- **AAA (Agricultural Adjustment Association):** Exclusion from the AAA, which paid farmers not to produce cotton in order to create a shortage that would drive the price up, led Black farmers to lose their land and become sharecroppers.

Striking a new deal

At the peak of the Great Migration, Black leaders began to leverage the Black vote. Recognizing the importance of the Black vote in his reelection efforts, FDR declared during a national radio broadcast that lynching was murder. He also appointed two Black Americans — Mary McLeod Bethune to head the Negro

Division of the National Youth Administration and *Pittsburgh Courier* editor Robert L. Vann to serve as special assistant to the U.S. Attorney General. Between 1933 and 1946, the number of Black Americans employed by the federal government rose from roughly 50,000 to about 200,000.



TECHNICAL STUFF

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who enjoyed a close friendship with Mary McLeod Bethune, helped push her husband toward a stronger position on civil rights. New Dealers such as Harold Ickes (Secretary of the Interior and administrator for the Public Works Administration) and the Works Progress Administration's Harry Hopkins also pitched in. Ickes ended segregation in the Department of the Interior's restrooms and cafeteria, while Hopkins ended discrimination in WPA relief efforts.



REMEMBER

On June 18, 1941, FDR issued Executive Order 8802, banning racial discrimination in government employment, defense industries, and training programs and establishing the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC). This order also helped seal many Black Americans to the Democratic Party and set a precedent for government involvement against racial injustice in the 20th century. It also paved the way for President Harry S. Truman to pass Executive Order 9981 in July 1948, desegregating the military.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

MARY McLeod BETHUNE

Born Mary Jane McLeod to enslaved parents near Maysville, South Carolina, in 1875, Mary McLeod Bethune was a prized student. In 1904, Bethune moved to Daytona Beach, Florida, and founded the Daytona Literary and Industrial School for Training Negro Girls, part of modern-day Bethune-Cookman University. Adding civic leader to her many skills and positions, Bethune led voter registration drives and served as president of the State Federation of Colored Women's Clubs before becoming president of the National Association of Colored Women in 1924. As her reputation grew, Bethune attended several presidential conferences and served on numerous boards. Bethune became a member of Roosevelt's "Black Cabinet," spearheading minority affairs for the National Youth Administration.

A woman of international significance, Bethune received prestigious medals from Haiti and Liberia. Following the landmark *Brown v. Board* of Education Supreme Court decision, Bethune wrote in her *Chicago Defender* column that "there can be no divided democracy, no class government, no half-free county, under the constitution." Throughout her life, Bethune fully lived her mantra "not for myself, but for others."



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

A. PHILIP RANDOLPH

Few Black leaders were as forceful as A. Philip Randolph, who helped spearhead and lead the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, founded in 1925. He also helped found the Harlem-based radical publication *The Messenger,* which circulated from 1917 to 1928. An expert at compromising without sacrificing his principles, Randolph became one of this nation's most effective civil rights leaders. Seeking evidence of real change for the Black working class in particular, Randolph threatened a March on Washington by establishing offices in various cities and joining forces with the NAACP, National Urban League, churches, and fraternal and sorority orders. As the momentum for the March grew, FDR buckled. The result: Executive Order 8802.

Can't Fool Us Twice: Black Americans and WWII

During World War I, Black American soldiers fought alongside the French and strolled Paris and other French cities free of Jim Crow restrictions (although some military bases still implemented restrictions, such as Black and white soldiers fraternizing or utilizing the same facilities). These experiences left an indelible impression that made accepting Jim Crow back home even more difficult. That their contributions in the War for Democracy were celebrated only by other Black Americans and largely ignored by white Americans just worsened matters. When World War II broke out, even though Black Americans supported the war, they refused to subjugate their own interests again.

The Black press, led by the *Pittsburgh Courier,* refused to remain silent against racial discrimination in the military and at home and, in 1942, waged a "Double V" campaign highlighting the struggle on both fronts. Lobbying — and winning — for Black war correspondents, the Black press wasn't the only Black entity taking the offensive. Mabel K. Staupers, executive director of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses, fought to integrate the Army and Navy Nurses Corps and succeeded when a nurse shortage hit in 1945. The NAACP attacked the racial discrimination practiced by war industries receiving government contracts, charging that Black Americans paid taxes for warplanes they couldn't build, repair, or fly.

World War II yielded some other successes, including the Tuskegee Airmen, so-named for their training at Tuskegee Institute. At war's end, the Tuskegee Airmen received two Presidential Unit Citations and 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses, among other honors. Partially acknowledging the racial barriers they battled the 1945 propaganda short *Wings for This Man,* which praised the extraordinary wartime achievements of these airmen.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Desegregating public schools
- Feeling the impact of Emmett Till's murder
- Following Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s lead
- Marching on Washington for Jobs and Freedom

Chapter 8

I, Too, Sing America: The Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1963

The mid-1950s set the stage for another major revolution in the United States. Just as the Civil War tested the nation's core values almost a century earlier (refer to Chapter 6), the civil rights movement in the mid–20th century tested these values once again. This chapter examines this era's leaders (greatest among them being Martin Luther King Jr.), the events that transpired during these volatile years, and the 1963 March on Washington, where King gave voice to millions, Black and white, in a speech that defined America as it should be and not as it was.

The Tide Turns: Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

The dramatic battles that set the tone for much of the 1960s didn't just happen. Several events preceded those battles, perhaps none more important than the 1954 Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education.* That decision

overturned the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* edict, which set the precedent for legalized segregation (refer to Chapter 7 for info on the *Plessy* case).

Before the 1950s, most court cases challenging segregated schooling targeted higher education. Longtime Howard Law School dean Charles Hamilton Houston, the first Black editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, crafted the brilliant strategy to challenge Jim Crow's "separate but equal" mandate in graduate education in the 1930s when he led the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. Consequently, the NAACP legal team, which had tried many of the key segregation cases since 1935, gained momentum with these 1950 landmark decisions:

- ***Sweatt v. Painter:*** Denied admission to the University of Texas School of Law in 1946 despite meeting all requirements but race, Heman Marion Sweatt pursued legal action to force the school to accept him. Because a law school admitting Black students opened in 1947 while his case was still being heard, the Texas courts upheld the University of Texas's denial of admission. The Supreme Court overturned the Texas courts' decision, citing that the University of Texas had substantially more professors and students plus a larger law library than the Black law school, marking the first time the Court factored in issues of substantive quality and not just the existence of a separate school. In 1950, he enrolled in the University of Texas School of Law, though he eventually withdrew.
- ***McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents:*** Although admitted to the University of Oklahoma, doctoral student George W. McLaurin was forced to sit in a designated row in class, at a separate table for lunch, and at a special desk in the library. Oklahoma courts denied McLaurin's appeal to remove these separate restrictions. The Supreme Court overturned the lower court's decision, ruling that Oklahoma State's treatment of McLaurin violated the Fourteenth Amendment, which prevents any separate treatment based on race.

In essence, these decisions undermined the rationale behind the Supreme Court's 1896 ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* — that separate facilities were equal. In June 1950, NAACP lead attorney Thurgood Marshall, who later became the nation's first Black Supreme Court Justice, convened the NAACP's board of directors and some of the nation's top lawyers to discuss the next phase of attack. They decided that the NAACP, which had already initiated some lawsuits, would pursue a full-out legal assault on school segregation.

The 1954 ruling and the reaction

Wanting to form a representative sample of the nation as a whole, the Supreme Court consolidated five cases to form the more popularly known *Brown v. Board of Education* (see the sidebar for details on these five cases).



To get *Plessy* overturned, Marshall and his team knew they had to show that segregation, in and of itself, harmed Black children. To do so, he relied on the research of Dr. Kenneth Clark and his wife Mamie Phipps Clark, the first and second Black Americans to receive doctorates in psychology from Columbia University. To figure out how Black children viewed themselves, the Clarks placed white and Black dolls before Black children and asked them to identify the "nice" and "bad" doll, as well as choose the one most like them. Most children identified the white doll as "nice" and the Black doll as "bad," even when they identified themselves with the Black doll. Based on these findings, the Clarks concluded that Black children had impaired self-images.



Few expected the unanimous decision finally delivered on May 17, 1954. "In the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place," ruled the Supreme Court. "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." A year later, on May 31, 1955, with the case known as *Brown II*, the Court established guidelines to desegregate all public education.

As the implementation of the *Brown* ruling began, the nation discovered that instituting equality and applying its principles were two different battles. Although many white people didn't fully support the Supreme Court's decision, they abided by it. Others simply refused. In parts of the South, resistance reached dramatic heights.

CASES THAT BUILT BROWN

Although the decision in the anti-segregation case is commonly referred to as *Brown v. Board of Education,* the final ruling by the Supreme Court comes from a consolidation of several cases:

- ***Briggs v. Elliott:*** In 1947, when Clarendon County, South Carolina, school superintendent R.M. Elliot denied the request from Black parents for a bus to transport their children to school (even though a little boy had drowned crossing a reservoir on a common route to school), they sued. With the assistance of Reverend Joseph A. DeLaine (a schoolteacher and African Methodist Episcopal pastor) and Modjeska Monteith Simpkins, Harry Briggs and at least 19 other parents took bold action, later backed by Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, that led to a demand not just for a bus but for equal schools for Black students in Clarendon County. Heard by the Supreme Court in 1952, *Briggs v. Elliot* directly challenged the "separate but equal" doctrine established by *Plessy v. Ferguson,* making it the nation's first desegregation case to reach the Supreme Court.

(continued)

(continued)

- ***Bolling v. Sharpe:*** To avoid sending their children to dilapidated schools, a group of parents, in a calculated move, marched to the newly built John Philip Sousa Junior High School on September 11, 1950, and attempted to enroll 11 Black students. The school's principal turned them away. *Bolling v. Sharpe,* the resulting lawsuit, broke with the accepted strategy of demanding equal facilities and directly challenged segregation. The U.S. District Court dismissed the case; the Supreme Court decided to hear the case on appeal. ***Note:*** When the Court finally rendered its decision, it ruled on *Bolling v. Sharpe* separately because Washington, D.C., wasn't a state and couldn't be grouped as such.
- ***Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas:*** Topeka had four Black elementary schools and 18 white schools. Following a strategy conceived by the Topeka NAACP chapter, Black parents attempted to enroll their children in the nearest school and were turned away due to race. Strengthened by the denied enrollments, the NAACP filed *Oliver Brown et al v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas,* involving 13 parents and 20 children, in the District Court on February 28, 1951. When the District Court ruled in favor of the school board, the NAACP took the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.
- ***Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County:*** Conditions for Black students at R.R. Moton High School in Farmville, Virginia, were horrendous, and the all-white school board consistently refused to allocate more money to the school, even as overcrowding resulted in some classes being held in an old school bus. Students, led by 16-year-old Barbara Rose Johns (the niece of Vernon Johns, the civil rights leader who helmed Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, before Martin Luther King Jr.), walked out in protest of the school's unacceptable conditions. Johns and fellow organizer Carrie Stokes secured Richmond NAACP counsel Oliver Hill, who filed the case on May 23, 1951. Rejected by the U.S. District Court, the NAACP filed an appeal to the Supreme Court.
- ***Belton v. Gebhart* and *Bulah v. Gebhart:*** In *Belton v. Gebhart,* Ethel Belton and six other parents challenged policies that forced their children to attend run-down Howard High School in downtown Wilmington over the perfectly fine school in their community only due to race. In *Bulah v. Gebhart,* parent Sarah Bulah, dismayed that her daughter had to walk to school when a school bus of white children regularly passed their house, tried to secure transportation for her child. When her attempts failed, she secured counsel and filed a case. Delaware Judge Collin Seitz ruled that the circumstances of both grievances violated the "separate but equal" doctrine and ordered that Black students be admitted to the "white" schools. This ruling, however, didn't extend throughout the state of Delaware.

Desegregating Central High School

No one planned on Arkansas serving as a major desegregation battleground. The Little Rock School Board issued a statement that it would comply with the Supreme Court decision and adopted an integration plan. The board selected Central High School as the first school to be integrated at the beginning of the 1957–1958 school year. Careful not to jump hastily into integration's deepest waters, the Little Rock School Board decided to keep its high school for Black students open, allowing just a handful of students to attend Central High that first year.

The Little Rock Nine and white resistance

A few Black students tried to enroll in Central High School in January 1956. Because the attempt was made ahead of schedule, a judge denied the students' enrollment, but that made little difference: White citizens opposed to integration took notice, and signs of resistance and threats began to show. Months before the September 3, 1957, initiation date, the Capital Citizens' Council (Little Rock's version of the White Citizens' Council, a segregationist group spawned in Mississippi) and the Mothers' League of Central High, considered the second most important segregationist club and sponsored by the Capital Citizens' Council to give the opposition to desegregating Central High a feminine edge, launched an anti-integration media campaign.

Given the increased stakes, the school board solicited volunteers to attend Central High School and selected 17 students. Before any school doors opened, however, anti-integrationists went to work, and that number dwindled to nine: Minnijean Brown, Elizabeth Eckford, Ernest Green, Thelma Mothershed, Melba Patillo, Gloria Ray, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas, and Carlotta Walls. Arkansas NAACP head Daisy Bates served as their personal coach and counselor.

On August 29, a suit filed by a member of the Mothers' League prompted the county chancellor to issue a temporary injunction preventing Black students from enrolling in Central High. Federal District Judge Ronald N. Davies nullified the injunction the next day and ordered the school board to continue with its September 3 plans.

Faubus makes his move

On the night of September 2, the Arkansas National Guard and state police surrounded the school on orders from Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus to admit only white students, teachers, and school officials. A mob of roughly 300 gathered by morning.

When the nine Black students, called the Little Rock Nine, tried to enroll in Central High the next day, members of the Arkansas National Guard turned them away. Frantic, the school board requested a stay of the integration order on September 7, but Judge Davies rejected the request. On September 10, Governor Faubus received a federal summons; he also held a press conference and announced that the armed presence outside the school would remain. Wisely, the Little Rock Nine didn't attempt to enroll again before the hearings. On September 20, Faubus, following a court order, removed the troops.

Eisenhower steps in and the students enroll

On September 23, the Little Rock Nine made another attempt to enroll in Central High, but uncontrolled violence erupted and they left school before the day ended, spurring President Dwight D. Eisenhower to intervene. Although far from a drum major for integration, Eisenhower wouldn't permit blatant disregard for the laws of the land.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

On September 24, President Eisenhower addressed the American public on national television to explain his decision to intervene. He said, "The very basis of our individual rights and freedoms rests upon the certainty that the president and the executive branch of government will support and insure the carrying out of the decisions of the federal courts." He insisted, "The interest of the nation in the proper fulfillment of the law's requirements cannot yield to opposition and demonstrations by some few persons. Mob rule cannot be allowed to override the decisions of our courts."



REMEMBER

Protected by federal troops, the Little Rock Nine enrolled in Central High on September 25, 1957, but they continued to be victimized. White students verbally and physically abused them, and segregationists harassed their families and members of the Black community in general. Bowing to the pressure, Minnijean Brown poured a bowl of chili over a white student's head and was expelled. Ernest Green, the group's only senior, graduated from Central High on May 27, 1958, but the others didn't get their chance.

Faubus closes the schools

In August 1958, Governor Faubus called a special session of the state legislature and passed a law allowing him to close all the public schools. The schools remained closed until September 1959, when federal authority via the courts finally won out. In the interim, two of the Little Rock Nine had moved away with their families, and the others had graduated from other schools in Arkansas. Governor Faubus served as governor of Arkansas for 12 years before losing in the 1970 election.

POLITICAL PANDERING AT ITS WORST

Unaware that Governor Faubus had ordered the Arkansas National Guard and state police to block the admittance of Black students into Central High, *The New York Times* predicted on September 3 that integration in Little Rock would go smoothly. After all, Governor Faubus, who grew up racially tolerant, didn't block the desegregation of state buses and other public transportation. In fact, Faubus didn't adopt his anti-integrationist position until his 1956 gubernatorial opponents made it an issue. Although he had vowed to prevent integration to secure his gubernatorial victory, those working to integrate Central High never imagined he'd take such drastic actions.

Massive resistance follows in Virginia

Arkansas wasn't alone in its efforts to circumvent school desegregation. The board of supervisors in Prince Edward County, Virginia, withheld all funding from the county school board, closing all public schools for the 1959–1960 school year. This policy, known as *massive resistance*, stems from U.S. Senator Harry F. Byrd Sr.'s solicitation of the support of other influential Virginians to prevent school desegregation in 1956.

When the courts reopened the desegregated Prince Edward County schools in February 1959, no white students attended. Instead, their parents enrolled them in *segregation academies*, schools established to prevent integration. This battle waged into the 1970s, with many Southern schools desegregating in theory but not in practice. Today, many argue that public school education in both the North and South operates under a system of *de facto* segregation.

Putting a Face to Racial Violence: Emmett Till

Credited as the birthplace of the White Citizens' Council (WCC), an organization composed of civic leaders determined to fight integration that spread throughout the South, Mississippi had a reputation for extreme racism. Although Black Mississippians made up an estimated 45 percent of the state population in the 1950s, only 5 percent were registered voters because both registering to vote and voting itself were so dangerous.

Consider these examples: Grocery store owner and NAACP field worker Reverend George Lee was shot and killed in Belzoni, Mississippi, for trying to vote. Weeks

later, in Brookhaven, someone shot Lamar Smith dead in broad daylight, with witnesses present, for casting a ballot. No arrests were made for either murder. These are the conditions Emmett Till, a 14-year-old-boy raised on Chicago's South Side, encountered.

Emmett Till's murder

Although born in Mississippi, Emmett Till's mother, Mamie Till, grew up in Illinois and had limited experience in Mississippi. In August 1955, she sent Emmett, accompanied by family members, to visit his great-uncle, Mose Wright, near Money, Mississippi. Shortly after Emmett's arrival in Mississippi, he and a few others, including his cousin Simeon Wright, went to the general store in Money. He bought candy from Carolyn Bryant, a 21-year-old white woman who worked as cashier of her family-owned store, and she claimed Emmett flirted with her — some accounts say he whistled at her. Three days later, Bryant's husband Roy and his half-brother J.W. Milam came to Wright's home at night and kidnapped Emmett at gunpoint.

Although arrested for kidnapping, Bryant and Milam insisted that they had only talked to Emmett and had released him alive. A couple of days later, on August 31, a boy fishing in the Tallahatchie River found Emmett Till's badly decomposed body. Authorities found a 75-pound fan from a cotton gin attached to his neck with barbed wire, a detached eye, and a bullet lodged in the skull, among other atrocities.

The outrage of the nation

Despite attempts by some white Mississippians to bury Emmett there, Mamie returned her son's body to Chicago and held an open-casket funeral to expose his brutalization to the world. An estimated 50,000 people viewed his body.


REMEMBER

Photos of the body, published by *Jet Magazine,* hit a nerve with Black Americans. White American as well as the world also responded strongly. Emmett's mutilated body exposed the horrors of Jim Crow in the South, prompting thousands of dollars in donations to civil rights organizations.

With most of the nation outraged, Mississippi tried Bryant and Milam for murder. Testifying against the men in court, Wright, Till's uncle, boldly pointed them out. Carolyn Bryant, on the decision of the judge, didn't testify at all. After deliberating for only an hour and seven minutes, the all-white jury in Sumner, Mississippi, acquitted the two men. The acquittal generated more outrage, making Emmett Till a martyr. Many who later joined civil rights movements cited the lynching of Emmett Till as an impetus.

THE TILL CASE REVISITED

Prompted by evidence, including facts pointing to false accusations of Emmett Till whistling and other actions, uncovered by Louisiana filmmaker Keith Beauchamp while researching his documentary *The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till,* the Department of Justice and Mississippi District Attorney's office for the Fourth District opened an investigation into the murder on May 10, 2004. Although both Bryant and Milam, who had admitted to killing Till (and even sold details to the magazine *Look* in 1956), were dead, Beauchamp's research pointed to others, Black (more than likely coerced into participating) and white, who assisted in the murder. As many as three others, including Carolyn Bryant, may have come to Wright's house the night he was kidnapped.

Ultimately, the investigation yielded no new convictions. The significance of Till's brutal murder can't be overstated, however. His mother, Mamie Till, before her death in 2003, said of her son's heartbreaking death, "Men stood up who had never stood up before." Indeed, her son's brutal murder spoke of hatred's most insidious transgressions against human existence and impelled Black and white people to join those committed to freedom and equality for Black Americans.

A New Twist in Leadership: Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, on January 15, 1929, Martin Luther King Jr., shown in Figure 8-1, originally planned to be a scholar and a minister. King attended Morehouse College and excelled at Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pennsylvania, before pursuing graduate studies at Boston University. It wasn't until he accepted the position of pastor at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama and was tapped by Montgomery's Black male leaders to lead the newly created Montgomery Improvement Association, that King, age 26 at the time, began his public civil rights journey.

King infused the civil rights movement with a greater moral and philosophical purpose. By insisting that God's law and love truly did conquer all and through his advocacy of *nonviolent direct action*, the process of challenging societal wrongs via protest marches, boycotts, and sit-ins, among other strategies, without the use of violence, he was able to bring an initially reluctant America closer to the dream of true equality for all races.

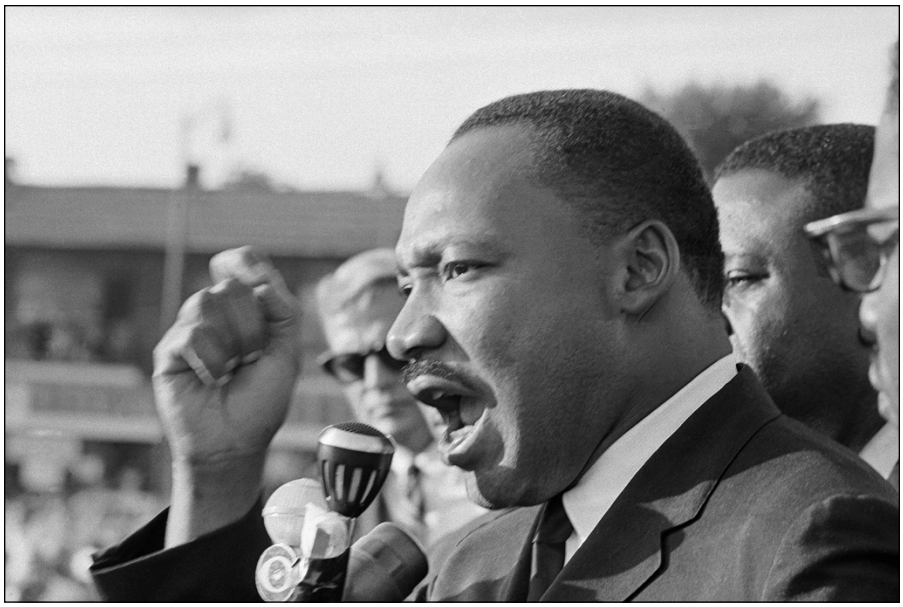


FIGURE 8-1: Martin Luther King Jr. speaking in Cleveland.

Bettmann/Getty Images

Adopting the philosophy of nonviolence

Sparked by a 1950 lecture about the philosophy of Indian activist Mahatma (Mohandas) Gandhi, King began seriously studying Gandhi while a student at Crozer Theological Seminary. He was particularly intrigued by the concept of *satyagraha*. *Satya* means "truth," which also equals love; *agraha* means "force." Therefore, a direct translation means truth-force or love-force.

King found that Gandhi's teachings jelled with his own Christian beliefs (specifically the biblical philosophy to "turn the other cheek" and "love your enemies") as well as his intolerance for racial injustice. He melded these ideas with the concept of nonviolent resistance, which he encountered during his first year at Morehouse while reading Henry David Thoreau's *Essay on Civil Disobedience.* King became convinced that a philosophy based on love could succeed as a "powerful and effective social force on a large scale" and adopted the philosophy of nonviolent direct action.

Even when confronted with violence, practitioners figuratively and sometimes literally turn the other cheek and love, instead of hate, those who wrong them. The Montgomery Bus Boycott (see the section "The Montgomery Bus Boycott and Rosa Parks" for details on the boycott) became King's first opportunity to use nonviolent direct action.

As the civil rights movement progressed, King's ideology matured. Although Gandhi's principles provided the foundation for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), an active civil rights organization founded in 1942 preceding him, King developed the link between Gandhi and the civil rights movement further. In subsequent writings and speeches, not only did King define the relationship between Gandhi and nonviolent direct action, but he also explained why Christian leaders and all members of society had a moral obligation to rise above the limitations of manmade laws steeped in hatred.

Founding the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

Buoyed by his success in Montgomery (see the section "The Montgomery Bus Boycott and Rosa Parks" for details), King and others founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), an organization of ministers and others dedicated to duplicating the changes of Montgomery throughout the South. The SCLC

- Adopted nonviolent mass action as its chief strategy
- Made a commitment to affiliate with local community organizations across the South to widen the reach for social change
- Vowed to be open to all regardless of race, religion, or background



HISTORICAL ROOTS

In 1957, King invited Southern preachers to the Negro Leaders Conference on Nonviolent Integration. Sixty respondents representing ten states met at Ebenezer Baptist Church, King's home church in Atlanta, and formed the SCLC. Held in Washington, D.C., on May 17, 1957, to commemorate the third anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, which attracted 20,000 attendees, became the SCLC's first public act. In August of that same year, the organization convened its very first convention in Montgomery. SCLC is a national organization still based in Atlanta.

Sit-ins, Boycotts, and Marches: The King Era of the Civil Rights Movement Begins

With its rulings regarding school desegregation (see the earlier section "The Tide Turns: Brown v. Board of Education (1954)"), the Supreme Court had spoken loudly, but so too had those opposing justice. Turbulent times lay ahead for the nation. Black people all across America were tired of being sick and tired. Unlike

the NAACP's legal team, they didn't begin with a grand strategy. Instead, ordinary folks challenged racism and racist policies with small, individual acts of defiance — such as drinking from the "white only" water fountain or demanding service at a "white only" restaurant. Actions such as these erupted into a national movement.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott and Rosa Parks

The Montgomery Bus Boycott became a powerful display of what ordinary Black Americans could achieve. *Plessy v. Ferguson*'s declaration of separate but equal permeated every aspect of Southern life. (See Chapter 6 for more on this landmark case.) In Montgomery, Alabama, and other parts of the South, Black and white people rode the same public buses but never sat together. Custom and law dictated that white people sit in the front and Black people sit in the back. The law prohibited a white rider from sharing a seat with a Black rider. So if the white section filled up and a white person needed a seat, a Black rider had to move back and relinquish his or her seat.

In December 1955, Rosa Parks, shown in Figure 8-2, sat in the fifth row of a bus with three other Black people. A white man boarded the bus, but there were no seats left in the white section, so the bus driver directed the Black riders to move back one row. Three complied. Rosa Parks refused. The driver had her arrested. E.D. Nixon, leader of the Montgomery NAACP for whom Parks served as secretary, and white attorney Clifford Durr, a former employer of Parks and friend, bailed Parks out. The devoted wife had an exemplary background, and with permission from her husband and mother, she agreed to pursue the case. Newly minted Black attorney Fred Gray and Durr represented Parks.


IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The popular version of the story is that the 42-year-old Parks, a sometime seamstress and volunteer secretary of the NAACP, was too tired to give up her seat. In her autobiography *Rosa Parks: My Story,* she explains, "People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true . . . No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in."

Rosa Parks didn't stumble into the fledgling civil rights movement unwittingly; she walked into it defiantly. In fact, months earlier, Parks had supported teenager Claudette Colvin, who had also been arrested for refusing to give up her seat. However, E.D. and others didn't fully pursue Colvin's case because it wasn't deemed strong enough to pursue legally (not because she became pregnant as some rumored). Viola White, a Black woman Parks also knew, unsuccessfully challenged bus segregation in 1944 when Alabama's white power structure stalled her case in court, prompting later cases to aim for the U.S. Supreme Court. Aurelia Browder, Susie McDonald, and Mary Louise Smith, who were all involved in

challenges to bus segregation prior to Parks's arrest in the same year, joined Colvin for the subsequent Supreme Court case *Browder v. Gayle* (see "Death knells for bus segregation") that had a huge impact.



FIGURE 8-2: Rosa Parks.

Bettmann/Getty Images

Organizing — and then extending — the boycott

Alabama State College professor and Women's Political Council leader Jo Ann Robinson, who had been challenging Montgomery bus segregation for years, sprang to action immediately. Black residents in Montgomery received flyers asking them not to ride buses on Monday, December 5. Organizers urged local ministers, one of whom was Martin Luther King Jr., to speak of the boycott in their Sunday sermons. These efforts resulted in nearly 90 percent of Black Montgomery residents not riding the buses.

HISTORICAL ROOTS

The success of the one-day bus boycott inspired the city's mostly Black male leadership of ministers and community leaders to form the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), which selected King as its president. After his first address in his new capacity, given at Montgomery's Holt Street Baptist Church on December 5, Black attendees numbering in the thousands voted to continue the boycott.

At first, boycott organizers' demands were modest. As early as December 8, the MIA approached the bus company with a plan not to eliminate the segregated bus system but for more equitable bus seating. The bus company refused.

The long haul: Keeping the boycott going despite resistance

As white people in Montgomery tried to end the boycott, Black people strategized ways to keep it going. To counter the ten-cent fare Black cabdrivers charged boycott participants, for example, the city passed an ordinance forbidding cab services to charge less than a 45-cent fare. To keep the boycott going, the MIA organized a private taxi service of Black citizens who owned their own cars. Similar to buses, the service had designated routes and pickup times. In another move to divide the Black community and end the boycott, city commissioners negotiated with three non-MIA ministers who accepted their terms. A story announcing the boycott's end leaked to the Sunday papers, and word got back to the MIA leadership. To inform the Black community that the story was a hoax, MIA members, ministers among them, hit the bars Saturday night. The boycott remained intact.

Unable to stop the boycott through false negotiations, Montgomery officials turned to intimidating the protestors. In January, Montgomery police arrested King, who had begun receiving death threats, for speeding five miles above the speed limit. When the MIA Executive Board filed the federal lawsuit *Browder v. Gayle* challenging the constitutionality of segregated bus laws on January 30, intimidation efforts only increased. King's house was bombed, as was E.D. Nixon's house. When, on February 20, attendees at a mass MIA meeting rejected a settlement from the Men of Montgomery (a group of white businessmen), a Montgomery grand jury indicted King and 88 other bus boycott leaders for violating a 1921 Alabama statute barring boycotts without "just cause." To top it off, the Alabama state legislature introduced bills to *strengthen* bus segregation.

In March, a grand jury tried King on conspiracy charges. Although found guilty, his punishment of a year in jail or a $500 fine was suspended as he appealed the decision. By this time, the Montgomery Bus Boycott was a major national story, and a number of cities observed a National Deliverance Day of Prayer in support of the boycotters.

Death knells for bus segregation

In May, the *Browder v. Gayle* trial challenging the constitutionality of Montgomery's segregated buses finally began in federal district court. Two of the three judges ruled that segregated buses in Montgomery were unconstitutional. On appeal, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the unconstitutionality of Montgomery's segregated bus system.



TECHNICAL STUFF

The court order ending Montgomery's segregated bus system arrived in Montgomery on December 20. The next day, King, Nixon, and local Baptist minister Ralph David Abernathy (a King comrade who would become a significant figure throughout King's civil rights administration) rode in the front section of a Montgomery bus.

Victory wasn't easy, though. Two days later, a sniper fired shots into King's home. Some passengers became victims of assault by white people who opposed desegregating buses, and others were the victims of sniper fire. It was clear that although King and his team, greatly assisted by Robinson and the Women's Political Council, as well as brave women like Browder and Colvin who filed federal suit challenging bus segregation, had won an important battle, they hadn't won the war.

Sitting in for justice

On February 1, 1960, four Black college students — Joseph McNeil, Ezell Blair Jr., Franklin McClain, and David Richmond — sat at a Woolworth's lunch counter reserved for "white only" in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina. This simple act added fuel to the burgeoning civil rights movement.



HISTORICAL ROOTS

Sit-ins weren't a new civil rights technique. In the early 1940s, CORE successfully used sit-ins to desegregate public facilities, in Chicago primarily. Howard University students also had success in 1944 when they used the sit-in tactic to desegregate a cafeteria in Washington, D.C. These incidents were more isolated, however. The four students in North Carolina sparked a wave of additional sit-ins throughout the South and set the stage for the creation of a new organization that quickly gained momentum within the civil rights movement: the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

The day after the first sit-in at the Greensboro Woolworths, more students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, the historically Black college the original four attended, descended on the store. Even though there were no confrontations, the local media covered the second sit-in. When the national media picked up the story, it struck a chord with other students who began to duplicate the sit-ins in other locations.



REMEMBER

F.W. Woolworth Company discount stores represented Americana. One of the nation's few chains, Woolworths helped create a national identity. The lunch counters at the front of the stores were popular meeting spots. Civil rights leadership recognized Woolworth's symbolic power and acted quickly to organize more sit-ins. Within two weeks, students in 11 cities had staged sit-ins at Woolworths and S.H. Kress stores. To show their support, Northern students, both Black and white, picketed local branches of chain stores that practiced racial segregation in the South.

Sit-ins in Nashville

Nashville was a pivotal city in the sit-in movement. With the national spotlight created by the Greensboro sit-in, students from four predominantly Black schools took action in Nashville in February 1960.

The first wave of sit-ins was peaceful, but that changed on February 27, 1960, when a group of white teenagers attacked sit-in participants. Nashville police didn't stop the attack. Instead, they arrested the sit-in participants for disorderly conduct. A new group quickly replaced the arrested students. Nashville police arrested approximately 81 students during this period.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

When the Black community rallied behind the students with money to bail them out, the students refused the bail money and opted to serve jail terms. Fisk student Diane Nash, a former beauty pageant contestant who became one of the civil rights movement's young leaders, explained, "We feel that if we pay these fines we would be contributing to and supporting the injustice and immoral practices that have been performed in the arrest and conviction of the defendants."

By April, Nashville, long considered a moderate city in regard with race relations, had lost considerable tourist dollars. When segregationists bombed the home of Z. Alexander Looby, the Black attorney who represented the participating students, 2,500 people, some white people among them, marched to city hall and addressed Nashville Mayor Ben West. A turning point in the Nashville movement came when Nash asked West if he believed it was wrong to discriminate against a person solely on the basis of race and West answered "yes." Weeks later, lunch counters in Nashville were desegregated.

Beyond lunch counters

The sit-in tactic helped integrate other facilities. By August 1961, an estimated 70,000 people had participated in sit-ins across the country (more than 3,000 people were arrested). One of the most important results of these actions was that students from across the country became active participants in the civil rights movement.



REMEMBER

The sit-ins demonstrated that mass nonviolent direct action could be successful and brought national media attention to the new era of the civil rights movement. Additionally, the *jail-in* tactic of not paying bail to protest legal injustice became another important strategy. For the first time, the battle to end racial injustice combined legal action with direct public protest.

Founding SNCC

SCLC administrator Ella Baker, a former NAACP and National Urban League worker, convinced SCLC leadership to sponsor a gathering of student sit-in leaders and participants. Baker encouraged the students to form an independent, grassroots unit. The result was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced *snick*), run by students. Throughout the 1960s, SNCC was an important fixture of the civil rights movement.



Marion Barry, who later became mayor of Washington, D.C., served as SNCC's first chairman. Other key SNCC leaders included Diane Nash, John Lewis, James Forman, and Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture).

Riding for freedom

Under the direction of James Farmer, CORE implemented the influential Freedom Rides of 1961. Organized to test the enforcement of *Boynton v. Virginia* (1960), which desegregated all interstate transportation facilities, including bus terminals, 13 Freedom Riders — 7 Black (including Farmer) and 6 white, some of them college students — boarded a Greyhound bus in Washington, D.C., on May 4, 1961, with New Orleans as their ultimate destination.

The riders traveled through Virginia and North Carolina with no incident, but John Lewis and another rider were attacked in Rock Hill, South Carolina, for trying to enter a "white only" waiting room. Upon entering Alabama, the group split in two. According to Birmingham Public Safety Commissioner "Bull" Connor, who would become a poster child for segregation, no officers were available to escort or protect the riders because it was Mothers' Day. When a mob of about 200 white people brandishing guns surrounded one of the buses (disabled by blown tires), someone threw a bomb through a broken bus window. As the riders left the bus, the mob attacked them. The second group fared little better. Pictures of the burning Greyhound bus and the severely injured passengers landed on the front pages of national and international newspapers.

Caught up in the Cold War, President John F. Kennedy wasn't prepared for this kind of domestic volatility. He complained to U.S. Justice Department official Harris Wofford, who was close to key players in the civil rights movement that the Freedom Rides needed to end, but Farmer and CORE couldn't stop them, especially the determined college students, even if they wanted to. Even after Alabama officials escorted the riders to Tennessee, Fisk students John Lewis and Diane Nash found a way back to Birmingham, rallying new riders to continue the journey. Aware of the danger, some riders even drafted wills. When Greyhound bus drivers refused to drive them, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy called a Greyhound superintendent in Birmingham and demanded a bus, noting that the law entitled the riders to transportation.

When the riders reached Montgomery, the police escort accompanying them from Birmingham disappeared. As they stepped off the bus, a group of angry whites attacked them and nearby reporters. Even though a police station was nearby, no local law enforcement appeared at the scene. Eventually federal marshals saved the day. When the riders landed in Jackson, Mississippi, authorities immediately arrested them for attempting to use "white only" facilities. Yet the riders continued on.

Over the next four months, several hundred more volunteers descended on Mississippi despite the risks. Finally, bowing to pressure from Robert Kennedy, the Interstate Commerce Commission tightened regulations against segregated bus and train terminals, and the Freedom Rides ended.

The Albany Movement: A chink in the armor

Unlike previous movements, where the goal had been to desegregate buses or schools specifically, the Albany Movement, founded in 1961, set out to desegregate the entire city of Albany, Georgia, and to challenge the city's white power structure. Albany's Black community, hailing from various socioeconomic backgrounds, participated in numerous protest efforts, such as sitting-in at a local bus terminal and contesting police brutality. More than 500 people were jailed before mid-December, prompting organizers to call in King to attract more national attention. As soon as King and Ralph David Abernathy joined an Albany protest march on December 16, authorities arrested them, Albany Movement president Dr. William Anderson, and about 200 others.

To undermine the efforts of the protestors, city officials changed their tactics:

- Unlike other Southern law enforcement entities, Albany Police Chief Laurie Pritchett, who favored arrests over public beatings, forbade his officers from mistreating anyone in the presence of the news media.
- As King vowed to spend Christmas in jail, Black leaders and city officials struck a deal to halt the demonstrations in exchange for the release of jailed protestors and other concessions. King didn't spend Christmas in jail, but the city didn't alter any of its segregationist policies, a move that embarrassed King and the SCLC.
- When King and Abernathy returned to Albany in July 1962 for sentencing, they couldn't serve their full 45-day sentence because city officials claimed an anonymous Black man paid their fine just two days into their sentence. When King managed another arrest later, Albany officials suspended his sentence.

» When police beat Marion King, the pregnant wife of the Albany Movement's vice president Slater King, while delivering food to Black prisoners, members of Albany's Black community responded violently. Delighting in this break in nonviolent direct action, Pritchett directed news attention to "them nonviolent rocks," prompting Dr. King to call for a day of penance and halt protests. King understood that the retaliation of protesters would help justify action against them and take the attention away from desegregation.



REMEMBER

In Albany, city officials made sure that there were no obvious incidents of brutality. With police not beating participants and not permitting King or his close associates to serve jail time, Albany lessened the impact of the protestors and at the same time made no significant concessions regarding segregation.

In August 1962, King left Albany. Because nothing happened while King was there, his efforts seemed futile. Members of the Albany Movement didn't view their campaign as a failure, however, because much of the city legally desegregated in 1962.

Integrating Ole Miss and Increasing Federal Involvement

By 1962, the nation had experience with university integration, yet the reaction to James Meredith's entry into the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi, was especially hostile. Led by Governor Ross Barnett, Mississippi held firmly to its segregationist reputation. Mississippi's obstinacy in refusing to allow Meredith's enrollment spurred Robert Kennedy to extend the federal government's involvement in the civil rights movement further.

The trouble began when the Mississippi-born Meredith decided to transfer from Jackson State, a Black college in Mississippi, to Ole Miss. Denied admission twice, Meredith appealed to the courts. Eventually a federal district court ordered Ole Miss to admit Meredith. On September 20, 1962, when Meredith attempted to register for school, Governor Barnett himself blocked Meredith's path. After speaking with Barnett directly, Robert Kennedy sent 500 federal marshals to escort Meredith onto the campus and into his dorm room on September 30, but an angry crowd of students and outside agitators gathered in opposition to Meredith's enrollment.

Federal marshals tried unsuccessfully to disperse the rock-throwing crowd with tear gas. More outside agitators poured into Ole Miss and used bottles, bricks, and gunshots to attack the marshals, who heeded Justice Department orders not to use their rifles. In the end, 160 marshals were wounded (28 by gunshot), and two

people were killed. Reluctantly, Kennedy sent in the first wave of 5,000 army troops, who controlled the crowd without using their rifles. Although the number of troops eventually declined, Meredith attended Ole Miss with federal protection until his graduation in 1963.


REMEMBER

The incident at Ole Miss changed President Kennedy's position on dealing with the civil rights movement. He finally realized that federal intervention was necessary and, furthermore, that most of the American voting public didn't view such intervention negatively, even in the South.

1963: A Bloody Year

In 1963, the confrontations and violence associated with the civil rights movement escalated. Black America's patience had worn thin waiting on justice. The Freedom Rides (see "Riding for freedom") and the Albany Movement (see "The Albany Movement: A chink in the armor") hadn't moved the nation as far along as civil rights leaders had hoped. The SCLC, perhaps urged on by criticism from the much younger SNCC, took bolder action.

Not-so-sweet home Alabama: Birmingham

Dubbed "Bombingham" by some for its extreme racial violence, Birmingham became a significant project for civil rights leaders. SCLC executive director Wyatt Tee Walker believed that the South would follow Birmingham; if civil rights protests succeeded there, they could succeed anywhere.


REMEMBER

What happened in Birmingham demonstrated that Black Americans wouldn't wait any longer for freedom and equality. It was an important turning point in the civil rights war, but it was by no means the last battle.

Project C

On April 3, 1963, the first protest of what Walker called *Project C,* for "confrontation," began, and 20 people were arrested. Three days later, a march led by local Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, founder of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, also ended in nonviolent arrests, which were uncharacteristic for segregationist Bull Connor. However, on April 7, when King's brother Reverend A.D. King marched with other ministers to City Hall, they encountered dogs and nightsticks. Despite an injunction telling him not to lead a march, on April 13, Martin Luther King Jr. and buddy Ralph David Abernathy did so anyway and went straight to jail.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

LETTER FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL

King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," a response to a letter published by white clergyman denouncing the demonstrations and urging patience, made this jail visit different from others. In the widely published letter, King explained why Black Americans could no longer wait for freedom. Written on scraps of paper with a pen smuggled into the jail during King's eight-day stay, the letter articulated the desires of those who marched while also justifying their defiance of unjust laws. "We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor," he wrote. "It must be demanded by the oppressed."

The children's march

After King left jail on bail, he saw that volunteers in Birmingham had dwindled. James Bevel, fresh from the Nashville sit-ins, suggested using high school students. A dilemma emerged when the students' brothers and sisters of all ages also turned up for nonviolent resistance training. After much deliberation, the decision was made to let the children march on May 2. Although Connor didn't use violence during the march, he and his team arrested an estimated 900 children. When more people marched the next day, Connor ordered the use of clubs, dogs, and fire hoses against the participants. The melee made national headlines, demanding the attention of President Kennedy.

The children kept coming, and the police kept arresting them, making national headlines and filling the jails. In days, police arrested at least 2,000 people, the bulk of them children. As the number of young people increased, the situation became more charged. Negotiating with city officials, civil rights leaders agreed that protests would start around noon on May 7, but the children came early, and some began taunting the police. A disturbance broke out. Fearful of greater violence, civil rights leadership halted the next day's protest. White leadership also feared greater violence and decided to negotiate.

Negotiating for desegregation

On May 10, Birmingham's white merchants made a pact with the SCLC to desegregate as well as hire Black workers during the next three months if the organization put a stop to the demonstrations. Not everyone was pleased, however. Some Black people criticized King for yielding to promises.

The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) responded by bombing A.D. King's home and a motel where they believed Martin Luther King Jr. and his aides were staying. These bombings induced rioting among some Black people. The federal government sent

in 3,000 army troops, among other resources, and the bombings ended. Aided by Birmingham's moderate mayor, desegregation in Birmingham finally began.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

When Alabama Governor George Wallace vowed to bar two Black students from registering at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa in June 1963, President Kennedy ended his public silence on civil rights. In a public broadcast that evening, Kennedy stated that "all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities." The support of the federal government for desegregation was finally in place, but turbulent times still lay ahead.

Murder in Mississippi: Medgar Evers

News of President Kennedy's commitment to civil rights only angered segregationists further. White Mississippians refused to give up segregation. The murder of Medgar Evers one day after Kennedy's speech made that clear.

Evers, the Mississippi NAACP field secretary, kept Mississippi in the fight for civil rights. His work included helping establish NAACP chapters throughout the state, investigating violent crimes against Black people, and organizing boycotts of segregated stores in Jackson, as well as Jackson gas stations that wouldn't allow Black people to use the restrooms. Just before his death, he began a full-scale campaign to desegregate downtown Jackson. When Mayor Allen C. Thompson went on television asking Black people not to participate, Evers went on television, too. A sit-in at the Woolworths lunch counter proved successful enough that the mayor promised to desegregate some public facilities. Bowing to pressure from the White Citizens Council and other segregationists, however, he backed down from his promise.

Evers's successes, even if they were small in comparison to the successes in other cities, no doubt sealed his fate. On the evening of June 12, 1963, in front of his house, Evers was shot in the back. With Evers seen as a martyr, his death added urgency to the civil rights movement.

CLOSING THE EVERS CASE

Following Medgar Evers's murder, an all-white jury acquitted his assassin, Byron De La Beckwith. Thanks to the efforts of Evers's widow Myrlie Evers-Williams, Mississippi finally retried and convicted De La Beckwith of murder on February 5, 1994. The 1996 film *Ghosts of Mississippi,* starring Whoopi Goldberg, dramatizes those efforts. De La Beckwith appealed the case, with the Mississippi Supreme Court upholding the conviction in 1997.

March of All Marches: The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963)

Orchestrated by labor organizer A. Philip Randolph (see Chapter 7) and unsung civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, held in the nation's capital on August 28, 1963, was the march of all marches. More than 250,000 people, with an estimated 50,000 white people among them, representing various organizations converged on the Lincoln Memorial to demonstrate for Black equality — politically, socially, and economically.



In addition to King, other participating civil rights leaders included the National Urban League's Whitney Young Jr., the NAACP's Roy Wilkins, and CORE's James Farmer. Entertainers such as gospel great Mahalia Jackson, Joan Baez, and Bob Dylan were present, as well as movie stars Sidney Poitier, Charlton Heston, and Marlon Brando.

Prior to the March, White House officials warned organizers that such a march could create a conservative backlash against the movement. Adjustments occurred, as the march's site shifted from the White House to the Lincoln Memorial. Organizers also agreed to censor militant speakers.



The speech by Freedom Rider and SNCC Chairman John Lewis sparked controversy for its militant message. Lewis voiced his and others' frustration with waiting on the government for hundreds of years for freedom, as well as his pronouncement that Black people would no longer wait. He also noted that both the Democrats and Republicans had betrayed the Declaration of Independence.



Considered one of the greatest moments of the 20th century, King's address dispelled any potential for trouble. In his famous "I have a dream" speech, King gave voice to hope: "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.'" As he continued, the crowd's "amens" grew louder. King's dream that his "four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" moved both white and Black people. That vision resonated so loudly that his words regarding the nation's long record of persistent Black economic inequality have frequently been overlooked.

So parts of his speech like "We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so we've come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the

security of justice," are unrecognizable to many. With some of King's skeptics even acknowledging the power of his vision, his "I have a dream" speech was able to expand the national conversation on race to one of a broader American society inclusive of all. Those words resonated even more with President Kennedy, who had been lukewarm about the gathering. Afterward, he invited key march organizers to the White House. Unfortunately, the high of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom didn't last long.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Mourning the rising death toll in pursuit of the dream
- Understanding key civil rights legislation
- Risking it all to register Black voters
- Unleashing Black Power
- Dying for freedom

Chapter 9
Turning Up the Heat (1963–1968)

Although civil rights organizations had gathered at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in a show of unity, some opponents of integration weren't easily swayed. Still, proponents had much reason to be optimistic. Right before their eyes, the America they had known was finally changing. Throughout the South, "white only" and "colored only" signs began to gradually disappear.

This chapter explores the violence of the civil rights era in the mid- to late 1960s. Particular topics of note are the impact of JFK's assassination, the events of Freedom Summer, and the rise of Malcolm X and the Black Power movement. This chapter also familiarizes you with the heated civil rights battles in Alabama, the passage of key civil rights legislation, and the impact on the nation of Martin Luther King Jr.'s murder.

Suffering Two Tragic Blows

Most civil rights participants knew that death was a very real consequence for their actions. In some Southern states, Black residents avoided civil rights activity because of the fear of retaliation, but segregationists made no distinctions between

participants and nonparticipants. White Americans weren't safe either. Some argue that some white Southerners didn't actively resist desegregation primarily to avoid physical harm. In the fall of 1963, the lengths to which segregationists would go to prevent integration shocked and saddened the nation.

Four innocent victims

When a bomb exploded at Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church just minutes before the 11 a.m. service on September 15, 1963, the whole nation felt the jolt. Four little girls — 11-year-old Denise McNair and 14-year-olds Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Addie Mae Collins — died instantly from the dynamite blast emanating from the church basement. More than 20 others were injured. Ironically, "The Love That Forgives" was the message planned for the day's service.

A hub for civil rights activity, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was a center of Birmingham's Black community and served as a central checkpoint for the first phase of what Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) executive director Wyatt Tee Walker dubbed *Project C* (the "c" stood for confrontation), waged only a few months prior (refer to Chapter 8). Therefore, the church represented Black Alabamans' progress, and that progress didn't sit well with the state's extreme segregationists, including Governor George Wallace.

The community's reaction

Despite King's pleas for nonviolence, Black Birmingham reacted violently to the church bombing. Alabama authorities responded with fire hoses, brutal beatings, vicious dogs, and mass arrests. Adding to the already tragic situation, police shot and killed 16-year-old Johnny Robinson, and two white people killed another Black youth, 13-year-old Virgil Ware. Six young Black people lost their lives that day.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

A funeral service was held for three of the four girls killed in the bombing (one family insisted on a separate ceremony). Over 8,000 mourners and clergymen of both races attended the service, but city officials, no doubt fearful of angry and emotionally charged crowds, stayed away. Delivering a stirring eulogy, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. hoped that "the innocent blood of these little girls may well serve as the redemptive force that will bring new light to this dark city." The Scripture, he reminded attendees, said "a little child shall lead them."

Just days after the funeral service, Birmingham's Public Safety Commissioner Bull Connor proclaimed to a gathering of White Citizens Council (WCC) supporters that the Supreme Court was responsible for the girls' deaths because of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. He even suggested that King's supporters bombed the church themselves.

The aftermath

Instead of stopping civil rights activity, the tragic bombing attracted national and international attention, pressuring the FBI to investigate the incident. Little was done though and, as was later learned, FBI head J. Edgar Hoover blocked the release of critical evidence to prosecutors. Only years later, in 1977, was Ku Klux Klan member Robert Edward Chambliss convicted. A 2000 reopening of the case brought convictions for two others: Thomas Blanton in 2001 and Bobby Frank Cherry in 2002. (The fourth man involved in the bombing, Herman Cash, died in 1994 and avoided prosecution.)



Acclaimed filmmaker Spike Lee received a 1998 Academy Award nomination for his documentary *Four Little Girls* about the 1963 bombing and its effects on the nation and the girls' families.

JFK dies

On November 22, 1963, the civil rights movement received another crushing blow. With President John F. Kennedy behind civil rights efforts and actively pushing Congress for the passage of a major civil rights bill, the prospect of achieving full Black equality appeared within reach. But during a visit to Dallas, as Kennedy rode with his wife Jackie in a convertible in a parade, three shots rang out, two of which hit Kennedy in the head and neck. He died shortly thereafter.

Kennedy's absence made the future of civil rights legislation uncertain. Because Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson hailed from Texas, few pegged him as a civil rights champion. Johnson's actions as president, however, surprised many, especially white Southerners.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

Ironically, Kennedy's assassination strengthened the proposed civil rights bill. Prior to his death, any civil rights legislation would have required significant compromise to pass both houses of Congress. After his death, President Johnson refused to compromise.

With an upcoming presidential election, Johnson's strong endorsement of the Civil Rights Act would normally have been a huge political risk. Yet with key Republicans emerging as allies and other lawmakers less inclined to squabble over a bill an assassinated president had supported, the bill passed both houses of

Congress with no significant changes. On July 2, 1964, Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. The law did the following:

- It prohibited racial discrimination in any public accommodations engaged in interstate commerce.
- It enforced public school desegregation.
- It withdrew federal funding from any institution or program that endorsed discrimination.
- It outlawed all employment discrimination and established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to monitor any violations.
- It ensured equal voter registration.

In November 1964, Johnson easily won the presidential election.

Targeting Mississippi for Voter Registration: Freedom Summer

In the summer of 1964, Mississippi, where Emmett Till, Medgar Evers, and countless others were boldly murdered without consequence (refer to Chapter 8), continued its reign as a segregationist stronghold. Just as the SCLC figured that victories in Alabama would significantly pave the way to integrate other Southern cities, Bob Moses, a former SCLC volunteer and a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) leader, counted on change in Mississippi would greatly influence the nation. The goal? Register Black voters. During that summer, volunteers poured into the state determined to make a difference.


REMEMBER

As more and more white people, especially students, signed up for duty in the fight for Black equality, civil rights leaders shifted their goal from desegregation to voting rights. Although the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments established voting rights for Black Americans, white Americans in many Southern states either intimidated Black voters or established barriers such as poll taxes and literacy tests to keep them from voting.

Getting ready

Beginning a voter registration project in Mississippi was challenging, to say the least. On the surface, McComb, in southwest Mississippi, wasn't an ideal place to

launch a voter registration campaign: Shortly after New York math teacher Bob Moses's arrival, Mississippi state legislator E.H. Hurst was acquitted for shooting Herbert Lee, a Black man, reportedly for his involvement with SNCC. Louis Allen, one of the witnesses who lied to authorities for Hurst's acquittal to protect his life, was later beaten and killed when his visit to the FBI (presumably to tell the truth) was revealed to local police.

Considering the racial climate, older Black people in McComb were understandably cautious about Moses. McComb's Black youth, however, eagerly embraced change. One ambitious youth lied about her age and led a sit-in that got her expelled from high school and sent to reform school. Some parents were outraged, but many students kept on agitating, even choosing civil rights work over school. Harassment, murders, and beatings didn't deter them.

Throughout the state, Black Mississippians stepped up. Medgar Evers is probably the best-known (refer to Chapter 8 for information about him), but Aaron Henry, Fannie Lou Hamer, Dr. T.R.M. Howard, and Amzie Moore were also noted local leaders in the voter registration campaign, not to mention countless others whose names don't grace the history books. Promised much-needed funding by Attorney General Robert Kennedy, the Voter Education Project launched in April 1962.

A mock election called Freedom Vote held in 1963 drew almost 80,000 Black voters, proving that Black Mississippians very much wanted to vote. Encouraged by this and the presence of white volunteers, Bob Moses proposed Freedom Summer.

Getting out the Black vote

Robert Kennedy, who arranged funding for Black voter registration campaigns, wouldn't commit federal protection for volunteers. Moses was convinced that placing college students, preferably white, in Black communities throughout Mississippi to register Black residents to vote as well as teach them reading and math would secure federal protection.

At orientation sessions held in Ohio, Freedom Summer organizers emphasized potential risks such as arrest, jail time, or death to volunteers. The volunteers were also required to bring $500 in bail money and instructed not to antagonize Mississippi police officers who arrested them. In June, hundreds of volunteers, mostly white, poured into Mississippi. Given Mississippi's volatile racial history, the Johnson administration worried about the safety of Freedom Summer participants and the potential impact on the nation.

By the time Freedom Summer kicked off, 900 volunteers had signed up for the fight. The central battleground became Greenwood, Mississippi, situated in the Mississippi Delta region between Memphis, Tennessee, and Jackson, Mississippi.

Mississippi burning

Tragedy struck early for the volunteers pouring into Mississippi. On June 21, 1964, after investigating a church bombing in Lawndale, local police stopped two white Northerners Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner and Black Mississippian James Chaney for speeding and took them to jail. Although reportedly released that same night, the three men disappeared. Instead of investigating, state police claimed that the trio staged their own disappearance as a publicity stunt.

The FBI got involved, and as the investigation dragged on, public outcry pressed the search on. On August 4, just days before the all-important Democratic National Convention, the three bodies surfaced just outside Philadelphia, Mississippi. Adding to the horror, Chaney had been castrated. Their deaths shifted public attention to Freedom Summer and its mission in Mississippi.

By the end of the year, the FBI had arrested 18 people, mostly Ku Klux Klan members, in relation to the murders. Although most of the people arrested received convictions, the convictions were for breach of civil rights, not murder (this case is the basis for the 1988 film *Mississippi Burning*). A manslaughter conviction came more than 40 years later when mastermind Edgar Ray Killen, a minister, received a 60-year sentence on January 6, 2005. The conviction, which Killen appealed, was upheld on April 12, 2007. He died in prison in 2018.

The success of Freedom Summer

Prior to Freedom Summer, just under 7 percent of Mississippi's voting-age Black population had registered to vote. By 1969, that number had climbed to nearly 67 percent. The 17,000 Black Mississippians who attempted to vote during the turbulent project helped achieve these numbers; so did the 1,600 who actually voted. This success rate contributed to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (see the later section "The Voting Rights Act of 1965").

Forty-one freedom schools helped educate Black Mississippians about much more than learning how to vote. Likewise, Black Mississippians taught the students and the world that hope could thrive in the direst circumstances. Most importantly, Freedom Summer demonstrated the positive impact that all Americans, regardless of race or income level, could have on the nation overall.

THE MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM DEMOCRATIC PARTY (MFDP)

With support from SNCC, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) launched in 1964 as an alternative to Mississippi's reigning Democratic party, which promoted white supremacy. MFDP elected its own delegates: Annie Devine, Victoria Gray, and the charismatic Fannie Lou Hamer being the most well-known, who had endured severe beatings in her quest to secure the freedom to vote for herself and her fellow Mississippians.

Fearing the backlash from Mississippi's "official" Democratic party, President Lyndon B. Johnson tried to prevent the MFDP from attending the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. But MFDP delegates didn't back down and took their case to the credentials board, where Hamer testified about the beatings she had endured in Mississippi for trying to vote.

Still, MFDP was barred from entering the Convention, so members borrowed passes from sympathetic delegates. When their seats were removed the second day, they remained and sang freedom songs. Although disappointed by the chilly reception in 1964, the MFDP went on to attend the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Oh Lord Selma: Back in Alabama

Alabama had been a bittersweet site for the King-led contributions to the civil rights movement. Although the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott made the Reverend Dr. King a national figure (see Chapter 8), the deaths of Birmingham's four little girls and countless others had been tough to swallow. Yet King and others under his SCLC umbrella returned to the contentious state in January 1965 to begin Project Alabama, a campaign to secure federal protection for voting rights.



Project Alabama experienced some of the same challenges as the Albany Movement in Georgia, with tensions between SCLC and SNCC ranking supreme. As in Albany, SNCC had arrived in the area before SCLC. For months, SNCC battled the many obstacles preventing Black voter registration, such as educating Black Alabamans about their voting rights. In addition, SNCC navigated bureaucracy such as voter registration offices only opening two days of the month and the endless paperwork. Many SNCC members felt that King and SCLC would receive credit for SNCC's hard work. Other prominent SNCC leaders like John Lewis continued to support King. Although these tensions were strong, neither side voiced them to the public.

Getting arrested again

To bring attention to Alabama's voting inequities, King needed authorities to arrest him and others. On February 1, he succeeded by leading a group of demonstrators in defiance of the July 1963 judgment banning all meetings and marches in Selma. When authorities, led by Sheriff Jim Clark, arrested him, local Black students marched in defiance and police arrested them, which is what King had anticipated. The national media captured the sequence of events.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

From a jail cell on February 1, during his first arrest since Birmingham, King wrote in a letter to the American public: "There are more Negroes in jail with me than there are on the voting rolls."

During a peaceful march on February 18, the situation became very dramatic when 26-year-old Jimmie Lee Jackson was shot and killed trying to protect his mother from the blows of a billy club. His death galvanized momentum for a federal voter registration law. Once again, the American public placed civil rights at the top of the nation's agenda.

Then on Sunday, March 7, a group of 600 people led by SNCC Chairman John Lewis and SCLC's Hosea Williams attempted to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge, defying the armed Alabama state troopers blocking their way. As the group marched, ignoring Major John Cloud's demand to turn around, officers charged them, in the process trampling them, whipping them, beating them, and tear-gassing them. Referred to as *Bloody Sunday,* the event was captured by the media and broadcast nationwide on the evening news. The ABC network even preempted its showing of the film *Judgment at Nuremberg* with coverage from Selma.

Marching from Selma to Montgomery

After Bloody Sunday, a court order banned King from leading a second march on March 9, so King took the group of protesters to the edge of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, knelt in prayer, and turned the group back. Emotions ran higher as on that same night, white men severely beat Reverend James Reeb, a white minister from Boston. Two days later, he died.

With court approval and the protection of armed forces, King led a third march from Selma to Montgomery on Sunday, March 21. King, with wife Coretta by his side as well as Rosa Parks and several other key civil rights leaders, reached the state capitol on March 25. Approximately 25,000 people attended the victory rally. *Selma,* the 2014 film directed by Ava DuVernay, captures these events.

The Voting Rights Act of 1965

Without Freedom Summer and Selma, it's doubtful the Voting Rights Act of 1965 would have ever passed. Although Black men received the right to vote with the Fifteenth Amendment and the Nineteenth Amendment extended voting rights to women, Southern states actively hindered Black people from voting, using several methods, the two most popular being the poll tax and literacy tests:

- **Poll tax:** Black voters, many of whom were poor, were charged fees to deter them from voting.
- **Literacy test:** In order to vote, Black Southerners, many of them with little formal education, were given a myriad of tasks such as reciting parts of the Constitution to the administrator's satisfaction, transcribing passages from the Constitution, and answering obscure technical questions such as "how many people can testify against a person denying his guilt of treason?"

With Southern states actively stopping Black people from voting, a practice that had gone on for decades, the federal government finally stepped in. On August 6, 1965, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act (VRA) into law. Key features of the law include

- **Federal supervision of voter registration in areas where less than 50 percent of the nonwhite population had registered to vote:** Instead of waiting for grievances to be filed, the federal government became proactive in identifying areas where white authorities were intimidating Black people not to vote.
- **Federal approval of change in local voting laws:** In areas with a history of disenfranchisement as well as less than 50 percent of the Black population registered to vote, the federal government had to approve any changes in voting requirements.
- **Prohibition of literacy tests:** The federal government banned the use of literacy tests for all American voters.
- **Authorizing the U.S. attorney general to investigate the use of poll taxes:** Although the act itself didn't ban poll taxes, that change did come eventually. While the Twenty-fourth Amendment, passed in 1964, banned the use of poll taxes in federal elections, the Supreme Court banned the use of poll taxes in state elections in 1966 with *Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections*.



REMEMBER

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 made it emphatically clear that the nation as a whole would no longer tolerate blatant voter discrimination. The law made an immediate impact. Within three weeks, more than 27,000 Black Americans in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana had registered to vote. Renewed four times since its passage, the act received a 25-year extension with the Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006 during President George W. Bush's administration.

Black Power Rising

Not all Black Americans were committed to King's doctrine of nonviolence. As white supremacists became increasingly more violent, some Black Americans felt compelled to fight back. During the mounting tensions of the 1960s, messages of Black empowerment became louder and louder. Prominent spokespersons such as Malcolm X and organizations like the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party began to command as much attention as King and civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, CORE, and SCLC. These developments directly affected SNCC, which began a metamorphosis.

As Black Americans became more publicly outspoken, conflicts erupted in both the North and the South. The days of patiently waiting for change were long gone. With direct nonviolent action (refer to Chapter 8) continuing in the South and rioting breaking out in the North, the nation found itself battling many wars.

The Nation of Islam

Until the 1960s, most Americans weren't very familiar about the Nation of Islam (NOI), which was founded in Detroit, Michigan, in the 1930s and is currently headquartered in Chicago, Illinois. Although its premise was religious, the NOI's strongest selling points for many Black Americans became its endorsement of Black nationalism and Black self-sufficiency. Its emphasis on Black separatism, including its insistence that white people were devils, greatly distinguished it from SCLC and other civil rights organizations that emphasized Christian love and forgiveness regardless of the transgression.



REMEMBER

Unlike King and his followers, the NOI sanctioned violent retaliation against acts of violence against NOI. Its stance on self-preservation and defending one's self appealed most to the nation's urban areas. Actively recruiting its membership from the prison system, the NOI found great success. NOI membership often gave prison converts the discipline they required to survive imprisonment. Once released, many found employment with the NOI, which operated several businesses.

Even though NOI leader Elijah Muhammad built the NOI into a formidable organization that exceeded its humble 1930 origins, Malcolm X propelled the NOI into mainstream awareness. (You can read more about the Nation of Islam in Chapter 12.)



Although not recognized by mainstream Islamic organizations until recently because of significant theological differences that have since been altered, NOI members followed certain aspects of mainstream Islam such as reading the Koran (also Quran or Qur'an) and observing Muslim practices such as the separation of the sexes during worship. Religious services, as well as the NOI's schools, emphasized the values of self-sufficiency and self-discipline.

Malcolm X

Although best known for slogans such as "By Any Means Necessary" as well as posters depicting him with a gun, Malcolm X, shown in Figure 9-1, was a complex man. Formerly incarcerated, Malcolm X exhibited strength, charisma, and intelligence that only underscored the potential the nation had tucked away in its prison systems. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X,* published months after his death, offered insight into who he once was, who he became, and who he might have been.

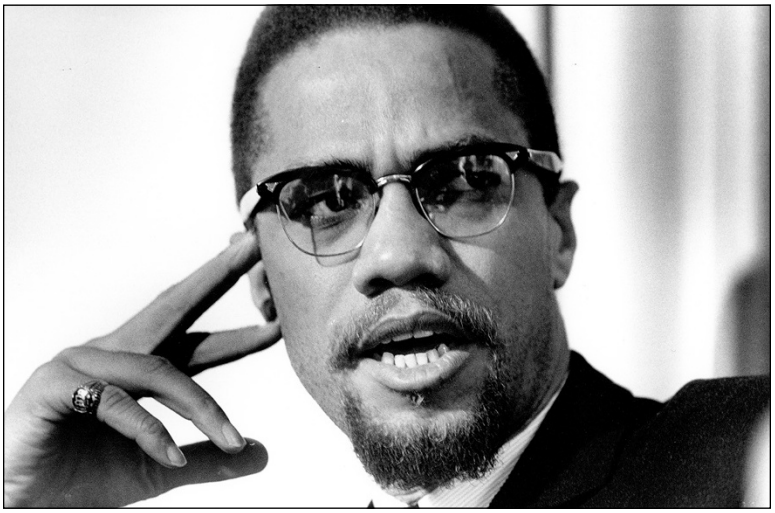


FIGURE 9-1: Malcolm X.

Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images

His initial views proclaiming white people as devils, a view consistent with the NOI and its leader Elijah Muhammad, whom Malcolm X followed, propelled him to the attention of the news media — that and the tens of thousands who came to hear him. Ultimately, Malcolm X's break with the NOI, as well as his renunciation

of equating white people to the devil, placed him in greater favor with many, Black and white. Unfortunately, he was killed, but his legacy kept him one of the 20th century's elite freedom fighters.

The rise of Malcolm X

As a child, Nebraska-born Malcolm Little's life was torn apart when a group of white extremists murdered his father. Forced to go on welfare, the Little household became unstable, with the children often living in foster homes. Little dropped out of school when a white teacher told him that becoming a lawyer "was no realistic goal for a nigger."

With limited opportunities available to him, Little ventured into a life of crime. While serving a ten-year sentence for burglary, he seriously explored the NOI and eventually dedicated himself to the group, even conversing with leader Elijah Muhammad.

By the time Little was released from prison in 1952, he had met Elijah Muhammad and officially joined the NOI, adopting the name Malcolm X to rid himself of what he characterized as his slave surname. He moved to Chicago and studied directly under Muhammad, who sent Malcolm X to spearhead a Harlem branch for the NOI as part of his plan to expand the organization's reach.

Malcolm's message

As a national NOI spokesperson, the handsome and articulate Malcolm X generated much media attention, particularly for his disagreements with King's nonviolent methods of protest as well as for the NOI's message of Black self-sufficiency and separatism. Malcolm X's criticism landed him a public platform when he appeared in a weeklong television special titled "The Hate That Hate Produced" with TV journalist Mike Wallace in 1959.

Conflicts with the Nation of Islam

As Malcolm X's public stature grew, tensions developed within the NOI. Malcolm X, also known as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, lived by a strict moral code. After becoming a Muslim, he remained celibate until he married Betty Shabazz in 1958. In addition, he didn't engage in extramarital affairs (as confirmed by the FBI agents who followed him). In 1963, he discovered that Elijah Muhammad had engaged in sexual relations with as many as six women in the NOI and that some of those affairs had produced children. Muhammad's moral failings greatly contributed to Malcolm X's eventual split from the NOI.

Around the same time, Malcolm X offended many with his response to President Kennedy's assassination. According to Malcolm X, Kennedy "never foresaw that the chickens would come home to roost so soon," meaning that white Americans or presidents weren't exempt from the violence that denied life and liberty to Black Americans. Although Elijah Muhammad suspended and silenced Malcolm X for 90 days for his statements, Malcolm X suspected that Muhammad had other reasons for silencing him. In March 1964, Malcolm X left the NOI and formed Muslim Mosque, Inc.

But he wasn't finished evolving. After traveling to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in April 1964 and sharing his religious pilgrimage with Muslims of all races, Malcolm X returned to the U.S. and softened his stance on racial separatism. In May 1964, he founded the Organization of Afro-American Unity.

His death

By early 1965, it was clear that Malcolm X was marked for assassination. On February 14, someone firebombed his family's New York home, but the family escaped unharmed. On February 21, Malcolm X wasn't so lucky: During a speech at the Audubon Ballroom in Harlem, three men later revealed to be members of the NOI (a fact some people debate) fatally shot Malcolm X multiple times at close range. Many contend that the three men, convicted of first-degree murder in 1966, had colluded with the FBI. The 2020 docuseries *Who Killed Malcolm X,* directed by Rachel Dretzin and Phil Bertelsen, explores his murder. In February 2021, new information emerged suggesting the NYPD and FBI conspired to kill Malcolm X.

Although it's impossible to know where Malcolm X would have directed his talents, many believe that he would have worked more closely with the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Despite depictions of the two as opponents, Malcolm X shared King's commitment to freedom and equality, although they met only once in person. Just before his death, he had corresponded with King about his efforts in Selma. In addition, Malcolm X had become increasingly more pan-Africanist in his view: Before his death, he began to draw great correlations between the American oppression of Black Americans and the worldwide oppression of people of color in general. Without him, the Organization of Afro-American Unity ended.

The Black Panther Party

Like the NOI, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, spearheaded in 1966 by Bobby Seale and Huey Newton, rejected assimilation and advocated Black power and Black liberation. The party's demands for full employment, decent education, and affordable housing in their Ten Point Plan didn't differ greatly from the goals

of many mainstream civil rights organizations. The difference was mainly in their application. Two key points of the plan included

- **An immediate end to police brutality:** Although members of the Black Panthers often donned berets and sometimes brandished guns, the Black Panthers didn't necessarily advocate violence. Instead, they believed that Black Americans could use their inalienable right guaranteed by the Bill of Rights to bear arms to protect themselves against police brutality.
- **Full employment:** The Black Panthers demanded that the government provide jobs for Black Americans. Employment, they believed, would improve the standard of living in Black neighborhoods.

On October 28, 1967, the arrest of Newton for allegedly killing white police officer John Frey became a turning point for the organization. Although the details are still sketchy, a jury convicted Newton of manslaughter, and he received a sentence of 2 to 15 years in prison. Convinced of Newton's innocence, the Black Panthers united in a "Free Huey" movement that turned Newton into a symbol of oppression and police brutality.

The transformation of SNCC

The appeal of Black power and the Black Panther Party became apparent to SNCC's Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Ture), who had grown frustrated with the consequences of nonviolent tactics. A Freedom Summer veteran (see the earlier section "Targeting Mississippi for Voter Registration: Freedom Summer"), Carmichael's Black Power stirrings manifested during his participation in the James Meredith March Against Fear campaign.

James Meredith, who had integrated Ole Miss in 1962 (refer to Chapter 8) with the assistance of federal forces, proposed a lone, 220-mile walk through Mississippi in June 1966 to encourage Black people to exercise their right to vote. Beginning his journey in Memphis, Meredith was barely a day into the march when a sniper, later revealed as a KKK member, shot him as he crossed the Mississippi-Tennessee border.

King, SNCC Chairman Carmichael, and CORE's new leader Fred McKissick flocked to Meredith's bedside to get his blessing to continue the march. Meredith agreed to their proposal. As the various civil rights groups prepared to continue the march, dissension emerged. CORE and SNCC participants denounced nonviolence, proclaiming that, if struck, they would strike back. SNCC's appeal to Louisiana's Deacons for Defense and Justice, a group of armed Black men (many of them war veterans who had organized in 1964 to protect civil rights workers and activities) further demonstrated its more militant leanings. In addition, Carmichael wanted an all-Black march.

Carmichael's insistence on an all-Black march horrified the NAACP's Roy Wilkins; Carmichael's arguments that nonviolent resistance had outgrown its usefulness disturbed Wilkins even more. Both Wilkins and the National Urban League's Whitney Young believed that marching without white people and abandoning nonviolence was equivalent to suicide. Disgust for this new attitude among CORE and SNCC members prompted Wilkins and Young to leave Memphis. King stayed on the condition that CORE and SNCC participants adhere to his rule of nonviolence. Because King's presence guaranteed the media attention necessary to navigate Mississippi successfully, participants agreed.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

In Greenwood, Mississippi, the nonviolent agenda changed when a SNCC member yelled "Black Power" to a crowd of Black Mississippians, and they shouted back in approval. Arrested in a June 16 rally in Greenwood, Carmichael emerged from jail and publicly revealed his newly adopted militant attitude. "We been saying 'freedom' for six years," he said, "and we ain't got nothin'. What we gonna start saying now is 'Black Power!'" As before, the crowd responded approvingly.

Carmichael went on to coauthor a book titled *Black Power* and briefly affiliated himself with the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California. Although Black people in both the North and the South had grown impatient with nonviolent resistance, race relations in the North began to take center stage.

Race Relations in the North

While the South seemed to move forward, race relations in the North were an enigma. Although free of signs segregating Black people from white people, racial discrimination manifested itself in the North primarily through Black unemployment. Police brutality was also a problem in the North, but television cameras didn't capture these transgressions like they did in the South. In many ways, the Watts riots/uprisings in the Black neighborhood in southern Los Angeles, California, shifted national attention from the obvious racial problems in the South to the less obvious but just as severe problems in the North.

Rioting in Watts

On August 11, 1965, when a police officer stopped Marquette Frye in urban an Watts neighborhood in Los Angeles, a riot was the furthest thing from his mind. As he and Frye bantered back and forth, a crowd gathered. Concerned, the officer called for backup. Matters intensified when Frye's mother showed up. Eventually police arrested the entire Frye family (Frye's brother had been in the car with him when he was stopped). Even with a crowd gathered, there were reports that the

situation appeared to be resolved. As with most riots or uprisings, however, definitive details leading up to the actual eruption of violence are sketchy. What is clear, however, is that the Watts riot, also known as the Watts Uprising or Watts Rebellion, surprised the nation.

For six days, homes and businesses burned or fell to looters. As the National Guard and police tried to contain the violence, some rioters reportedly retaliated using guns. After the smoke cleared, 34 people, mostly Black, were dead. The injured list numbered another 1,000, with police arresting an estimated 4,000. Property damage ranged from $50 million to $100 million. Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., prompted by events in Watts, took the movement "up south."

The Chicago Freedom Movement

As the nation pondered what caused the riots in Watts, Martin Luther King Jr. decided that Black America's urban centers also needed him and turned his attention to Chicago. Perhaps Chicago's appeal to King rested in its immense population of Southern Black people, its active Black clergy, its strong political leadership, its organized unions, and its liberal white community.

In 1966, King, supported by other civil rights organizations, launched the Chicago Freedom Movement (CFM), which brought the civil rights movement north. King even moved himself and his family to a neighborhood on Chicago's West Side. Discriminatory housing practices such as *redlining,* unfair economic practices based on race that included denying loans to Blacks to keep them from living in certain areas, served as the CFM's main target.

King attempted a strategy of marches, sit-ins, and boycotts in Chicago. Much like white Southerners, white Northerners also used violence such as throwing rocks in resistance to any efforts to end racial inequality. In addition, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley was as formidable a foe as any mayor or governor that King had faced in the South. King's difficulties in Chicago, along with the unrest in Watts, forced him and the nation to acknowledge that racism wasn't just a Southern problem but a national problem. The difference in the North, however, was that no signs pointed out the lines.

Before King left Chicago, however, city officials signed the ten-point agreement intended to strengthen laws such as the city's 1963 open housing ordinance and other measures that addressed housing discrimination in Chicago. Realtors agreed to become more open-minded while lenders agreed to practice more equitable lending. Because the agreement was more self-policing and lacked an emphasis on outside enforcement, many considered King's and the CFM's efforts a failure. Those with a more realistic view of the national impact of racism, however, recognized that the battle was long term.

The Poor People's March

Although King had once remarked that taking a broad approach to segregation in Albany, Georgia, during the Albany Movement contributed to his failure there (refer to Chapter 8), he ignored those earlier concerns with the launch of the Poor People's Campaign in 1967. A broad-based movement, the Poor People's Campaign sought to address poverty in the U.S. Unlike the civil rights movement of the 1950s and early 1960s, the Poor People's Campaign was diverse and included individuals from all racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Economic inequality replaced racial inequality as the main culprit for unrest. To bring attention to the plight of America's poor, King proposed another march on Washington, D.C., dubbed *The Poor People's March.* This effort led to his fateful trip to Memphis in March 1968.

At the behest of friend and colleague Rev. Billy Kyles, King led a march on March 28, 1968, in Memphis in support of striking sanitation workers. Unfortunately, not all the 6,000 demonstrators followed King's nonviolent tactics. Some contend that the disrupters were planted. Nonetheless, when someone broke a window, violence erupted, with police using nightsticks, mace, tear gas, and gunfire to restore order. At the end of the scuffle, 16-year-old Larry Payne lay dead of a gunshot wound. With 60 people injured and another 280 arrested, the state legislature issued a 7 p.m. curfew. Four thousand National Guardsmen also moved into Memphis as an added precaution.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

On April 3, King returned to Memphis and delivered one of his most fiery speeches at Mason Temple Church of God in Christ, in hindsight a foreshadowing of his own death. "We've got some difficult days ahead," he told the crowd. "But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people will get to the Promised Land."

Death of a King

Very few people doubt the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. knew that his days were numbered. The fates of other figureheads and leaders in the civil rights movement — particularly the murders of Medgar Evers and President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and Malcolm X in 1965 — greatly clarified the risk that accompanied King's work. Even after battling Alabama's notorious Bull Connor and enduring repeated jailings and assaults, King pressed on, lending his leadership

and influence to various efforts, most notably in Chicago and Memphis. He seemed unfazed by or perhaps resigned to the prospect of death.

The night of his death and the mourning after

On April 4, 1968, at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, King stood alone on the second-floor balcony. At around 6 p.m., a single shot hit him in the neck. King's longtime friend Ralph David Abernathy was among the handful who immediately rushed to his side. At 7:05 p.m., not even a full hour later, doctors at St. Joseph's Hospital pronounced him dead. Before the night's end, President Johnson addressed the American public on all major networks and urged unity in this time of crisis. A national day of mourning followed.

For many Americans, especially Black Americans, more than King died on that motel balcony that fateful evening. In no less than 60 cities, including Chicago, Washington, D.C., and New York, Black Americans lashed out in violence as the reality of King's assassination sank in. Civil disorder was so high that as many as 40,000 regular and National Guardsmen filtered throughout the nation. Some cities adopted curfews to curtail the violence. Nationwide, an estimated 46 people died. Injuries were as high as 3,000, but authorities arrested many thousands more, mostly for looting.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Instead of canceling his appearance before a Black audience in Indianapolis, presidential hopeful Robert F. Kennedy bravely informed the crowd of King's death. "We can do well in this country," he told the crowd, trying to restore hope. "We will have difficult times. We've had difficult times in the past. And we will have difficult times in the future. . . But the vast majority of white people and the vast majority of Black people in this country want to live together, want to improve the quality of our life, and want justice for all human beings that abide in our land."

On April 9, Jacqueline Kennedy, Vice President Hubert Humphrey, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, and other dignitaries descended on Atlanta to attend King's funeral. An estimated 100,000 people walked behind King's body during the funeral procession, and millions more watched the event on television.

Continuing his work

Those closest to King, despite their grief, bravely marched to tie up some of King's loose ends. On April 8, just days after King's assassination, Ralph David Abernathy and Coretta Scott King led a silent march of 20,000 through Memphis in support

of the Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike, the cause that had brought King to Memphis in the first place. The 65-day strike ended with a bittersweet settlement just 8 days later.

That May, Abernathy, as the SCLC's new president, tried to keep King's Poor People's Campaign alive by establishing Resurrection City, where more than 2,000 people of varying ages and races camped out near the Lincoln Mall. The optimism of Resurrection City ended with the news of Robert F. Kennedy's assassination on June 5.

Two days following King's funeral, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Most people know Title VIII of the act as the Fair Housing Act. It's significant because it prohibited discrimination based on "race, color, religion, or national origin" in selling or renting property. It also made designating any preference in advertising the rent or sale of a property based on race, color, religion, or national origin illegal.

Despite this victory, the civil rights movement was never the same. So many people had given their lives for freedom and equality. Black America was at a crossroads. King's assassination, which many believed wasn't the lone work of James Earl Ray, was a hard blow. Only time would tell if America's deepest scars would heal.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Chronicling the demise of the Black Panther Party
- Getting political with the Vietnam War, feminism, and elected officials
- Eyeing the economic playing field
- Battling crack cocaine and HIV/AIDS
- Tracking the racial divide well into the 21st century

Chapter 10
Where Do We Go from Here? Post–Civil Rights

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s death in 1968 put the civil rights movement in limbo. As its leadership struggled to regain momentum, cries for Black Power grew louder, with the Black Panther Party becoming the biggest beneficiary. However, its dominance wouldn't last long. It simply couldn't survive with its key leaders either behind bars or dead, largely due to targeting by the FBI and local law enforcement. At the same time, the Vietnam War presented other challenges.

If the 1960s were about dismantling the nation, for many, the 1970s were about trying to put it back together better than before. Like George Jefferson of the 1970s sitcom *The Jeffersons*, many Black Americans were moving on up, with Black elected officials heading cities and walking the halls of state legislatures and Congress, even in the midst of urban blight. Crack cocaine's emergence in the 1980s presented unique challenges, as did the advent of HIV/AIDS. Still the racial divide continued well into the top of the 21st century, indicating that some battles come with multiple wars.

This chapter explores those challenges while reflecting on the remarkable journey, heartbreaking and inspiring, that still fuels the drive to the final destination Dr. King, Malcolm X, Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Booker T. Washington, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, and countless others fought so hard to achieve without losing sight that the war wasn't won.

The Panthers Stumble

Black Power rumblings began before King's death in 1968. During a march through Mississippi in 1966 with King, Stokely Carmichael, the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), announced his allegiance to a Black Power ideology. (Refer to Chapter 9 for details on Carmichael's rejection of nonviolence or more accurately nonviolent direct action.) Carmichael, who later became Kwame Ture, affiliated with the Oakland-based Black Panther Party (BPP) for Self Defense, an organization founded in October 1966 by Bobby Seale, Huey Newton, and a handful of others at Merritt College and credited for the Black Power movement. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the BPP, which coincidentally worked with many white activists, was the nation's most prominent representative of Black Power.

Huey Newton: A symbol of Black Power


IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The 1967 arrest of Huey Newton for allegedly killing a white police officer sparked a "Free Huey" campaign. Newton and his impending trial came to represent the condition of Black people everywhere. The truth of that belief wasn't lost on Newton; in his 1973 book *Revolutionary Suicide,* he wrote, "Every day they kept me there I grew as a symbol of the brutalization of the poor and Black as well as a living reproach to society's indifference to the inequities of the legal system."

Ample propaganda furthered the association. Newton's image and the "Free Huey" slogan showed up on flags, buttons, T-shirts, and posters. Curiously, Newton became a living martyr. King's death had left a void that the fight to free Newton filled in many ways. Although there was no shortage of great causes to fight, there were few symbols to galvanize the public's interest. Newton became one such symbol.

The BPP encounters challenges

Ultimately, Newton's incarceration and the notoriety of the Black Panthers became a detriment. Matters worsened when BPP cofounder Bobby Seale received an indictment as part of the Chicago 8, a group of activists accused of crossing state

lines to incite rioting during the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Judge Abbie Hoffman declared a mistrial and sentenced Seale to four years of prison for contempt of court (which an appeal later overturned), making the Chicago 8 the Chicago 7. With both Newton and Seale out of the Panthers' active picture, the BPP began to change.

Cleaver and the party's growing association with violence

Eldridge Cleaver, considered more radical than either Newton or Seale at the time, seized control of the BPP. Cleaver, shortly after being released from prison, joined the Panthers mere months after its founding. As the BPP's minister of information and spokesperson, he advocated for armed struggle for liberation, which eventually put him and Newton at odds because BPP used guns for self-defense.

In 1968, only two days after King's assassination in Memphis, Cleaver and 13 other Panthers were involved in a shootout with police in Oakland. One to four officers were wounded, and one of the BPP's own died. Despite surrendering unarmed, with his hands up (according to several witnesses), 17-year-old Bobby Hutton (known as Lil Bobby Hutton), the Panthers' first recruit and treasurer, died after being shot with an estimated 12 bullets by the police.

When that incident threatened to return Cleaver to jail, he fled to Algeria. His wife, Kathleen Neal Cleaver (whom he met at a 1967 SNCC conference at Fisk University), became the BPP's communications secretary, a position she created when she relocated to Oakland that same year. She later joined her husband in Algeria.

ELDRIDGE CHANGES: *SOUL ON ICE*

Although Eldridge Cleaver returned to the United States from exile in 1975, and renounced the Black Panther Party (BPP), most Americans remember him as a Black Panther because of his book *Soul on Ice,* released in March 1968. Cleaver's admission to raping Black and white women helped fuel the many myths associated with the BPP. Other books such as *Seize the Time* (1970), by BPP founders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, and former BPP chair Elaine Brown's *A Taste of Power* (1992) offer more balanced insight into the BPP.

As the years wore on, Cleaver, who passed away in 1998 after battling addiction, greatly altered his political views. He became a conservative Republican in the 1980s and unsuccessfully ran for both Berkeley City Council and the United States Senate in California.

Other incidents followed. In 1970 George Jackson, who had established a BPP chapter at California's Soledad Prison, and two other prisoners, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Clutchette, were charged with murdering a prison guard reportedly in retaliation for the murder of several Black prisoners. Jackson, imprisoned since age 18 for a gas station robbery of $70 he disputed, was introduced to Marxist and Maoist political thought by fellow inmates and reading. Jackson and Angela Davis, a professor at UCLA affiliated with the BPP who gained notoriety when California Governor Ronald Reagan pushed the UC Board of Regents to fire her for being a member of the Communist Party, became connected when Jackson wrote her. Davis's involvement in the Soledad Brothers' case helped bring awareness to the condition of the prison population. Jackson and the case gained even more attention when his younger brother Jonathan snuck guns into a California courtroom. Jonathan, along with the two Soledad prisoners in the courtroom, took the judge and four others hostage before being gunned down.

The case also put Davis, who was later revealed to have a personal relationship with George Jackson, on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitive List when registration for Jonathan Jackson's guns traced back to Davis, whom he was reportedly protecting though she was unaware of his plans, and she ran. After her arrest, Davis spent 18 months in jail without bail before eventually receiving an acquittal in 1972.

In 1971, guards at California's San Quentin Prison killed George Jackson, who had gained fame for his 1970 book *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Chicago Review Press), for a purported escape attempt; however, their account of the events kept changing. Deeper dives into Jackson's imprisonment for 11 of his 29 years uncovered many inconsistencies. Davis, whose life during this time was chronicled by filmmaker Shola Lynch in the 2012 documentary *Free Angela and All the Political Prisoners*, continued to be a progressive symbol.

Another notable case includes the Panther 21 in New York City when 21 members of the BPP Harlem chapter were indicted on April 2, 1969 on 156 counts for conspiring to blow up subway and police stations as well as department stores, railroads, and even the New York Botanical Garden. Bail was set at $100,000 each, collectively totaling $2.1 million, with the Panther 21 spending several months up to two years in jail. One of the accused was Afeni Shakur, the mother of rapper Tupac; she represented herself in the trial and was acquitted in May 1971, weeks before her son's birth.

The Black Liberation Army emerges

During the legal trials of Newton and Seale, the Black Liberation Army (BLA) gained prominence. The underground revolutionary organization, active from 1970 to 1976, contained many former Panthers. Cleaver, whom Newton had expelled from the BPP in 1971, never officially led the BLA; however, many of the ideas he encountered from revolutionaries in the countries in which he was exiled (including Cuba, Algeria, and France) reportedly influenced the BLA to embrace armed retaliation against oppression. Despite being painted as radicals, many BLA values remain relevant.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"We are anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-racist, and anti-sexist," BLA members proclaimed. "We must of necessity strive for the abolishment of these systems and for the institution of socialistic relationships in which Black people have total and absolute control over their own destiny as a people," they stated, among other core principles.

Assata Shakur, formerly JoAnne Deborah Chesimard, is among BLA's most well-known members. A series of alleged criminal activities, including bank robberies and clashes with law enforcement, one in which a New Jersey state trooper was killed in 1973, made Shakur notorious. She escaped from a New Jersey correctional facility in 1979, and resurfaced in Cuba in 1984. In early 2021, Shakur was still in political asylum in Cuba despite repeated demands from the U.S. government over several decades that she be extradited.

Fred Hampton, a murder in Chicago

Fred Hampton, an activist since at least age 12, worked with both the NAACP and SNCC. Attracted mainly by the BPP's Ten Point Plan (see Chapter 9) as well as its emphasis on class struggle, Hampton joined the Panthers in 1968, at age 20. Along with Bobby Rush and others, he helped transform the Illinois chapter, established by former SNCC leader Bob Brown in 1967, into a formidable force. Committed to community development, Hampton's key successes included the following:

- Spearheading the signature Black Panther Party Free Breakfast for School Children Program in Chicago. (The first program had been established in January 1969 in Oakland to provide nutritious breakfasts to Black schoolchildren.)
- Establishing a free medical center and implementing door-to-door testing for sickle cell anemia, an inherited blood disorder largely affecting people of African ancestry.

- Brokering a peace pact among Chicago's gangs to form what he called a *rainbow coalition,* a term that Jesse Jackson would later use for his own organization (see the later section "Making political strides in the 1970s"). Because the BPP had previously had numerous run-ins with the Blackstone Rangers, one of Chicago's biggest gangs, the pact was even more of an achievement.

Chicago police cut Hampton's good deeds short on December 4, 1969, during a special raid on the apartment Hampton shared with Deborah Wilson (Akua Njeri), who was pregnant with their son. Their apartment was also a BPP gathering spot. Cook County state's attorney Edward Hanrahan claimed the Black Panthers surprise attacked Chicago police, 14 in all, as they tried to execute a search warrant for illegal weapons in the apartment. Coming on the heels of the murder of two Chicago policemen allegedly by the Black Panthers a month earlier, perhaps made the raid, which left Hampton and fellow Black Panther Mark Clark dead, more believable at the time. Hampton was just 21. Further investigation, however, revealed a far uglier truth.

FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS AND COINTELPRO

In 1975, the Church Committee (nicknamed for its leader, Idaho Senator Frank Church) uncovered information about the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), confirming the Black community's suspicions about FBI interference in the affairs of the Black Panthers, as well as those of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., among others.

Two years prior, William "Bill" O'Neal, who had served as a security chief in the Illinois Black Panther Party, had been exposed as a paid FBI informant through COINTELPRO. O'Neal, who was in the Federal Witness Protection Program in California as William Hart before returning to Chicago in 1984, sat for an interview admitting to his double agency with *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads 1965–1985,* which aired in 1990. Hours later, he was hit by a car with his death being ruled a suicide. O'Neal reportedly provided the blueprint of Hampton's apartment used by the Chicago Police, as well as put barbiturates in Hampton's drink during a meal O'Neal prepared. The FBI, it was later revealed, started a file on Hampton in 1967, prior to him even joining the Black Panther Party. Also documents released in early 2021 suggest that J. Edgar Hoover was directly aware of the raid that killed Hampton.

O'Neal's betrayal of Hampton was explored in the 2021 film *Judas and the Black Messiah*. Stanley Nelson explored the Black Panthers more fully in the 2015 PBS documentary *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*.



Police claimed that they had killed Hampton, who had an FBI file dating back to 1967, and Clark in response to shots first fired by the Black Panthers. Because "militant" quotes by Hampton in the *Chicago Sun-Times* had already put white Chicago on guard, the police account only confirmed their perceptions of the Black Panthers as armed thugs. Yet subsequent investigations revealed that of the 99 shots fired that day, only one came from the Panthers.

Changing focus: Embracing nonviolence and women's leadership

By the early 1970s, the BPP had become a nonviolent direct-action organization in line with Dr. King's vision that began to work within the system for social change. Seale, who had beaten the charges against him, ran for mayor of Oakland in 1973. Although he lost, his strong showing was encouraging. Other BPP members also ran for office, and the BPP successfully supported the election of other Black Americans to political offices.

In 1974, another murder accusation against Huey Newton, who had been cleared of his earlier charges, prompted him to flee to Cuba, where he lived in exile for three years before eventually receiving an acquittal. Elaine Brown succeeded Newton to become the BPP's first female chair that same year. Committing the party to women's rights initiatives, Brown led the BPP until 1977. In addition to Brown and BPP's communications secretary Kathleen Neal Cleaver, other prominent women in BPP's inner circle included Ericka (Jenkins) Huggins, who led the BPP's New Haven, Connecticut chapter and even stood trial in a BPP-related incident in 1970 where she, along Seale, was accused of murder, kidnapping, and conspiracy in relation to a suspected informant but was acquitted in 1971. In fact, the BPP boasted a substantially active female membership across the country. (Refer to the section, "Black Women Taking a Stand," later in this chapter for more information on Black women leadership.)

Legal cases involving BPP activity dating back to the 1960s and 70s continued throughout the 1980s and, in some instances, until the year 2000, when prominent attorney Johnnie Cochran finally succeeded in securing BPP political prisoner Geronimo Pratt's release. In 1989, Newton became a victim of urban crime and died of a gunshot wound in Oakland. Seale continued to work with the youth. Although the BPP faltered in the late 1970s, officially shutting down in 1982, its legacy and spirit live on, especially in Oakland.

Fighting Vietnam

Starting in the mid-1960s, the Vietnam War was a hot-button issue for many Americans. The conflict began when Vietnam split into two factions: communist and noncommunist. Although President John F. Kennedy first sent military advisors into Vietnam before his 1963 assassination, the number of American troops escalated during Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency, and their advisory role ended. With mounting fatalities, no exit strategy in place, and no visible American gain to the war's outcome, college campuses across the nation bustled with antiwar activity, which continued until the war ended.

In accordance with President Harry Truman's executive order, the military was almost completely desegregated by the end of the Korean War in 1950. Subsequently, more Black American men served in the Vietnam War than in any other war preceding it.

An unfair fight

Military draft deferments for college attendance and certain civilian occupations favored privileged white men. Moreover, Project 100,000, a Great Society program initiated in 1966 that made military entrance requirements like mental aptitude and physical ailments more lenient in order to bolster forces, only increased those disparities. An estimated 41 percent of the 350,000 new enlistees were Black American men, mainly from poverty-stricken areas. Even more disturbing, 40 percent of those enlistees drew combat assignments and suffered twice the casualty rates of other military enlistees.

Overall Black American male casualty rates constituted almost 20 percent of all combat deaths between 1961 and 1966; Black Americans, however, made up only 13 percent of the U.S. population as a whole and 9 to 10 percent of the military. The numbers were so high that the military worked hard to bring them down. By the time the war ended in 1975, the 12.5 percent overall Black casualty rate was a vast improvement. At the same time, Black military personnel had also increased significantly. In 1976, Black Americans, mostly men, constituted 15 percent of the military.

Reacting to the war

The BPP vehemently opposed the war in Vietnam. The group's Ten Point Plan demanded "an immediate end to all wars of aggression." Specifically, the BPP objected to Black American men serving and dying in disproportionate numbers, especially because their own country treated them poorly. Not surprisingly, the SNCC and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) also opposed the Vietnam War. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s public opposition to the Vietnam War was surprising, however, and very unpopular among the civil rights mainstream, particularly because he was connected to civil rights issues and many didn't view the Vietnam War as a civil rights issue.

So King, who had won the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1964, shocked many when he linked his opposition of the Vietnam War to the civil rights movement and attacked President Johnson's administration directly in an April 1967 speech titled "Declaration of Independence from the War in Vietnam," also known as "A Time to Break Silence." For King, the resources used for the Vietnam War could be better used to fight poverty.

The New York Times denounced King, as did civil rights leader Bayard Rustin, political scientist and fellow Nobel Prize winner Ralph Bunche, and Major League Baseball player Jackie Robinson, among others. The NAACP and the National Urban League worried that opposing the Vietnam War would adversely affect funding for civil rights initiatives. When President Johnson admonished King, telling him to stick to civil rights, King refused to alter his position, which won him respect with Black Power stalwarts even though many of them still disagreed with his nonviolent approach.

Coming home

Once at home, many Black Vietnam veterans publicly supported the war and defended themselves against antiwar protestors — a lonely position, given that unlike in previous wars, discharges from Vietnam were staggered, so veterans couldn't defend themselves or the war in large numbers. It also didn't help that in Vietnam, some soldiers had become addicted to heroin while others became alcoholics — a sad scenario that resulted in a stereotype that many veterans resented.

BLACK WOMEN CIVIL RIGHTS LEADERS

After Reconstruction, Black women became critical in civil rights efforts. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Mary Church Terrell were just three of the powerful female leaders in the Black community at the end of the 19th century and into the early 20th century. Here are some of the main players:

- **Ida B. Wells-Barnett** ignited the ire of Southern white men with her investigations of lynchings, revealing that Black men were most often economic targets, that Black women were lynched too, and that white women frequently consented to sex with Black men. She was also a key figure in the women's suffrage movement that secured the 19th Amendment granting women the vote. (Read about Wells-Barnett in Chapter 7.)
- **Mary McLeod Bethune** founded the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), active for more than 85 years, and a school that eventually became Bethune-Cookman College. She was extremely active in Black American affairs, calling national conferences and frequently visiting the White House during Theodore Roosevelt's presidency. She brought Black leaders from various organizations together for the Federal Council of Negro Affairs, better known as the Black Cabinet.
- **Dorothy Height** dedicated the bulk of her life to service primarily to Black women, first in social work, mostly with the YWCA, and most prominently as a national president of Delta Sigma Theta. She later led the National Council of Negro Women, founded by her mentor Mary McLeod Bethune, for more than 50 years. Height, a key organizer of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, ensured Black women sat at the civil rights table.
- **Mary Church Terrell,** an Oberlin graduate, NAACP co-founder, educator, and prominent speaker and writer against segregation, fought for civil rights throughout her life. At the age of 86, she actively participated in efforts to desegregate Washington, D.C. restaurants in 1950.
- **Ella Baker** was a principal force in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) during the civil rights movement of the 1960s and later the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which she nurtured. (Read about the fruits of her efforts in Chapter 8.)
- **Daisy Bates,** an NAACP activist and newspaper publisher, was a pivotal figure in integrating Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957. (Read about Central High in Chapter 8.)
- **Fannie Lou Hamer,** who grew up a sharecropper in the Mississippi Delta, was critical to civil rights efforts in Mississippi. Boldly challenging white supremacy in her native state, Hamer endured beatings for daring to speak up and act. An SNCC organizer and key component of Freedom Summer as well as a founder of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Hamer was a fearless leader. (Read about Freedom Summer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in Chapter 9.)

- **Pauli Murray,** civil rights activist, attorney, National Organization for Women (NOW) cofounder, and a member of the LGBTQ community, inspired successful arguments on race and gender early in their careers for later Supreme Court Justices Thurgood Marshall and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The documentary *My Name Is Pauli Murray*, exploring her impact, premiered at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival. In 2012, Murray, who became a priest later in life, was sainted by the Episcopal Church.

Black Women Taking a Stand

From the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, Black women were in a difficult position. Between the civil rights and feminist movements, where did they fit in? They had been the backbone of the civil rights movement, but their contributions were deemphasized as Black men, often emasculated by white society, felt compelled to adopt patriarchal roles. In many respects, they fared better in the BPP. When Black women flocked to the feminist movement, white women frequently discriminated against them and devoted little attention to class issues that seriously affected Black women, who also tended to be poor.


REMEMBER

Historically, Black women have prioritized race over gender concerns. This choice was especially poignant during Reconstruction, when Black female leaders such as active suffragist Frances Ellen Watkins Harper supported the Fifteenth Amendment, giving Black men the right to vote, over the objections of white women suffragists with whom she had worked for a long time.

Black women have a long feminist tradition that includes 19th-century activists such as Maria W. Stewart and Sojourner Truth as well as organizations like the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACWC) and the National Council of Negro Women, founded in 1896 and 1935, respectively. The 1960s and 1970s, not to mention Black men's changing attitudes regarding the role of Black women, piqued interest around new concerns such as race, gender, and class, and these organizations attempted to address issues:

- **The ANC (Aid to Needy Children) Mothers Anonymous of Watts and the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO):** Johnnie Tillmon was an early pioneer of addressing the concerns of poor Black women. A welfare mother living in Los Angeles's Nickerson Projects, Tillmon helped found Aid to Needy Children Mothers Anonymous of Watts in 1963. She was later tapped to lead the National Welfare Rights Organization, founded in 1966. Through these organizations, she addressed issues such as equal pay for women, childcare, and voter registration.
- **Black Women's Liberation Committee (BWLC):** SNCC member Francis Beal was one of the founders of the Black Women's Liberation Committee in 1968.

In 1969, she helped clarify the struggles of Black women in the influential essay "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," which also appeared in the landmark 1970 anthology *The Black Woman* (Washington Square Press); that book ushered in a new wave of Black female writers (read about this literary movement in Chapter 14). Beal identified capitalism as a key factor in the chasm between Black men and women. During the early 1970s, the BWLC evolved into the Third World Women's Alliance.

- **National Organization for Women (NOW):** Reverend Dr. Anna Pauline (Pauli) Murray is a cofounder of the nation's most prominent feminist organization, the National Organization for Women, founded in 1966. (Refer to the nearby sidebar for more about Murray.)
- **The National Black Feminist Organization:** While many Black women remain active in mainstream feminist organizations only, other Black women have created organizations aimed at addressing Black women's unique concerns more effectively. The National Black Feminist Organization launched in 1973, with the specific goal of including Black women of all ages, classes, and sexual orientation. Although it and similar organizations didn't outlive the 1970s, the legacy of Black feminism lives on.

CLARENCE THOMAS HEARINGS, 1991

Conflicts between Black women's allegiance to race or gender came to a head in 1991 during the Senate confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas to replace Thurgood Marshall, the first Black person to hold that seat, on the Supreme Court. During the hearings, Black law professor Anita Hill, who had worked for Thomas at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), was vilified by many Black Americans for accusing Thomas of sexual harassment and testifying that he had made sexually inappropriate comments to her during their working relationship. Hill, who received considerable support from white women, was accused of being a pawn to block the ascension of a Black man.

Thomas, during his testimony, referred to the hearing as a "high-tech lynching," bringing attention to the all-white male Senate Judiciary Committee presiding over it and the nation's history of violence against Black men. Over time, however, Hill became seen as a champion of women and was lauded for her bravery. In 2016, the HBO film *Confirmation* starring Kerry Washington, chronicled Hill's life and the historic moment. As the Me Too movement, founded in 2006 by Tarana Burke and distinguished by the hashtag #MeToo heated up in the late 2010s, the Oklahoma native became even more of a hero.

During the 2020 presidential race, candidate Joe Biden, who had served as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, expressed his regrets for his handling of the hearings and treatment of Hill.

In 1983, Alice Walker coined the term *womanism*, a feminist ideology that addresses the Black woman's unique history of racial and gender oppression. Women such as Angela Davis; law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw; academics Patricia Hill Collins, Beverly Guy Sheftall, and bell hooks; and historians Darlene Clark Hine, Paula Giddings, and Deborah Gray White have greatly expanded the context in which Black women and their history and activism are discussed. They underscored Black women's issues related to race, gender, and class as well as the active role Black women have played in the fight for equality for all women.

A Race to Political Office

Black Americans voted in unprecedented numbers after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and Black politicians became the main beneficiaries. From the mid-1960s into the 1970s, Black politicians became congressmen, state legislators, and mayors in record numbers. By the end of the 1980s, both Chicago and New York, the second largest and largest cities in the nation at the time, had elected Black mayors with Harold Washington in 1983 and David Dinkins in 1989.

Jesse Jackson also made two historic presidential runs. Carol Mosley Braun, the nation's first Black female senator, took office in 1993, but the 1990s, especially during Bill Clinton's presidency, became defined more by historic Black appointments, a trend that largely continued into the 2000s. In 2008, Barack Obama took the top office in the nation and served two terms (refer to Chapter 11). And in the 2010s, the numbers of Black politicians capturing major offices exploded. The following sections offer a few highlights of the political power that the legendary activist W.E.B. Du Bois advocated in the early 20th century.



HISTORICAL ROOTS

ELECTION DAY

A replica of colonial elections, Election Day began in Connecticut around 1750 and continued being held in some areas for at least a century. Black Americans took the opportunity to elect their own officials, who governed their enslaved communities, primarily settling disputes. Both serious and fun-filled, festivities culminated in an impressive parade. Historian William Piersen argued that such celebrations helped shape the nation's parade tradition.



REMEMBER

Registering Black voters became an essential strategy for electing Black officials. In addition, the success of Black politicians — such as Oscar DePriest, the first Black person elected to serve in Congress in the 20th century, and New York City's firebrand Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. — was significantly influenced by the Great Migration, the mass relocation of Black Americans from the South to the North. Large Black voter turnout helped these men secure victory, a lesson that wasn't lost on Black politicians in the late 1960s and into the 1980s.

Getting a foot in the door in the 1960s

In the late 1960s, Black politicians got the ball rolling by winning a number of key elected positions:

- In 1966, Massachusetts's Edward W. Brooke III, a Republican, became the first Black politician elected to the U.S. Senate since Reconstruction. Black female politicians Yvonne Braithwaite Burke in California and Barbara Jordan in Texas won offices within their respective state governments.
- In 1967, Black mayors Richard B. Hatcher and Carl B. Stokes headed the Midwestern cities of Gary, Indiana, and Cleveland, Ohio.
- In 1968, more Black candidates than ever were elected to their state legislatures, and to top it off, Brooklyn's Shirley Chisholm became the first Black woman elected to Congress. Nationwide, 370 Black politicians won elections that year.

Making political strides in the 1970s

In the 1970s, Black elected officials flourished. Organizations such as the Black Panther Party embraced the political process as a significant agent of change for Black America.



HISTORICAL ROOTS

THE CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS

In January 1969, Black members of the House of Representatives, including Shirley Chisholm, Louis Stokes, and William L. Clay, founded the Democratic Select Committee, which became the Congressional Black Caucus in 1971. Functioning primarily as a lobbying group to the larger Congressional Democratic Party, the Caucus focuses on issues affecting Black Americans. It launched with nine members; in 2005, it was 43. In 2021, the number was more than 50.

Wisely, Black candidates cut their teeth on smaller offices before tackling bigger jobs. Because so many had participated in civil rights organizations, they were already familiar with government bureaucracy. Julian Bond, for example, went straight from SNCC to the Georgia legislature, and Andrew Young, a close aide of King's, served as a congressman, the mayor of Atlanta, and U.S. ambassador to the United Nations.

As important as serving in a federal office was, Black politicians also exerted considerable power by leading major cities. The 1973 elections of Coleman Young and Maynard Jackson as the first Black mayors of Detroit and Atlanta were important milestones. That same year, Tom Bradley's election as mayor of Los Angeles offered more promise, because unlike Atlanta and Detroit, which had sizeable Black populations, Los Angeles was only 15 percent Black. Bradley's win that same year signaled that some white Americans were willing to elect Black officials to major positions. By the end of the 1970s, Washington, D.C. had officially made Walter Washington its first ever *elected* mayor, with Richmond, Virginia (Henry L. Marsh, 1977); Oakland (Lionel Wilson, 1978); New Orleans (Ernest Nathan Morial, 1978); and Birmingham, Alabama (Richard Arrington Jr., 1979) all electing their first Black mayors.

Eyeing a bigger prize in the 1980s

In addition to Chicago and New York City, other cities that elected their first Black mayors in the 1980s include Little Rock, Arkansas (Charles E. Bussey, Jr., 1981); Charlotte (Harvey Gantt, 1983); Philadelphia (Wilson Goode, 1984); Baltimore (Kurt Schmoke, 1989); and Seattle (Norm Rice, 1989).

With more Black mayors, state legislators, and congressmen in office, civil rights leader Jesse Jackson began eyeing the presidency. He also helped usher in a new concept in Black political leadership by building a coalition among Black, Latino, gay, and other voting groups. He was the third Black candidate to mount a noteworthy nationwide presidential campaign. (Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm became the second in 1972, while George Edwin Taylor, the son of an enslaved father and free mother running on the all-Black independent National Liberty Party in 1904, was the first.) Jackson, founder of Operation PUSH (People United to Save Humanity), surprised numerous political pundits when he placed third in the Democratic primaries in 1984.

During Jackson's second run in 1988, he won an unprecedented 11 primaries, and by the time he had reached the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, he was a serious candidate to win the nomination. Despite a stirring speech in which he commiserated with the nation's poor, he failed to capture the nomination, yet he brought much-needed dialogue to national politics.



Similar to King's Poor People's Campaign (refer to Chapter 9) and Fred Hampton's movement of the same name formed in 1969, the mission of the National Rainbow Coalition, which Jackson established in 1985, strived to bring all races together on a variety of issues, including employment, fair housing, and affirmative action. In 1997, Operation PUSH and the National Rainbow Coalition merged to form the Rainbow PUSH Coalition.

Still thriving in the 1990s and early 2000s

The 1990s were very active, as several major cities elected their first Black mayors, including Memphis, Tennessee (W.W. Herenton, 1991); Denver (Wellington Webb, 1991); Kansas City, Missouri (Emanuel Cleaver, 1991); St. Louis (Freeman Bosley Jr., 1993); Rochester, New York (William A. Johnson Jr., 1993); Dallas (Ron Kirk, 1995); San Francisco (Willie Brown, 1996), Jackson, Mississippi (Harvey Johnson Jr., 1997); and Houston (Lee P. Brown, 1997). Washington, D.C. elected Sharon Pratt Kelly its first Black woman mayor in 1991, and Minneapolis, Minnesota elected Sharon Sayles Belton its first Black and female mayor in 1994.

President Bill Clinton, who received a large majority of the Black vote, appointed five Black people to his cabinet in 1993, including Ron Brown as Secretary of Commerce and Hazel O'Leary as Secretary of Energy. Despite an overall decrease in Black presidential appointees during George W. Bush's administration, Colin Powell did become the nation's first Black Secretary of State in 2001; Condoleezza Rice, who succeeded him, became the nation's first Black woman Secretary of State in 2005.

Money, Money, Money

More than a century ago, Booker T. Washington encouraged Black Americans to concentrate on economic empowerment over political empowerment. Since the civil rights victories of the 1960s, however, it wasn't a question of gaining one at the expense of the other. Increasingly, Black Americans used political power to address the economic inequities created by racism. For almost 50 years, affirmative action has been one of the main strategies used to address those inequities.

Looking at homeownership

Undoing the long-term effects of systematic racist practices such as *redlining*, the practice of charging Black people more to live in certain areas or not granting them loans to live in others, hasn't been easy. Historically, redlining reduced

Black homeownership, a proven determinant of wealth. Because Black Americans as a whole have historically possessed less individual and communal wealth than white Americans, surviving economic hardships such as unemployment has been more difficult.

In the 2004 book *The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality* (Oxford University Press), sociology professor Thomas M. Shapiro found that economic inequities persist in the United States because white Americans tend to inherit and generate more wealth than Black Americans. Discriminatory housing practices like Black people being denied loans on the same criteria as white people have received them has historically prevented Black homeowners who live in largely Black neighborhoods from accumulating significant wealth in their homes.

In the late 1990s, early 2000s, and into the 2010s, as more white Americans (mostly in higher income brackets) moved into traditionally Black neighborhoods in cities all across the United States, home equity soared; this practice is commonly referred to as *gentrification*. At the same time, those higher prices, accompanied by higher taxes, displaced Black Americans, many of whom had lived in these neighborhoods for generations, even fueling homelessness in some instances. Conditions such as these, argues Shapiro, create disparities that aren't easily solved through programs that increase Black American income.

Facing barriers in business

Historically, the federal government played a significant role in undermining the wealth of Black Americans. Roy Innis, who took over CORE in 1968, was one of the first civil rights activists to advocate for government assistance, such as providing government loans to encourage Black entrepreneurship, as a corrective.

In the late 1960s and 1970s Jackson led economic boycotts to increase Black employment at businesses Black consumers supported. Eyeing a bigger slice of the pie for Black Americans, however, he turned his attention to corporate America in 1996, with the Wall Street Project. The project's two main goals were to increase the number of nonwhite executives working in corporate America and to expand contracting opportunities for nonwhite firms.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, several large companies such as Texaco, Coca-Cola, and Denny's Restaurants paid out huge racial bias settlements for mistreating Black consumers and/or employees. In 1996, Texaco (acquired by Chevron in 2000) paid out $176 million on a suit filed by six employees on behalf of 1,500 employees after executives were caught on tape making racially insensitive comments. Coca-Cola settled a racial discrimination suit for $192.5 million.



REMEMBER

Empowerment zones, economic-challenged areas where government entities grant tax breaks and other incentives to companies and individuals that invest in them, have helped spark economic growth in once-depressed urban communities. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, these efforts were credited with revitalizing several areas in such cities as Chicago, Atlanta, D.C., and New York City. As with gentrification, however, the same charges of local Black businesses being squeezed out through higher taxes applied. In addition, young Black entrepreneurs weren't initially being granted similar opportunities as their white counterparts to own and operate businesses in these areas.

Successful Black-owned businesses

Historically, Black-owned businesses succeeded by filling a void ignored by mainstream businesses. Successful businesses included media, beauty, real estate, and food companies, among others. In the 21st century, Black-owned investing and tech firms began making their mark as well.

Black-owned media

Publications such as *Ebony, Black Enterprise,* and *Essence* owed a portion of their success to white publications' overlooking Black consumers. Similarly, Robert Johnson, often credited as the nation's first Black billionaire, launched Black Entertainment Television (BET) in 1980 to serve Black consumers with the help of his then-wife and businesswoman Sheila Johnson.

In 1980, Cathy Hughes founded Radio One with the Washington, D.C. station WOL. Hughes, along with her only child, Alfred Liggins, who took over as CEO in 1997, built a Black media empire of more than 50 radio stations. That foundation encouraged the company, which was renamed Urban One in 2018, to launch the cable networks TV One in 2004 and CLEO TV, targeting millennial and Generation X Black women in 2019.

In the 1990s and 2000s, many mainstream companies began buying into or swallowing companies that served the Black consumer market. Viacom purchased BET in 2000 for $3 billion, making Johnson and his wife billionaires, though he alone is usually credited. Time Warner, then owner of *TIME* magazine, became sole owner of *Essence* in 2005. Mainstream companies also formed alliances with popular Black personalities to capture the Black consumer market. Southwest Airlines and McDonald's are just two companies that enjoyed lengthy partnerships with leading Black radio personality Tom Joyner, who retired in 2019 after helming his nationally syndicated *The Tom Joyner Morning Show* for 25 years.

Companies also began creating partnerships with Black businesses to invest in Black neighborhoods. For example, prior to becoming a part-owner of the Los

Angeles Dodgers in 2012, former NBA star Magic Johnson's Johnson Development Corporation successfully partnered with Sony Pictures Entertainment Loews Movie Theatres and Starbucks to bring his Magic Johnson Theatres and Starbucks franchises to Black neighborhoods in Los Angeles, Atlanta, New York City, and more.

Beauty companies

In 1998, global beauty conglomerate L'Oréal bought the Black-owned hair company Soft Sheen. It followed that acquisition with Carson Inc., a manufacturer of several products catering to Black consumers, including Dark & Lovely.

In 2000, according to *Forbes*, "ethnic hair care" was a $1.2 billion market, with Black consumers accounting for a whopping 30 percent of the total U.S. hair care market. Historically, Black haircare and beauty needs had given birth to entrepreneurs like the more well-known Madam C.J. Walker; Poro empire founder Annie Malone, who preceded Walker; and Apex founder Sarah Spencer Washington, who followed her in the early 20th century. During the latter part of the 20th century, Luster, Dudley's, and Bronner Bros. (known for the Bronner Bros. International Beauty Show, which comedian Chris Rock captured in his 2009 docufilm *Good Hair*) were among the more well-known Black-owned haircare brands.

Restaurants and food

As Black Americans migrated from the countryside to the city or from the South to the North during Reconstruction, the Great Migration, and beyond, they often longed for the food of their past. That desire birthed some of the Black community's first strong businesses. In New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, and other cities, gifted cooks parlayed their talents into solid businesses, some even generational, that even attracted white consumers. Examples include Sylvia's in New York City's Harlem, Harold's Chicken Shack in Chicago, and Roscoe's House of Chicken and Waffles in Los Angeles. Food companies like Michele Foods, founded in 1984 by Michele Hoskins, opted for the retail route; the family's syrup recipe originating from an enslaved ancestor had been passed down for generations.

In 1987, corporate attorney Reginald F. Lewis orchestrated one of the biggest business coups with a buyout of Beatrice International to form TLC Beatrice, a snack food, beverage, and grocery store conglomerate. TLC Beatrice became the largest Black-owned company at the time, as well as the first Black-owned business with sales exceeding $1 billion. Lewis's book, *Why Should White Guys Have All the Fun?* (Black Classic Press), was published posthumously in 1994.

Glory Foods, spearheaded by William F. "Bill" Williams, along with Iris Cooper and white founding partner Dan Charna, started in 1989 with Williams's "vision of providing authentic soul food in a can." When Williams passed away in 2001, Glory continued until McCall Farms bought it in 2010.

Unforeseen Enemies

During the mid-1980s and 1990s, two unforeseen enemies — crack cocaine and HIV/AIDS — hit Black communities hard. Crack cocaine ravaged Black neighborhoods in innumerable ways, while the HIV/AIDS epidemic simply confounded Black Americans. Following is a rundown of these two formidable enemies.

Crack cocaine

Illicit activity has historically plagued poor Black communities primarily due to many Black Americans historically being denied access to better paying jobs for a myriad of reasons. Until the 1980s and 1990s, however, such activity remained a significant subculture. Crack cocaine changed that. During the 1980s and early 1990s, crack cocaine devastated the Black community. Suddenly, "crack addicts" and "crack pipes" were household terms among Black Americans. Drug dealers, in some communities, became more common than buses. Republican president Ronald Reagan's policies didn't help either, especially with rumors that the government played a role in importing the drugs to funnel money to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.


TECHNICAL STUFF

When street gangs began selling crack, conditions worsened as crack cocaine found a wider national network. Studies estimate that crack hit Detroit in 1985, New York and Los Angeles in 1986, and Chicago in 1988 before expanding to smaller cities in the 1990s.

Labeled "the poor man's cocaine," crack, a derivative of powder cocaine, could literally be mass-produced into rocks that created a powerful high when smoked. Because the drug could be cooked up in the kitchen and packaged for sale in mass quantities, the number of drug dealers and crack users escalated quickly. Highly addictive, crack resulted in broken homes as "crackheads" lost control and lost their jobs. This course of events greatly undermined the economic stability of many Black households and neighborhoods:

- **Unemployment and neighborhood violence:** The Reagan administration's massive social service cuts and the demise of manufacturing jobs allowed crack cocaine distribution to grow. As unemployment rates surged, hitting

Black men especially hard, greater distribution networks for crack cocaine generated unbelievably large sums of money. Soon enough, disputes over territory and other factors generated massive violence. Urban neighborhoods became war zones.


TECHNICAL STUFF

According to one source, Black males aged 14 to 24 made up only 1 percent of the population in the mid-1990s, but were 17 percent of homicide victims and 30 percent of homicide perpetrators.

- **Imprisonment:** As the drug trade grew, Black boys and men became increasingly entangled in the legal system for drug possession, drug dealing, homicide, and a plethora of other offenses, many of them nonviolent. One study reported that between 1979 and 1990, the percentage of Black people admitted to state and federal prisons increased from 39 to 53 percent of all offenders. Probation tied another significant portion of Black men to the legal system. Although most Black men worked or attended school and weren't engaged in illicit activity, the growing numbers of incarcerated Black men were still alarming.


TECHNICAL STUFF

Prior to 1980, Black men ages 18 to 24 in college greatly outnumbered Black men in the same age range in prison. In 2000, the ratio of Black men in college was roughly 2.6 to every 1 incarcerated Black man in the same age group. The number for white males in the same age group was 28 to 1.

- **Effect on families:** Single-parent households in Black communities were already on the rise prior to the advent of crack cocaine, but crack cocaine added to the problem. High incarceration rates among Black men and unbelievably high homicide rates helped increase the numbers of single-parent households.
- **Class wars in the Black community:** Often fleeing drug war zones, wealthier Black Americans relocated to the suburbs. This move deepened class issues within the Black community, which was traditionally made up of Black people of all classes. At no other point in American history, however, had Black Americans been so prosperous. Some have argued that the disappearance of these role models made drug dealing and drug use more appealing to Black youth.

Black activism, however, helped turn the tide. Statistics show that outrage in Black communities manifested in antiviolence campaigns, youth programs, and other initiatives since the late 1990s were a difference-maker. Homicide and other crimes, as well as crack cocaine use and drug dealing, went down significantly. Sentencing disparities related to the possession of crack and powdered cocaine were addressed. More educational and mentoring opportunities also emerged. The FX series *Snowfall* (2017–present), which *Boyz n the Hood* director/screenwriter John Singleton co-created, centers the onset of crack cocaine in Los Angeles and its impact on the Black community.

DANGEROUS ACCUSATIONS: THE GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN DRUG TRAFFICKING

Many in the Black community have long insisted that because Black people don't own the planes and boats that ship cocaine into the country or manufacture guns, the government has to be involved in trafficking drugs to Black communities.

In August 1996, the *San Jose Mercury* published "Dark Alliance," a three-part investigative series by white staff writer Gary Webb. It alleges that Nicaraguan drug traffickers supplied cocaine to Los Angeles drug dealers, including Freeway Rick Ross, in the 1980s. Webb contended that the CIA knew that the profits from such activity helped fund the Nicaraguan Contras, which the Reagan administration supported in its fight against the Sandinistas, Nicaragua's ruling party and a Cuban ally. Numerous outlets, including *The Washington Post,* attacked Webb's claims. Webb published his book *Dark Alliance* in 1998 and included declassified documents related to the story. In 2004, Webb died from two gunshot wounds to the head, a reported suicide.

Jeremy Renner played Webb in the 2014 film *Kill the Messenger,* and Webb's allegations were addressed in the 2015 documentary *Freeway: Crack in the System,* about Freeway Rick Ross and what is known as the CIA-Contra-Cocaine connection.

HIV/AIDS

At the initial discovery of HIV/AIDS in the 1980s, most people viewed it as a disease that afflicted gay white men. Although an HIV/AIDS epidemic began hitting the African continent hard in the late 1980s, few suspected the Black American community was at great risk. Most people thought the 1993 AIDS-related death of tennis great Arthur Ashe, who contracted HIV through a blood transfusion, was an isolated incident. Two years earlier, however, NBA great Earvin "Magic" Johnson generated concern when he announced that he was HIV-positive. The 1995 death of West Coast rapper Eric "Eazy-E" Wright reportedly from AIDS-related complications was another indication that heterosexuals were also at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.

Numbers for the 2000s are startling. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Black Americans accounted for 50 percent of all new HIV/AIDS cases in 2004. Seventy-three percent of the infants diagnosed with HIV/AIDS that year were also Black. In 2002, HIV/AIDS was among the top three causes of death for Black men aged 25 to 54 and one of the top four causes of death for Black women aged 25 to 34.

Although unsafe sexual practices has often been cited as a big reason Black Americans suffered higher rates of HIV/AIDS infection, many placed blame on

down-low men (originally a term popularized by R&B artists to refer to furtive heterosexual relationships) who presented as heterosexual to conceal their bisexuality. Given the traditional homophobic attitudes in the Black community plus incidents of faithful wives and girlfriends contracting HIV/AIDS from their "committed" partners, mass hysteria developed among some Black Americans. In 2004, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* even dedicated an episode to the down-low phenomenon and the HIV/AIDS crisis. J.L. King, the author of *On the Down Low: A Journey into the Lives of "Straight" Men Who Sleep with Men* (Harmony), was a primary guest.

Several organizations specifically addressing HIV/AIDS in the Black community sprouted. One of the most prominent is the Los Angeles–based Black AIDS Institute, cofounded in 1999 by Phil Wilson, a gay Black man living with HIV/AIDS. The Black AIDS Institute mobilized Black media and Black institutions such as churches to acknowledge the HIV/AIDS epidemic in order to prevent its spread early in the epidemic. It also provided the latest information on treatment and government funding. BET's "Rap It Up" campaign enlisted Black celebrities such as singer Mary J. Blige and rapper Common for public service announcements that encouraged Black Americans, especially teenagers, to take an HIV test. Raniyah Copeland took over as president of the Black AIDS Institute from Wilson in 2019.

The Atlanta-based SisterLove Inc., founded in 1989, was among the first organizations to specifically cater to Black women affected by HIV/AIDS. Efforts from organizations such as these contributed significantly to limiting the spread of HIV/AIDS. According to `HIV.gov`, HIV diagnoses for Black women fell 20 percent from 2011 to 2015, but in 2016, Black women still accounted for 61 percent of all HIV diagnoses for women. And in 2018, Black people, according to the CDC, were 42 percent of the nearly 40,000 new HIV cases at only 13 percent of the total population.

The Racial Divide

Several events in the 1990s indicated that opinions held by Black and white Americans on race differed greatly. Two of the most explosive events occurred in Los Angeles — the 1992 L.A. riots and the 1995 O.J. Simpson verdict. Riots in other cities such as Cincinnati in 2001 showed that L.A. wasn't an isolated incident. The 41 shots NYC police officers fired in the 1999 death of Amadou Diallo and the 50 shots NYC police officers fired in the death of Sean Bell a day before his wedding in 2006 were further evidence of the persistence of police brutality. In addition, there was also the horrific 1998 dragging death of James Byrd Jr. by three white male supremacists Shawn Berry, Lawrence Brewer, and John William King in Jasper, Texas that left Byrd's remains in 81 places, including his severed right arm and head.

For many Americans, Black and white, the local, state, and federal response to the many Black Americans standing atop roofs following Hurricane Katrina had racial

and class undertones unacceptable for the 21st century. Even as the world settled into a new century, the racism and bigotry of the old centuries continued.

L.A. riots

Charges of police brutality in Los Angeles largely went unheard until the Rodney King incident. Rappers and political activists had long proclaimed the LAPD was out of control. Proof wasn't delivered, however, until a wayward video camera captured the brutal police beating of Rodney King by four LAPD officers (three white and one Latino) in March 1991.

As news programs around the nation broadcast the footage, few banked on any jury acquitting the four officers. On April 29, 1992, when a mostly white jury in predominantly white Simi Valley did just that, the predominantly Black South Central Los Angeles erupted in violence within hours. Two days later, the violence, which included rampant looting, reached its highest intensity; it continued for almost a week before the California National Guard and federal troops quelled the disturbance.

Between 50 and 60 people lost their lives, and as many as 2,000 suffered injuries. News cameras caught Black youth brutally beating white truck driver Reginald Denny. Authorities arrested nearly 10,000 people, mostly Black or Latino. Property damage estimates ranged up to $1 billion with more than 1,000 buildings destroyed. Korean merchants suffered greatly, but so did Black business owners.

Latasha Harlins's killing also played a role in the riots. Two weeks after King's savage beating in March, a security camera captured Korean shop owner Soon Ja Du fatally shooting Harlins for allegedly stealing a $1.79 bottle of orange juice. Du's suspended sentence, 400 hours of community service, $500 restitution, and five-year probation angered Black Angelenos. For Black Los Angeles, the overall disregard for Black life by the courts was unacceptable.

The O.J. Simpson verdict

Perhaps few other incidents illuminated racial chasms better than the O.J. Simpson verdict. One of the nation's most popular celebrities at the time, former NFL star Simpson was charged with the murder of his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ron Goldman, both white, in June 1994. Simpson spent a reported $4 million on his legal team, which included Black attorney Johnnie Cochran. Christopher Darden, another Black attorney, worked for the prosecution. The defense's accusation of the LAPD planting evidence gained credence when police officer Mark Fuhrman lied under oath, testifying that he'd never used racial epithets yet was later heard on audiotapes doing otherwise. A glove found at the crime scene became another prominent feature of the case when it didn't fit

Simpson's hand. In his closing argument, Cochran told the jury, "If it doesn't fit, you must acquit," and that's exactly what happened on October 3, 1995.

Racial perceptions make Simpson's acquittal significant. White Americans felt Simpson was guilty but acquitted because of his money and celebrity status. While many Black Americans didn't disagree with that conclusion, they weren't outraged by the verdict; instead, they felt Simpson simply bought his acquittal just as wealthy white men in similar positions had done for years. Mainstream white circles ostracized Simpson; Black Americans who believed he was guilty didn't react as strongly. When it came to dispelling doubts about whether he committed the double murders, Simpson proved to be his own worst enemy. His proposed 2006 book *If I Did It* generated such outrage that the publisher's parent company refused to release the completed book.

Popular culture relived the O.J. saga in 2016, first with *The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story,* a limited series on FX in the first part of the year. It was followed a few months later by the documentary *O.J.: Made in America* on both ABC and ESPN. Although *The People v. O.J. Simpson*, which aired from February to April, had laser focus on the murders and the trial, the five-part, nearly eight-hour documentary *O.J.: Made in America,* spearheaded by Black director/producer Ezra Edelman, put his focus on what made O.J. in the first place; it reminded audiences exactly why he captivated the country as well as how it all went wrong. The documentary won both an Oscar and an Emmy while Courtney B. Vance and Sterling K. Brown won Emmys for their performances as Johnnie Cochran and Christopher Darden.

A modern-day lynching

Random violence against Black Americans persisted into the latter half of the 20th century. Perhaps most brutal was the 1998 dragging death of James Byrd Jr. in Jasper, Texas. Byrd accepted a ride home from three white men who severely beat him, chained him to the back of their truck, and dragged him about 3 miles, severing his head. They even dumped his torso in front of a Black church and cemetery.

Unlike in decades before, however, justice was swift, as two men received the death penalty and one received life in prison. In response to the crime, some Texans pushed for the passage of hate crime legislation, which then-Governor George W. Bush opposed. In 2001, the Texas legislature passed the James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Act. The bill underscored intolerance for crimes motivated by factors such as race and sexual orientation by enhancing penalties for these crimes. Again, this was a strong and positive change in race relations. In 2019, nearly 21 years after Byrd's death, John William King was executed for the murder; Lawrence Brewer was executed in 2011.

Hurricane Katrina

Most of the nation watched news broadcasts stunned as Hurricane Katrina, a Category 3 storm, ravaged New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast in August 2005. As television news crews and others entered New Orleans to cover the story, people began to question why the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) wasn't already on site doing something. When the levees broke, many viewers couldn't believe their eyes as day after day, fellow Americans, overwhelmingly Black and impoverished, stood on rooftops seeking refuge from the floodwater and waiting for help that was extremely delayed. In too many instances, it took six days for help to arrive.

When help finally arrived, New Orleans's Black Mayor Ray Nagin and Louisiana's white female governor Kathleen Blanco played the blame game. In the midst of all this, Black Americans in particular began asking, "Where is Bush?" Rapper/producer Kanye West expressed the unspoken thoughts of many when he stated, "George [W.] Bush doesn't care about Black people" during a live telethon to benefit Hurricane Katrina victims.

Although more Black Americans than white Americans already believed race and class motivated the government inaction on the behalf of Black Americans, Hurricane Katrina brought more mainstream attention and evidence to those issues. Media outlets referred to fleeing New Orleans residents as "refugees" instead of "evacuees" or portrayed hungry Black Americans as looters and white Americans as "finding food"; these differences opened up long overdue discussions about race and class in the media. *The New York Times* even apologized for not addressing poverty in New Orleans during most of its coverage. CNN anchor Soledad O'Brien took FEMA director Mike Brown to task on air for the agency's lack of urgent response.

Ordinary citizens responded to the needs of survivors far more quickly than FEMA or other governmental agencies. They rallied about how the government and insurance companies didn't provide much-needed assistance like food, clothing, housing, and money. Various cities, large and small, began accepting longtime Black New Orleanians among its residents. There were also pushes to restore New Orleans so generational residents could return.

In addition to efforts to rebuild housing and reopen schools, businesses were encouraged to invest in New Orleans to get the city back up and running. ESSENCE Fest, one of the city's biggest events and arguably the biggest attracting Black attendees, returned in 2007. Later that same year, *City Journal,* a Manhattan Institute publication, reported that prior to Katrina, New Orleans had nearly 326,000 Black residents. In 2020, it had only 233,000. What became clear is that race was still a paramount issue well into the 21st century. Director Spike Lee highlighted these issues in his HBO docuseries, *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (2006) and *If God Is Willing and da Creek Don't Rise* (2010). As the nation dug even deeper into the new century, it just couldn't hide the impact systemic racism continued to have on it.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Recalibrating in the 21st century
- Electing the first Black president
- Fighting for justice with Black Lives Matter
- Standing up for democracy

Chapter 11

The New Civil Rights — Obama, Black Lives Matter, and Beyond

As the 2000s truly got going, it became increasingly clear that the new millennium wasn't the complete reset many had hoped. The government's poor response to victims of Hurricane Katrina, who were overwhelmingly Black and poor in New Orleans demonstrated that the nation hadn't moved nearly as far as it had promised. Still the 2000s did offer glimmers of hope. What the political power leaders like Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., and others envisioned was becoming reality, with one of the biggest prizes being realized. But one thing wouldn't change: Racial injustice seemed to be a fixture of American life.

Beginning with the death of Trayvon Martin, the heartbreak wouldn't stop. And the police were among the main culprits. In city after city, Black people were being shot to death, and there appeared to be zero accountability. Proclaiming that "Black Lives Matter" was necessary, and so began the "New Civil Rights Movement," only it wasn't new at all. As Donald J. Trump's presidency echoed the nation's ugly past, the present kept getting uglier — not because he was the spark, but because many things had sadly never changed. Minneapolis police officer

Derek Chauvin's foot to George Floyd's neck as he called for his mother, captured on video, was the lightbulb for many others who hadn't gotten the message previously. That, followed by the realization that Louisville police killed Breonna Taylor in her home and walked away, further underscored how deeply unjust the country remained. And not even elation over the ascension of Kamala Harris to Vice President of the United States, the first woman to ever hold the position, could offset the persistence of racism and injustice further exposed by the global COVID-19 pandemic and the Capitol Riot on January 6, 2021. This chapter chronicles that reality as the nation, Black Americans specifically, remained at the crossroads.

Gaining the Presidency

On February 10, 2007, when Barack Obama, then the only Black senator in Congress, joined the 2008 presidential race, political pundits welcomed him as a Democratic candidate to watch. Few, however, gave Obama a shot at actually winning. Born in Honolulu, Hawaii on August 4, 1961 to a white mother from Wichita, Kansas, and a Kenyan father, his story just didn't fit any script. A month prior, former first lady Hillary Clinton had announced her candidacy and was a presumed frontrunner. As an Illinois state senator in the race for the U.S. Senate, Obama had given the 2004 Democratic National Convention keynote address (during which John Kerry was officially nominated for president) and became an instant favorite predicted to one day become president. But, again, only a few could see that day coming so soon.

Obama's 2008 campaign

Despite being a graduate of both Columbia University and Harvard Law School and meeting his future wife, Michelle LaVaughn Robinson, a Chicago native who had graduated from Princeton as well as Harvard Law School, while working for a law firm in Chicago, Obama had a personal narrative relatable to many newer Americans. He was biracial and had one parent, albeit absent, who was an immigrant. As a longtime community organizer, he had been at the forefront of helping people. For Black Americans, he had the benefit of living in Chicago, recognized as a premier Black city with a long tradition of Black power brokers and a history of being at the forefront of issues confronting Black people. He also was married to a Black woman whose roots were firmly planted in this country for generations.

The campaign wasn't smooth and had racial hiccups along the way:

- Michelle was portrayed as an "angry Black woman" as early as June 2008, with the notoriously conservative Fox News leading the charge.

- Obama, himself, was questioned about his faith, with some conservatives alleging he was secretly Muslim, a charge that had been leveled at him when he campaigned for his Senate seat in 2004. One rumor was he had used the Qur'an instead of a Bible to be sworn into his Senate seat. The reasoning behind these attacks was that the many Americans who presumed Muslims to be terrorists would make the same connection with Obama. The rumor of him being an undercover Muslim became so prominent that presidential debate moderator Brian Williams asked him about it during the January 15, 2008 presidential debate.
- In addition, his longtime Christian pastor Jeremiah Wright of Chicago's Trinity United Church of Christ was accused of being anti-American, with news outlets like ABC News offering several of his sermons as proof. Obama denounced Wright's controversial remarks in an impassioned speech "A More Perfect Union," strategically delivered at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia on March 18, 2008. That May, he and wife Michelle withdrew their membership from Trinity.

Still, by building a coalition consisting of young voters of various ethnic and racial backgrounds, including the Black community, Obama became the nation's 44th president (see Figure 11-1), serving two terms with former longtime Delaware Senator Joe Biden as his vice president. During his victory speech in Chicago's Grant Park November 4, 2008, with Michelle and daughters Sasha and Malia by his side, cameras caught longtime civil rights leader Jesse Jackson, who had coincidentally been critical of Obama early in his run, in the crowd with tears of pride in his eyes.

Celebrations took place in various cities. Atlanta-based rapper Young Jeezy released "My President," also known as "My President Is Black," featuring New York City rapper Nas on November 15 and the video on November 23. Hip hop had been an important political factor in Obama's win, especially in motivating ex-felons to regain their voting rights or advocating for them, and the community was elated by his win.

The Age of Obama, 2008–2016

Obama's inauguration on January 20, 2009, was the largest attended presidential inauguration in the nation's history. For reelection in 2012, Obama once again won convincingly. For his second inauguration, held January 21, 2013, he was sworn in using bibles from both Abraham Lincoln and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



FIGURE 11-1: President Barack Obama with his family.

everett25/Depositphotos

A Black family in the White House was a tremendous boon to many aspects of American life. Never before had the country had such representation at its highest governmental level. That diversity or portrait of a Black family, or what many termed "Black excellence," appeared to spur more Black inclusion in various industries, including book publishing as well as film and TV. In addition to openly embracing Black culture, the Obamas welcomed and championed diversity and inclusion across the board. That, however, didn't shield them from criticism by the Republicans. Also some Black Americans felt that Obama, because he was so multicultural, wasn't doing enough for the specific needs of the Black community. But that was far from the truth. Under Obama, there were actually tremendous gains for the Black community. (Many of President Trump's later policies overturned them.)

Black community gains

During Obama's two terms, the Black community made some notable gains. Black incarceration rates fell every year of his presidency, with imprisonment rates for Black men and women dropping to their lowest levels since the late 1980s and 1990s. On the federal bench, Obama made 62 lifetime appointments of Black judges, 26 of them women. In fact, he appointed more Black women judges than any other president in history. Spelman alum Judge Tanya Walton Pratt, who became the first Black federal judge in Indiana history, and Mississippi native Judge Debra M. Brown, the first Black woman to be confirmed to a federal judgeship in Mississippi, are among them. In all, 19 percent of Obama's confirmed judges were Black, as compared to 16 percent by Clinton, 7 percent by Bush, and 4 percent by Trump.

BLACK AND LGBTQ

The Black LGBTQ (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer) community has historically been a vital part of the Black community at large. From blues legend Ma Rainey to Moms Mabley and Langston Hughes, to James Baldwin and Alvin Ailey, the contributions have been countless. The HIV/AIDS crisis, however, stigmatized the Black LGBTQ community for a while.

In the past, LGBTQ leaders like civil rights activist Bayard Rustin — a key advisor to the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the main organizer of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom — among many others who made significant contributions weren't recognized in their full truth. Some experts argue that the Black Church played a key role in shaping anti-gay attitudes, even though homosexuality's harshest critics frequently cite the Bible as justification for their condemnation of homosexuality across the board.

In the early 2000s, activists such as political expert Keith Boykin and Jasmyne Cannick challenged those attitudes and were among the many who helped raise positive awareness for the Black LGBTQ community. Pop culture, however, has played one of the biggest roles in changing attitudes. Director Barry Jenkins's 2016 film *Moonlight,* a coming-of-age story spanning from childhood, adolescence, and adulthood charting one man's recognition and acceptance of his sexuality, helped to paint a tender and more accepting picture for many people; the story was inspired by a Tarell Alvin McCraney play.

Actress Gabrielle Union and her retired NBA husband Dwyane Wade publicly sharing their support of Wade's trans teen Zaya (born Zion) Wade, who came out publicly in 2019, was a beacon of light to many. Best known for his country-tinged hit rap single "Old Town Road," initially released in 2018, Atlanta-based rapper Lil Nas X made a big impact when he publicly revealed he was gay on June 30, 2019, the last day of Pride month. Trans actress Laverne Cox of *Orange Is the New Black* fame, comedian Wanda Sykes, news trailblazers Don Lemon and Robin Roberts, actress/producer Raven-Symoné, bounce rap artist Big Freedia, fashion guru Andre Leon Talley, and activist Angela Davis are just a sampling of those in the Black LGBTQ community whose substantial contributions continue to benefit the Black community at large. Arguably the most impactful of them all are Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors — two of the three Black Lives Matter founders — who identify as queer.

Black unemployment fell from 16.8 percent in March 2010 to 8.3 percent in December 2015, its lowest level since September 2007. Bailing out the auto industry, according to *Black Enterprise*, was a lifesaver to countless Black businesses; their presence in that supply chain represented roughly 42 percent of the $24.6 billion in 2011 revenue generated by those on the magazine's BE 100s list,

which ranks the top 100 black enterprises. In addition, the Affordable Care Act (ACA), popularly known as Obamacare, provided many independent contractors and employees of small businesses with much-needed healthcare. Most importantly, many average Black Americans gained access to healthcare that otherwise wouldn't have had it.

Throughout 2020, *The New York Times*, Vox.com, and other outlets credited the Affordable Care Act with helping millions during the COVID-19 pandemic. (In fact, *U.S. News & World Report* contributor Jonathan Metzl called President Donald Trump's continued efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act — even during a pandemic — "among his most racially divisive acts.") Black lifespan even expanded under Obama, and the rate of Black children in poverty fell by 4.2 percent.

The Black high school graduation rate hit its highest level. Pell Grant funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) grew from $523 million in 2007 to $824 million under Obama. To help young boys and teens of color reach their full potential, Obama launched the My Brother's Keeper initiative in 2014. In addition, Obama's many progressive LGBTQ initiatives, such as making way for the Supreme Court to approve same-sex marriage, and his 2014 executive order prohibiting discrimination from federal contractors across the board, benefitted the Black LGBTQ community (see the nearby sidebar).

Black Lives Matter Emerges

As much as Obama accomplished for Black Americans during his two terms as president, combating racial injustice remained a challenge. Early in his presidency, in 2009, he stumbled while addressing racial profiling in his response to Cambridge, Massachusetts police arresting Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates as he attempted to break into his own house after misplacing his keys. That resulted in an awkward and highly criticized "Beer Summit" at the White House with Gates, the arresting officer James Crowley, Vice President Biden, and Obama.

Just as his first administration came to a close, the question of race exploded in a way reminiscent of Emmett Till's tragic death in 1955 with the killing of Florida teen Trayvon Martin. The circumstances surrounding his death and the judicial response, coupled with the explosion of social media, placed the fight for justice back in the national spotlight.

I am Trayvon

On February 26, 2012, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was killed by 28-year-old George Zimmerman. Wearing a hoodie and talking to his friend Rachel Jeantel on his cell, with Skittles and Arizona Watermelon fruit juice cocktail in hand, Martin was followed by Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer, in Sanford, Florida. Martin was staying in the gated community with his father, Tracy Martin, and his father's fiancée, Natalie Jackson. Zimmerman had called 911 and reported Martin as suspicious. Although he was instructed by the 911 operator not to follow Martin, he did anyway.

Zimmerman claimed Martin attacked him, jumping him and beating him up to the point that he feared for his life. Consequently, he fatally shot him with a 9 mm semiautomatic handgun. Martin was unarmed. Zimmerman, who didn't go to the hospital, was taken in for questioning and released, with the Sanford Police Department declaring that its questioning and investigation revealed that Zimmerman had acted in self-defense in his killing of Trayvon Martin. A later medical report revealed that Zimmerman had a broken nose, black eyes, cuts on the back of his head, and a minor back injury. These injuries were offered as justification for him fatally shooting Martin.

Because Martin had no identification on him, his body was sent to the morgue and he was tagged "John Doe." His family learned of his death only after his father Tracy filed a missing person's report on February 28, 2012.

Bringing charges

Tracy and Trayvon's mother, Sabrina Fulton, brought in Florida-based attorney Benjamin Crump, who had a successful history representing families in similar cases. He, however, had no legal recourse to deal with Zimmerman criminally. Florida Governor Rick Scott appointed Angela Corey, the state attorney for the Florida counties Duval, Clay, and Nassau, as special prosecutor in the Martin investigation on March 22, 2012. On April 11, 2012, Zimmerman was charged with second-degree murder.

The circumstances surrounding Martin's killing created much dialogue around racial profiling and the lack of accountability when Black people are killed, as well as around Stand Your Ground laws. The Sanford Police Department consistently maintained that there was no evidence of wrongdoing on Zimmerman's part, validating his claims of self-defense.

Some people asked how Martin was suspicious or planning to rob anybody if he was in conversation on his cell phone. In Zimmerman's 911 call, he told the dispatcher, "This guy looks like he's up to no good, or he's on drugs or something. It's raining, and he's just walking around." Martin was walking home after going

to the store. Also, Zimmerman ignored instructions to remain in his car until the police arrived and confronted Martin anyway. Profiling actually played a role in his being charged. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the U.S. Department of Justice under U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder, and the FBI, all investigated the case.

On TV, some legal experts, overwhelmingly white, shifted the blame to Martin, claiming, as Zimmerman had, that he shot the unarmed teen in self-defense. They questioned his style of dress. Fox News host Geraldo Rivera claimed that Martin's hoodie was to blame. Supporters of Martin, like NBA players LeBron James and Dwyane Wade of the Miami Heat, donned hoodies in protest. Florida high school students staged walkouts.

Opening statements for *Florida v. George Zimmerman* began June 24, 2013, with Zimmerman being acquitted on July 13, 2013. Legal scholars long criticized Corey for charging Zimmerman with second-degree murder because they doubted the charge would result in a conviction. Others questioned if the American legal system had any measures to even protect the nation's Trayvon Martins. The various investigations, including the one by Holder's Department of Justice, closed without further charging Zimmerman, largely citing insufficient evidence. Some would later tie Zimmerman's defense and acquittal to the controversial "Stand Your Ground" legislation, allowing people to use deadly force to defend themselves that often resulted in legal conclusions overwhelmingly justifying the actions of white alleged killers when the victims were Black, but Zimmerman never used it for his defense. He used basic self-defense in his acquittal.

Obama's response

After the failed Beer Summit, Obama rarely made overtly racial addresses but spoke up a few times in the tragic killing of Martin in 2012, his re-election year, and 2013, the first year of his second term. Speaking from the Rose Garden on March 23, 2012, President Obama, in a rare racial address as president, offered words of comfort to Martin's family and told reporters, "If I had a son, he'd look like Trayvon." After the verdict acquitting Zimmerman, he spoke again.



On July 19, 2013, after a week of robust dialogue in the nation, President Obama told reporters "You know, when Trayvon Martin was first shot I said that this could have been my son. Another way of saying that is Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago. And when you think about why, in the African American community at least, there's a lot of pain around what happened here, I think it's important to recognize that the African American community is looking at this issue through a set of experiences and a history that doesn't go away. There are very few African American men in this country who haven't had the experience of being followed when they were shopping in a department store. That includes me."

Enter #BlackLivesMatter



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Bay Area queer activist Alicia Garza's response to Zimmerman's acquittal of killing Martin, often described as the "Emmett Till" of the 21st century, was a Facebook post where she wrote "btw stop saying we are not surprised. that's a damn shame in itself. I continue to be surprised at how little Black lives matter. And I will continue that. stop giving up on black life."

Her friend and fellow West Coast–based queer activist Patrisse Cullors captured Garza's sentiments in the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, and their other fellow activist Opal Tometi, who was based in New York and specializing in immigration, created the movement's social media presence. Together, the three of them launched the seeds of Black Lives Matter (BLM), a loose confederation of organizations and individuals challenging police brutality and advocating for racial justice. It would become increasingly impactful during the following year and throughout the Trump administration.



TECHNICAL STUFF

Although the official name Black Lives Matter (see Figure 11-2) can be pinpointed to the day Zimmerman was acquitted for killing Martin, the spirit of the work and core values that guide BLM, according to Garza, began in the Bay Area with the police killing of Oscar Grant. Less than three years prior to Martin's killing, BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) police officer Johannes Mehserle fatally shot 22-year-old Oscar Grant in the wee hours of New Year's Day 2009. Garza became involved in the protests demanding justice through her trans male activist partner Malachi Garza. *Black Panther* and *Creed* director Ryan Coogler dramatized the killing in his 2013 film, *Fruitvale Station;* its release coincided with Zimmerman's trial.



Jamie Grill/AGE Fotostock

FIGURE 11-2: Black Lives Matter.

Ferguson explodes: Michael Brown and the impact of Eric Garner's death

The 2014 uprisings in Ferguson, Missouri, a Black enclave just outside St. Louis, may have put the biggest spotlight on BLM. The protests erupted after 22-year-old police officer Darren Wilson fatally shot 18-year-old Michael Brown on August 9, 2014, and left his body lying in the street for four hours. Brown's crime was stealing Swisher cigarettes from a corner store, but there was considerable reason to believe that the officer wasn't even aware of that allegation. Brown was unarmed. According to Wilson, Brown tried to reach into his police car and take his gun. Within 90 seconds of answering the call, Wilson had shot Brown dead with six gunshots.

Just a few weeks prior, on July 17, 2014, two New York City Police Department officers, particularly Daniel Pantaleo, reportedly used a chokehold that killed 43-year-old Eric Garner, a father of six and grandfather of three. Although Garner's alleged crime that day was selling loose cigarettes illegally, no evidence was ever discovered of him even doing so. Copwatch member Ramsey Orta videoed the killing. On the video, Garner could be heard saying, "I can't breathe" 11 times while face down on the sidewalk. An autopsy ruled his death a homicide. So that was already the temperature when Michael Brown was fatally shot by Wilson in Ferguson.

Brooklyn-based writer/activist Darnell Moore, also a friend of BLM co-founder Patrisse Cullors, began coordinating "freedom rides" from various cities, including New York City, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Baltimore native DeRay McKesson, a teacher in Minneapolis at the time, connected with fellow Teach for America alum Britney Packnett prior to arriving and also connected with Johnetta Elzie. Together they provided updates via social media about the Ferguson protests, which had significant grassroots organizers. In fact, some people have contested the credit given to BLM because they had no chapter in the area and didn't officially spearhead the protests there. But the protests in Ferguson was still in line with the BLM platform to stand up against police brutality.

By the time mainstream media began showing images from Ferguson, police in riot gear had moved in. Protesters were tear gassed, and prompted by some witness accounts that Brown had put his hands up prior to being killed, began raising their hands, chanting "hands up, don't shoot." Less-controlled factions also moved into Ferguson, escalating the violence and the arrests. Protests in Ferguson lasted over several months. Yet no charges against the officers were issued for the deaths of Michael Brown or Eric Garner in either city.

Police killings continue: Tamir Rice and Laquan McDonald

The police killings didn't stop, however. White police officer Timothy Loehmann reportedly fatally shot 12-year-old Tamir Rice, who had been playing with a toy gun in a Cleveland park on November 22, 2014. A year later, a grand jury declined to indict. Both Loehmann and his partner, Frank Garmback, had questionable backgrounds. Loehmann's previous police department in Independence, Ohio, only miles away from Cleveland, claimed that Loehmann had resigned to avoid termination due to his lack of emotional stability to function as a police officer. That same year, the City of Cleveland had settled an excessive force lawsuit brought against Garmback for $100,000 that hadn't been placed in his file.

Before 2017 closed out, Chicago erupted in protests, too. Dashcam video of Chicago police officer Jason Van Dyke firing 16 shots at 17-year-old Laquan McDonald, killing him on October 20, 2014, was released on November 24, 2015. It was also revealed that Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel had delayed the video's release after seeing it. On the heels of this and other offenses, Emanuel didn't seek a third term as mayor. In 2018, Van Dyke became the first Chicago police officer convicted of murder for an on-duty police shooting in roughly 50 years.

Baltimore Rising: Freddie Gray

In 2015, BLM continued to be a needed reminder as several protests took place throughout the country. On April 12, 2015, Baltimore City Police arrested 25-year-old Freddie Gray for possessing a knife, later revealed to be a legal pocketknife. During police van transport, Gray suffered injuries to his neck, spinal cord, and vocal box, requiring hospitalization. Not long after, he fell into a coma. There was no explanation regarding what caused his injuries, though he was fine when he was arrested.

Hundreds of protesters gathered outside the police station, protesting Gray's mistreatment on April 18, some in the name of BLM. When he passed away the next day, the outrage only grew. Two days later, on April 21, the Baltimore Police Department released the names of the six officers. By the end of the month, chaos was afoot, with the protests taking its most violent turn in some areas on April 27 after Gray's service and burial. Vehicles and some buildings were set on fire. More than 200 people were arrested.

The next day, the national guard was brought in. The unrest continued from April 29 to May 3. In between all of this, an autopsy ruling Gray's death a homicide prompted Maryland Attorney General Marilyn Mosby to charge all six officers on May 1. Both Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake and Obama denounced

the violence. Obama had strong words for the "criminals and thugs who tore up" Baltimore and was criticized for his references.

Gray and the Baltimore Uprisings, or Baltimore Riots, as some call them, showed that anti-Black police brutality could even happen in a city like Baltimore, with a Black mayor and Black police officers not far from a White House occupied by a Black president. A year later, three of the six officers were acquitted with charges against the remaining three dropped.

The Charleston Church Massacre

Not long after the unrest in Baltimore, another tragedy occurred. During Bible study at Charleston, South Carolina's Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, better known as Mother Emanuel, on June 17, a 21-year-old white supremacist Dylan Roof opened fire, killing nine people, including its 41-year-old senior pastor and state senator Clementa Pinckney. Cynthia Marie Graham Hurd (54); Susie Jackson (87); Ethel Lee Vance (70); Depayne Middleton Doctor (49); Tywanza Sanders (26); Daniel L. Simmons (74); Sharonda Coleman-Singleton (45); and Myra Thompson (59) were the other victims.

Founded in 1818, Mother Emanuel is one of the oldest continuous Black churches in the nation. The culprit, however, wasn't gunned down when he was apprehended in a manhunt the next morning about 245 miles away from the crime. Authorities found white supremacist material, as well as a website touting white supremacy and communication with other white supremacists. Brought up on state and federal charges, he was sentenced to both life in prison and death, the latter of which he appealed.

President Obama gave the eulogy at the service for Reverend Pinckney on June 26, unexpectedly leading attendees in a moving rendition of "Amazing Grace." A couple of weeks later, on July 10, South Carolina finally removed the Confederate battle flag from its statehouse grounds.

Say Her Name: Sandra Bland

On July 13 in Waller County, Texas, 28-year-old Sandra Bland's body was found hanging from a jail cell. Bland, a Chicago-area native, had attended college at Prairie View A&M, an HBCU in Waller County, where she was set to begin a job. Bland was stopped by Texas state trooper Brian Encinia on July 10 for failure to signal a lane change after she had changed lanes to allow him to pass because he was following her closely.

When Bland indicated she was irritated and asked why she had to put her cigarette out, Encinia requested that Bland, who was involved in BLM activism, get out of the car. Initially she refused. When she did exit, dashcam and independently shot video show they argued, with Bland at some point not visible but heard screaming and crying. Bland was arrested and hit with a $5,000 bond but couldn't find anyone with the $500 to bail her out. On July 13, police reported they found Bland, who was later reported to have mental health and substance issues, dead, hanging in her cell via a plastic bag. An autopsy ruled her death a suicide and noted unusually high THC levels connected to marijuana use in her body. All of these details seemed to detract from why Bland was stopped in the first place.

Investigations yielded no convictions. Encinia, the arresting officer, was himself arrested for perjury, but that charge was ultimately dropped in exchange for him never seeking any employment in law enforcement. A wrongful death lawsuit was settled for $1.9 million. The state passed the Texas Senate Bill 1849, also known as the Sandra Bland Act, changing corrections and policing policy for dealing with those with mental health and substance issues that went into effect on September 1, 2017.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Because the bill failed to address critical issues in Bland's arrest, her sister Sharon Cooper, who also served as the family's spokesperson, blasted it before it even became law. "It's a complete oversight of the root causes of why she was jailed in the first place," she told The Texas Tribune in May 2017. The 2018 documentary, *Say Her Name: The Life and Death of Sandra Bland*, exploring the incident aired on HBO. Bland's death served as a reminder to many that Black men weren't the only targets of injustice. That awareness resulted in the use of the "Say Her Name" hashtag (#sayhername) to amplify the deaths of Black women by police like unarmed 22-year-old Rekia Boyd who was fatally shot in 2012 by Chicago Police officer Dante Servin, whom a judge acquitted in 2015.

Colin Kaepernick Kneels and Donald Trump Reacts

The summer prior to the start of the 2016–2017 NFL season, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick began sharing various posts about the police killings of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. Sterling was a Baton Rouge, Louisiana man whom police officer Blane Salamoni had fatally shot six times while he and his partner Howie Lake had him pinned down. Castile was fatally shot by officer Jeronimo Yanez on July 6, 2016, during a traffic stop in a suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota, as Castile's girlfriend, Diamond Reynolds, recorded the incident on Facebook Live with her 4-year-old daughter in the car. Kaepernick also commented about the Baltimore police acquittal in Freddie Gray's death.



These incidents prompted Kaepernick to remain seated for the national anthem. After three preseason games of not standing, NFL media reporter Steve Wyche asked him about it. Kaepernick responded, "I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses [B]lack people and people of color . . .. To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder."

Kaepernick, joined by his teammate Eric Reid, later switched to kneeling, a more respectful posture. In his September 25, 2017 op-ed "Eric Reid: Why Colin Kaepernick and I Decided To Take A Knee" for *The New York Times*, Reid, who approached Kaepernick after their last preseason August 26, 2016 about getting involved with his protest and how they could make a more powerful statement, explained.



"After hours of careful consideration, and even a visit from Nate Boyer, a retired Green Beret and former NFL player, we came to the conclusion that we should kneel, rather than sit, the next day during the anthem as a peaceful protest," Reid wrote. "We chose to kneel because it's a respectful gesture. I remember thinking our posture was like a flag flown at half-mast to mark a tragedy."

Throughout the season, as Kaepernick knelt instead of standing, the protest became a hotbed issue, as other NFL players and collegiate and high school athletes began to join. Donald J. Trump had criticized Kaepernick almost immediately. On August 29, 2016, he told a conservative talk show radio host in Seattle that Kaepernick's actions were "a terrible thing" and suggested "maybe he should find a country that works better for him."

Trump responds

During his presidency, Trump was even more relentless in his opposition to Kaepernick and the kneeling he sparked. During a September 2017 rally in Alabama, Trump told the mostly white crowd, "Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, to say, 'Get that son of a b**** off the field right now. Out! He's fired. He's fired'" Days later, he claimed that the protests had resulted in an NFL ratings dip.



That same month, Trump also turned his Twitter ire on longtime sports journalist Jemele Hill, one of the rare Black women prominent in the field. The month before Hill, who was the co-host of *SC6* or *The Six*, which was a rebranded hour of the ESPN program *SportsCenter* that had just launched that February, got into a heated Twitter exchange on September 11. Subsequently, Hill tweeted a series of tweets, including "Donald Trump is a white supremacist who has largely surrounded himself w/ other white supremacists" and "Trump is the most ignorant, offensive president of my lifetime. His rise is a direct result of white supremacy. Period."

Hill's tweets came just weeks after violence erupted during the "Unite the Right" rally organized by white supremacists and white nationalists in Charlottesville, Virginia, that resulted in the death of white counter-protester Heather Heyer. Trump was criticized for not strongly condemning the violence and rally organizers.

Trump referenced Hill via Twitter. On October 10, he tweeted: "With Jemele Hill at the mike, it is no wonder ESPN ratings have "tanked," in fact, tanked so badly it is the talk of the industry!" Days after the initial series of tweets, White House secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders called Hill's comments regarding President Trump "a fireable offense" during a White House press briefing. Hill stood by her comments, issuing an apology only to her employer ESPN for making them in "a public way."

Trump praised Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones that same month for his statement to ESPN that players should face consequences for kneeling. "A big salute to Jerry Jones, owner of the Dallas Cowboys, who will BENCH players who disrespect our Flag. 'Stand for Anthem or sit for game!'," he tweeted.

Kaepernick opts out of his contract

In 2017, Kaepernick opted out of his contract after being informed he wouldn't start under new coach Kyle Shanahan. Players, however, continued to kneel and Trump continued to criticize NFL commissioner Roger Goodell for "allowing" players to kneel. In July 2018, he tweeted that "The NFL National Anthem Debate is alive and well again — can't believe it! Isn't it in contract that players must stand at attention, hand on heart?" He also urged Goodell to take action and suggested how. "The $40,000,000 Commissioner must now make a stand. First time kneeling, out for game. Second time kneeling, out for season/no pay!" he tweeted.

Kaepernick never played in the NFL again. Legal challenges to the NFL resulted in a settlement. Kaepernick, also a Nike spokesperson, became a powerful symbol in the BLM movement.

Change Gone Come: Trump, COVID-19, and George Floyd

Obama's election in 2008 inspired other Black people to run for various offices throughout the 2010s. Black women especially answered the call and were elected mayor in numerous cities, including Savannah, Georgia (Edna Johnson, 2011);

Gary, Indiana (Karen Freeman-Wilson, 2012); San Antonio, Texas (Ivy Taylor, 2014); Shreveport, Louisiana (Ollie Taylor, 2014); Rochester, New York (Lovely Warren, 2014); Flint, Michigan (Karen Weaver, 2015); Charlotte, North Carolina (Vi Lyles, 2017); New Orleans, (LaToya Cantrell, 2017); and San Francisco (London Breed, 2018). In 2019, Chicago elected Lori Lightfoot, making her the first woman and Black woman mayor of a top-three major American city as well as the first openly gay one.

But one of the most powerful sparks for this new political reawakening was the continued racial injustice, most exemplified by police killings of Black people often captured via cell phones, and Trump's presidency, where one of the main goals was rolling back all the gains achieved during Obama's administration. Very few areas were spared. In 2019, `Democrats.org` posted the article, "Trump's Policies Have Hurt African Americans" in response to Trump kicking off his Black Voices for Trump Coalition initiative.

Several points made include that Trump rolled back efforts that protected Black students from racially biased school discipline, sought to make legal aid less accessible plus contended that federal prisoners shouldn't be allowed to challenge their sentences in court, encouraged harsher sentences for drug offenses, reinstated the death penalty, rescinded Obama efforts to encourage diversity in public schools. and delayed implementing regulations addressing racial disparities in special needs programs in public schools.

Trump's attacks continue

Trump, who was a prominent voice in the birther attacks claiming that Obama wasn't born in this country and thus not eligible to serve as president, consistently made racially biased statements. *The New York Times* reported that two officials present during a 2017 meeting with Trump claimed Trump commented that Haitians had AIDS and Nigerians lived in huts. In July 2019, Trump shared a lengthy Twitter post proclaiming "Cumming [sic] District is a disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess," among other observations in reference to the predominantly Black Maryland district U.S. Congressman Elijah Cumming represented.

In July 2018, Trump referred to Maxine Waters, a veteran U.S. Congresswoman from California and one of his fiercest critics, as "an extraordinarily low IQ person," via tweet. The 2018 midterm elections in November resulted in the election of a record-number of women. One of Trump's new targets became The Squad, a group of progressive Congress members, overwhelmingly female, launched in 2018 with Representative Ayanna Pressley (the first Black woman elected to Congress from Massachusetts), Ilhan Omar of Minnesota (the first

Somali American to serve in Congress), Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) from the Bronx in New York City, and Michigan's Muslim Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib.

In July 2019, Trump also tweeted "So interesting to see "Progressive" Democrat Congresswomen, who originally came from countries whose governments are a complete and total catastrophe, the worst, most corrupt and inept anywhere in the world (if they even have a functioning government at all), now loudly . . ."

Stacey Abrams runs for governor in Georgia

Mississippi and Georgia-raised Stacey Abrams captured the nation's attention when she ran as the Democratic nominee for governor of Georgia in 2018, making her the first Black female major party gubernatorial candidate in the nation. An alum of Spelman College, University of Texas at Austin, and Yale Law School, she served in the Georgia House of Representatives from 2007 to 2017, taking on the role of minority leader from 2011 to 2017, prior to stepping down to run for governor.

Abrams's Republican opponent Brian Kemp, an unabashed Trump supporter, kept his job as Secretary of State even though his office oversaw the election. There was also evidence suggesting voter suppression on Kemp's part in his capacity as Secretary of State. In the end, Abrams lost by roughly 53,000 votes in what she and many others maintained wasn't a fair election.

COVID-19 exposes racial disparities

By March 2020, it started to become clear that the coronavirus pandemic first reported out of Wuhan, China in late 2019, was greatly impacting the United States, too. Initially, as President Trump hosted White House coronavirus (as it was popularly referred to then) briefings with Vice President Mike Pence technically serving as White House Coronavirus Task Force lead, Black Americans weren't addressed as a primary risk group. Some news media, like ABC's *Nightline*, were among the first to pick up on how hard the pandemic was hitting Black Americans. *Nightline* ran an early story about the 20 people or so who contracted the virus at funerals in the same funeral home between February 29 and March 7 in Albany, Georgia, which was more than 70 percent Black. For some, that was the first indication that corona or the 'rona, as many people called it, might be disproportionately affecting Black people.

As the world and the nation shut down, the reality that Black Americans were dying at disproportionately higher rates became impossible to ignore. In Chicago, for example, the American Medical Association noted that Black Chicagoans made up more than half of the city's COVID-19 deaths, though Black people were only 29 percent of the city's population. Numbers released by the Louisiana Department of Health on April 6, 2020, showed that Black Americans were 70 percent of all the state's COVID-19 deaths, despite being just 33 percent of the state's total population. The majority Black population of New Orleans was hardest hit. Mayor Cantrell took immediate action, canceling large gatherings. ESSENCE Festival of Culture, a huge source of revenue for the city attracting tens of thousands of Black people to the city, was officially canceled April 15.

Unable to wait on the government to help its Black citizens, community organizers and churches sprang into action. In Philadelphia, Dr. Ala Stanford formed the Black Doctors COVID-19 Consortium and offered free testing in church parking lots. Way Christian Center Pastor Michael McBride, in West Berkeley, California, joined forces with comedian W. Kamau Bell to launch Masks for the People, a joint initiative with Live Free and the Black Church Action Fund, to get personal protective equipment (PPE), hand sanitizer, and testing kits to nonmedical essential workers, those incarcerated, the homeless population, and others in poor urban and rural communities.

A September 2020 University of Utah Health study noted that Black essential workers died at higher rates than other Americans because they were far more likely to work in more vulnerable occupations, including food preparation, buildings and grounds maintenance, childcare, and more. Attention was also brought to the fact that many Black communities lacked adequate healthcare options, including hospitals and urgent care facilities.



REMEMBER

As vaccines became more readily available in early 2021, campaigns to erase many Black Americans' uneasiness to even take the vaccine were mounted. Distrust created by the history of the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, where Black men were injected with syphilis and largely untreated for it through a study by the U.S. Public Health Service at Tuskegee Institute (later University) from 1932 to 1972, among others lingered. Some became more at ease after learning that Dr. Kizzmekia "Kizzy" Corbett was a key leader in developing the Moderna vaccine. Black Americans willing to take a vaccine generally found that, as sparse as vaccines initially were in the nation at large, they were even harder to access in predominantly Black communities. As with testing and treatment throughout the pandemic, vaccines were also disproportionately unavailable to Black Americans initially.

"Stop killing us": George Floyd and Breonna Taylor

On May 25, 2020, an 8-minute, 46-second video shook the nation. It showed Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin holding his knee on 46-year-old George Floyd's neck and as Floyd said he could not breathe and called out for his mother — all over Floyd's alleged use of a $20 counterfeit bill at a local store. Officers J. Alexander Kueng and Thomas Lane helped Chauvin restrain Floyd as officer Tou Thao kept bystanders from interfering with Floyd's death.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, which made gathering in large crowds a health risk, tens of thousands of Americans of various racial and ethnic identities took to the streets in protest. That effort was matched abroad as well. Trump, however, didn't welcome the outrage, referring to Minneapolis protesters as "thugs." Aggressive policing only helped aggravate the situation in Minneapolis, especially where looting and the burning of some buildings also came into play.

Many believe the heightened attention George Floyd's killing brought to police brutality, systemic racism, and the overall lack of accountability in policing Black people and Black communities was a result of the COVID-19 shutdown. Also, news of the February killing of 25-year-ikd Ahmaud Arbery while he was jogging in Brunswick, Georgia, by two white men, loosely associated with law enforcement, was relatively fresh. The spotlight on Floyd also brought attention to the Louisville Metro Police Department's fatal shooting of 26-year-old Breonna Taylor in her home on March 13, especially the idea that officers Jonathan Mattingly, Brett Hankison, and Myles Cosgrove hadn't been charged. Celebrities like Oprah Winfrey lent their voices and platforms. Others such as Jamie Foxx, Ariana Grande, Machine Gun Kelly, Tessa Thompson, and Sophia Bush marched in BLM protests.

As the police killings continued with Rayshard Brooks in Atlanta and Andre Maurice Hill in Columbus, Ohio, cries for solutions to reform or defund the police — diverting more police funding into social services and even shifting 911 responses from police officers to social workers and other professionals — became louder. Some people even viewed the 2020 presidential election between Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden as a referendum on police brutality that could decide the nation's course on anti-Black violence as well as the pandemic response.



REMEMBER

CORPORATE AMERICA'S RESPONSE POST-GEORGE FLOYD

Corporations across the board announced broad investments promoting Black inclusion after George Floyd's death. Here are a few examples:

- PepsiCo unveiled a five-year, $400 million initiative to increase Black managerial representation by 30 percent as well as more than double the business it did with Black-owned suppliers.
- Bank of America pledged $1 billion to enhance economic opportunities in communities of color over a four-year period.
- Netflix announced its plan to put 2 percent of its cash holdings, starting with an initial $25 million, in Black financial institutions.

Other American institutions began to examine the structural barriers barring Black Americans from broader economic access, particularly as it related to Black business ownership. The reality has been that most Black entrepreneurs have historically been blocked from realizing significant wealth via business ownership. Lack of access to capital, especially via bank lending, was just one of the many inequities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The July 20, 2020, *Kellogg Insight* article "Black-Owned Businesses Often Struggle to Access Capital. Here's How Financial Institutions Can Change That," from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, cited that "One of the biggest barriers to Black and minority entrepreneurship stems from long-held beliefs by banks and other financial institutions that these entrepreneurs are higher-risk candidates for mortgages and other loans."

William Towns, adjunct lecturer of social impact at Kellogg and managing director of 4 S Bay Partners, LLC, a private equity fund targeting minority-operating businesses within opportunity zones in the Chicago area, observed that JPMorgan did more loans in the predominantly white Lincoln Park area of Chicago than it did in all the predominantly Black areas in the city combined.

And the December 31, 2020 article "To Expand the Economy, Invest in Black Businesses," by Andre M. Perry and Carl Romer from the Brookings Institution noted that according to the most recent Census Bureau data, "Black businesses comprise only 2.2% of the nation's 5.7 million employer businesses (firms with more than one employee)." Using data from the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, it noted that "only 1% of Black business owners were able to obtain loans in their founding year, compared to 7% of white business owners." In addition to Black entrepreneurs being denied loans or granted them at much lower amounts but at higher interest rates than their white counterparts, the article also noted that "only 1% of funded startup founders were Black, according to data analytics from CB Insights." So very clear barriers deterring Black business ownerships remained well into the 21st century.

The 2020 Election

On June 6, 2020, Joseph R. Biden officially became the Democratic nominee for president. U.S. Senators Cory Booker, who was once mayor of Newark, New Jersey, and Kamala Harris, the multiracial daughter of immigrants (with a mother from India and a father from Jamaica) who had served as California's attorney general, were unsuccessful in their 2020 presidential bids. Interestingly, Biden seized his victory largely due to a huge turnaround in the polls in South Carolina at the end of February driven by Black voters. Backed by South Carolina Congressman and House Majority Whip James "Jim" Clyburn, a respected Black leader, Biden grabbed 49 percent of the vote, overwhelmingly winning the Black vote and crushing all candidates.

As speculation mounted about Biden's choice for running mate, whom he had committed to making a woman, several Black women, including former Georgia gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, Atlanta Mayor and early Biden supporter Keisha Lance Bottoms, along with U.S. Congresswomen Val Demings from Florida and Karen Bass from California, appeared on the list. To the surprise of many, on August 11, Biden chose Harris, who, next to Vermont's Senator Bernie Sanders, had been among his fiercest challengers during their 2020 presidential bids.

Voting in the era of COVID-19

As the COVID pandemic continued, killing hundreds of thousands of Americans and wreaking havoc on the economy, disproportionately impacting Black Americans, and additional police killings and shootings without legal ramifications, democracy seemed more urgent than ever. Black groups got to work, especially in the South with Black Voters Matter headed by its co-founder LaTosha Brown and Fair Fight from Stacey Abrams.

Given the long lines during the 2018 elections prompted by broken voting machines in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, lack of voting machines at predominantly Black voting precincts in Atlanta, and more, there was ample reason to be proactive. As BLM protests continued and pro athletes like LeBron James and the entire WNBA lent their support, Trump's behavior worsened, with him calling for additional law enforcement to contain what he described as "anarchy."

Rappers get presidential

Defeating Trump was the order of the day, but not all Black people were on board the Democrat train to do it. In the weeks leading up to the election, rumblings against Black people blindly voting Democrat without any significant gains surfaced, most prominently through rapper/actor/film producer/Big3 team owner Ice Cube. Ice Cube came up with the Contract with Black America and caught flack in October 2020 for meeting with representatives of the Trump campaign, which added aspects of the Contract with Black America to Trump's Platinum Plan.

Days before the election, rapper Lil Wayne endorsed Trump, but it was also revealed that he was facing a criminal case and might need a pardon down the line. Rapper Kanye West even made a feeble attempt to run for president, securing ballot placements in 12 states. He reportedly garnered 60,000 votes.

The paperchase

With people not able to go to the polls in the way they were used to pre-COVID, voting via absentee ballots became one of the most viable options. Radio shows like the syndicated *Keeping It Real with Al Sharpton*, along with *The Karen Hunter Show* and *The Joe Madison Show* on the SiriusXM UrbanView channel on XM Satellite Radio, put extra effort into educating their listeners on how to vote either in person or via absentee voting, including when to mail ballots or use drop boxes, as well as how to find them. Virtual and in-person socially distanced rallies were held. Trump, by contrast, insisted on holding huge rallies that became super-spreader events. Black Republican Herman Cain passed from COVID after attending a June Trump rally in Tulsa. Phone banking, along with ample promo mailing, were also popular for reaching voters. Social media, like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and the iPhone-only app Clubhouse, became important platforms.

From the beginning, Trump, who had greatly downplayed the pandemic since the top of 2020, encouraged his base to ignore absentee voting in favor of voting in person. Legal teams working on behalf of Trump tried to limit the length of time in which ballots could be counted in several states, as well as get ballots that physically arrived after the November 3 election date thrown out. Ultimately, however, the laws in those states prevailed. Although absentee ballots weren't new to the voting process, they had never been this extensively used. Political experts warned that it would take days to declare a presidential winner.

Biden-Harris win

After numerous Trump legal challenges and endless claims of voter fraud, not to mention pro-Trump protests at key poll counting sites in Michigan, Arizona, and Pennsylvania, Trump, showing his racial bias, challenged Biden votes in predominantly Black areas like Detroit, Philadelphia, and Atlanta. Still, on November 7, the Biden-Harris win became official.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

That night, in Wilmington, Delaware, Harris, wearing a suffragette white pantsuit (see Figure 11-3), spoke of her Indian mother who immigrated to the United States, as well as the many women who had paved the way. She especially honored Black women's contributions to the fight for suffrage, equality and civil rights, acknowledging that Black women leaders are "too often overlooked, but so often prove that they are the backbone of our democracy." Stacey Abrams was among those women lauded for her efforts.



FIGURE 11-3: Vice President Kamala Harris.

Biden Campaign via CNP/Biden Campaign via CNP/AGE Fotostock

Former first lady and one-time New York U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton, who mounted two unsuccessful presidential runs in 2008 and 2016, was on pace to break the political glass ceiling for women. Instead, that distinction went to Harris, a graduate of the historically Black Howard University in Washington, D.C. as vice president, not president. "While I may be the first woman in this office, I will not be the last," Harris promised during her speech.

And it was the Black vote that largely carried the Biden-Harris team to victory, as they earned 87 percent of the Black vote, including victories in several states like Pennsylvania, Michigan, and especially Georgia, which voted blue in the presidential election for the first time since 1992. Feeling that Georgia was close, the Democrats sent out Obama, Harris, and Biden to campaign at drive-in or socially distanced rallies close to the election.

Overall 66 percent of eligible Americans voted, casting a total of 158 million ballots with Biden-Harris receiving 81 votes to roughly 74 million votes for Trump-Pence, indicating that Trump still had a strong grip on significant portions of the country.

Other election firsts

The 2020 election brought about some significant firsts. Promising news came out of Ferguson, Missouri, which was the site of a major racial reckoning in 2014. Less than a decade removed from the nationwide protests surrounding the police killing of Michael Brown, Ella Jones's election as the city's first Black mayor was significant. Similarly, Ferguson activist Cori Bush's win against a candidate whose family had occupied that seat for 52 years to become the first Black woman from Missouri to serve in Congress, was another one. In Congress, Bush immediately joined "The Squad."

On January 5, 2021, the two U.S. Senate seats in Georgia were up for grabs in a critical runoff. To get a clear Biden-Harris mandate for the senate, the Democrats needed to win both seats. Georgia native, Morehouse alum, and longtime pastor of Dr. King's home church, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Raphael Warnock, faced off against Republican and Trump supporter Kelly Loeffler for one. In December 2019, Georgia's Republican Governor Brian Kemp, a Trump supporter, appointed Loeffler to the seat when longtime Senator Johnny Isakson resigned for health reasons. The other candidate Jon Ossoff, a Jewish Georgian, was facing off against David Perdue. Through the efforts of Stacey Abrams and others, both Ossoff, who had worked under Congressman John Lewis, and Warnock, who was Lewis's longtime pastor, prevailed. Coming just months after the passing of Lewis (1940–2020), along with two other key civil rights titans — the Reverend Joseph E. Lowery (1921–2020) and the Reverend C.T. Vivian (1924–2020), these victories offered hope that the ideals of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s could one day become real. With his victory, Warnock became the very first Black U.S. Senator elected from Georgia.

Trump and the U.S. Capitol riot

Trump rejected the presidential election results. Refusing to concede to Biden, Trump hyped up his base of more than 70 million Americans that the election was fake and that he had actually won, despite the substantial math to the contrary and professional assessments from Trump's former director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Christopher Krebs and his Attorney General Will Barr, that there was no evidence of election fraud. In addition, his legal team lost more than 50 court challenges. Trump's denial that he lost the election resulted in a rally of Trump supporters that he personally addressed on January 6, 2021. It culminated in an attack on the U.S. Capitol building the day that Congress was to certify election results.

The event was reminiscent of actions taken in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1898, when a white mob attacked city hall; they dumped the white mayor who had won his election through a progressive coalition of white and Black male voters, replacing them and shutting off Black political access. *Wilmington's Lie: The Murderous Coup of 1898 and the Rise of White Supremacy* by David Zucchino (Atlantic Monthly Press) chronicles that history.

Unlike in Wilmington, the 2021 Capitol riot didn't succeed in changing election results. Still, it was a sad indicator of just how racially polarized the nation was, as the overwhelmingly white mob descended on the Capitol, vandalizing property, busting out windows, and igniting violence that resulted in five deaths. Subsequent videos revealed participants shouting racial epithets and carrying Confederate battle flags.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

STACEY ABRAMS: FIGHTING VOTER SUPPRESSION

Stacey Abrams's run for Georgia governor and refusal to remain silent about unfair voting practices, even after her opponent Brian Kemp took office in 2019, put her in national political circles and conversation. There was even talk of her being a vice presidential running mate. Instead, Abrams, who worked to register voters through the New Georgia Project, which she had founded in 2014, rededicated herself to voting rights by launching Fair Fight and its affiliate Fair Fight Action after losing the 2018 governor's race.

Fair Fight registered voters, tallied allegations of voter suppression, and facilitated investigations of those claims. She even starred in and produced the 2020 documentary, *All In: The Fight for Democracy*, addressing voting rights and voter suppression released prior to the election. Her efforts were largely credited for the unexpected result of Georgia turning blue and voting for Democrats Joe Biden and Kamala Harris in 2021.

Fair Fight also helped send Jewish American Jon Ossoff and Savannah native Reverend Raphael Warnock, a Morehouse College alum and pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church (Martin Luther King Jr.'s family church in Atlanta), to the U.S. Senate. Warnock became the first Black senator from Georgia.

People familiar with police response to peaceful BLM–themed protests couldn't help but notice the difference between how leniently violent white protesters were treated in comparison to peaceful Black ones. Arrests weren't made immediately, with Trump and other Republicans downplaying the violence. For many, the Capitol riot was yet another indication of what had been historically true in the United States in that there were indeed two Americas — one for white Americans and another for Black Americans. And even with the changing demographics, creating an even more multiracial nation, racial polarization hadn't ended.

Despite the violence, Biden and Harris were sworn in as president and vice president. The moment, while triumphant, was bittersweet, however, as Dr. King Jr.'s question presented in his 1967 book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community* seemed more timely than ever. That question became even more pressing March 25, 2021, when Georgia Governor Brian Kemp, one of the states that gave the Democrats the upper hand in the 2020 elections, signed Senate Bill 202 tightening voting restrictions into law. Rushed through the Georgia House by Republicans, the bill put new limitations on absentee voting, criminalized passing out food and drinks to voters standing in line, and made it possible for the State Election Board and lawmakers to take over elections from the Secretary of State. Like the Capitol riot, Georgia's new bill further restricting voting only indicated that the battle was far from won.

FLINT WATER CRISIS: A REMINDER OF SYSTEMIC RACISM'S HIGH COST

In the summer of 2014, Flint, Michigan resident complaints about the smell, color, taste and negative impact on their skin were ignored. To save money, the city had switched from Lake Huron water in Detroit, about an hour away, to Flint River water, which it had to treat, in April 2014. Because a financial emergency was declared in Flint, Michigan, Governor Rick Snyder appointed several emergency managers, superseding the authority of Flint Mayor Dayne Walling, between 2011 and 2015. Ed Kurtz presided during the water source switch.

Despite several boiled water advisories, the city maintained the water was fine. Yet the city permitted a General Motors plant to switch back to Lake Huron water in October 2014. The Flint Public Library stopped using the water, offering bottled water instead. When the Detroit Water and Sewage Department (DWSD) offered to reconnect Flint, emergency manager Jerry Ambrose declined. Residents voted to switch back to DWSD, but that didn't happen.

Because Flint's pipes were bad and needed replacing, there were toxic lead levels in the water. During a September 2015 press conference at Hurley Children's Hospital, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, a pediatrician, revealed study results of doubling lead levels in infants and children tied to the city's water source switch. A return to the Detroit water source, Mayor Walling and other city officials insisted, would financially bankrupt the city.

On January 5, 2016, Governor Snyder declared a state of emergency for the crisis. President Obama sent assistance from FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security. Thousands of bottles of water arrived; high-profile fundraisers were held. Drinking toxic water caused developmental issues for many of the city's kids. A 2020 study revealed that 80 percent of 174 Flint children would need special education services. When Mayor Karen Weaver, the Black woman who replaced Walling, appealed to Governor Snyder for help, he dismissed her. White kids, white people, wouldn't be denied safe drinking water, many concluded. Systemic racism played a key role in the fate of the nearly 60 percent Black population of Flint, studies revealed.

In January 2021, former Michigan governor Snyder was charged with two counts of willful neglect of duty. Although Flint pipes were said to be free of lead and the water safe to drink nearly a decade later, the effects on kids, particularly poor and, of course, Black, persisted. Although climate change was more responsible for the water crisis that hit predominantly Black Jackson, Mississippi, from February to March 2021, the white governor's lack of urgency and the sparse media attention echoed the systemic racism at the heart of the Flint crisis.

4 Cultural Foundations

IN THIS PART . . .

Delve into the spiritual and religious journey of Black Americans and find out how they had already begun establishing their own churches before emancipation. Discover what role the Black church would play post-emancipation and throughout the 20th century, standing at the forefront of many of Black America's and the nation's most transformative moments.

Marvel at how fiercely Black Americans pursued education in the fight for freedom and see how education has historically been a heated battlefield that persists now, with many debates raging around the issues of affirmative action and how failing public schools affect the futures of Black children, while also appreciating the challenges and living legacy of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

Explore Black American literature and its early origins in the African oral tradition as well as the slave narrative, along with its rise to prominence during the Harlem Renaissance and other similar movements all the way to the breakout 1970s when Black women began raising their voices even louder to now.

Develop an appreciation for Black theater and its trials and triumphs through minstrelsy and early musical theater to creating serious drama. Examine the journey and evolution of Black dance through the art form's greatest innovators.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Converting enslaved Africans to Christianity
- Developing the Black church tradition
- Blurring the line between politics and religion
- Exploring other Black religions

Chapter 12

Somebody Say "Amen": The Black Church

Early enslaved Africans weren't overwhelmingly Christian, but converting to Christianity didn't change Black Americans as much as Black Americans changed Christianity. As the first uniquely Black institution in American culture, the Black church is unparalleled in its impact on the overall development of Black American culture. Historically, the Black church has been more than a place of worship; it's also served as a community center, a relief society, a political think tank, and an educational center.

This chapter traces the development of the Black church back to the politics of Christian conversion and explores the church's emergence, its social impact and influence, its political backbone, and its shortcomings. It also acknowledges that while Christianity has ruled much of Black America for centuries; not all Black Americans were (or are) Protestant Christians. There's a reason Black Americans have been solidly religious for centuries, and this chapter explains why.

Converting to Christianity

Differences between how white and Black Americans worship haven't gone unnoted. The Black church's divergence from European-based Christianity reflects the early religious differences between Europeans and Africans and the contrasting realities of life for Black and white Americans, as well as the enduring legacy of retained characteristics of African religious practices.



TECHNICAL STUFF

Religiously, Africa has never been an inactive continent. Because religion is a focal point of most cultures, invading forces promoted their own religious beliefs. Initially, Muslims made the biggest impact on Africa, particularly in West Africa, where a large percentage of enslaved Africans in the United States hailed from. (Historians note that Arab Muslims coming into many African countries would enslave Africans, but upon conversion to Islam they'd release those that were enslaved.) Islam, however, coexisted alongside distinctly West African religious practices. Coinciding with the onset of the transatlantic slave trade, Christian forces also made headway.

Early objections, early conversions

During the 1660s in New England, Puritan minister John Eliot argued that slaveholders had a duty to provide religious instruction to those they enslaved. Eliot believed that teaching the enslaved to read the Bible expedited their Christian conversion. Slaveholders hesitated at the prospect, probably because slavery itself was a relatively new and unstable practice. Later, slaveholders greatly feared that teaching those enslaved to read and interpret the Bible would incite rebellions. Nat Turner, the leader of one of America's most notorious enslaved uprisings, for example, was deeply religious (see Chapter 4 for more about him). Because many of the enslaved achieved literacy through religious organizations, slaveholders associated those insurrections with religious instruction.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Some of the enslaved who were baptized successfully gained their freedom by challenging the lifetime enslavement of Christians, prompting some white religious leaders, like Rev. James Blair, a representative of the bishop of London in Virginia, to suspect that some enslaved people converted to Christianity purely in hopes of gaining freedom. "I doubt not," he wrote his superior in 1729, "some of the Negroes are sincere Converts, but the far greater part of them little mind the serious part, only are in hopes that they will meet with so much more respect, and that some time or other Christianity will help them to their freedom."


REMEMBER

To alleviate slaveholders' worries that conversion to Christianity could result in the freedom of those they enslaved, colonial legislators passed laws stating that Christian baptism didn't alter one's legal slave status. By 1706, at least six colonial legislatures had passed such laws. Because African heathenism had once been one of the main justifications for African enslavement, such legislation was a major shift. Gradually, race alone became the backbone of American slavery.

Eliot continued his mission to convert the enslaved through religious education by promising slaveholders he would teach only Scripture to those enslaved. Cotton Mather, his successor, appeased slaveholders further with his 1693 leaflet "Rules for the Society of Negroes." Working with the enslaved in Massachusetts, Mather used religion as a form of social control by twisting the Ten Commandments into a doctrine that demanded those enslaved give their legalized masters the same respect as God.

Still, many slaveholders objected, for purely capitalistic reasons, to the religious instruction of those they enslaved. To appeal to their profit-minded motives, some missionaries stressed that enslaved people who were converted to Christianity worked more efficiently and therefore yielded greater profits. Tax incentives sometimes enticed slaveholders to allow spiritual instruction to those they enslaved.

Of course, some of the men and women weren't always receptive to conversion attempts, naturally preferring their own religious practices to those of their slaveholders'. It wasn't until the Great Awakenings that African conversion to Christianity gained momentum.

The Great Awakenings: Called to convert

The First Great Awakening, a religious movement in the 1730s and 1740s that began in New England, radicalized religion by making it more personalized. Suddenly individuals could exert some control over their own salvation. They were also encouraged to express their emotions. The Second Great Awakening occurred during the 1820s and 1830s.

Distinguished by their revival style, a novel concept at the time, the Great Awakenings, especially the first one, had a lasting impact on Black Americans even though the movement's main messengers, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and Gilbert Tennent, were white. These leaders noticed almost immediately the impact their meetings, often held outside to accommodate large numbers of attendees, had on Black people. Leaders such as Samuel Davies, a minister who became president of the College of New Jersey (Princeton), actively evangelized Black people.



REMEMBER

Historians have argued that the Great Awakenings had such a profound effect because their fervent worship style and emphasis on a personal relationship with God meshed with core African religious beliefs. Despite the multitude of languages and cultures that existed among enslaved Africans, common threads allowed them to bond with one another. When the First Great Awakening emerged, they were able to embed their existing beliefs into a form of religious expression that was acceptable to whites.

The rise of plantation missions coincided with the Second Great Awakening. Advocates such as Charles Colcock Jones contended that rural enslaved people weren't receiving proper religious instruction and appealed to various religious and secular parties, including slaveholders, to remedy the situation with plantation missions. As abolitionism gained momentum, plantation missions became a complicated proposition. Slaveholders worried about those they enslaved receiving the same religious instruction as whites. They also feared that religious instruction encouraged rebellions. To ease their concerns, plantation missions ministered orally to the enslaved. Its advocates also reminded plantation owners that religious instruction could teach the enslaved discipline and encourage obedience. Southern Methodists made the biggest inroads with plantation missions.

Christianity, Black American style

Culturally, Black Christianity has distinctive features. Like Europeans, West Africans in particular believed in an ultimate supreme being, but unlike Europeans, lesser deities aided their supreme being. Scholars believe that in Latin America and the Caribbean, Catholicism's patron saints replaced African deities. So Christianity, scholars argue, resonated with Black Americans for a variety of reasons.

FUSING CHRISTIAN AND AFRICAN RELIGIONS

In the Caribbean and Latin America, religious practices such as Voudou (or Voodoo), Obeah, Santería, and Candomblé prominently featured African deities and spiritual forces. These religious practices rose out of a combination of African religions and Catholicism. Religious scholars have noted that Africans in Latin America and the Caribbean acquiesced to Catholicism by substituting Catholic patron saints for their own African deities. This allowed enslaved Africans to continue to pray and worship their deities while seemingly practicing Catholicism. Ultimately, these religious practices emphasize a personal connection to a guiding spiritual force or forces. This sense of personal connection, many historians argue, is what drew Africans to Christianity in large numbers. Others have argued, however, that Africans had little choice but to convert to Christianity.

Black liberation theology

Although some argue that the concept of the Trinity — God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost — attracted Black people to Christianity; others believe that the Bible's biggest selling point became the many circumstances that approximated the Black American experience with enslavement. C. Eric Lincoln, one of the foremost authorities on the Black church, observed in his seminal work with Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Duke University Press), that Black Christianity places a "symbolic importance" on the concept of freedom. It wasn't hard for Black people to believe that they were God's chosen people who would be led out of bondage. Very few Black Americans, enslaved or free, accepted enslavement as the natural order. Just because death ensured freedom didn't mean that one couldn't achieve it while living.

During the 1970s, James H. Cone, author of the groundbreaking *Black Theology and Black Power,* formalized this concept of freedom and became a leading proponent of *Black liberation theology.* Cone argued that for Black people, Christianity should reflect their unique experience of oppression. Cone advocated a communal approach to Christianity for Black Americans, rejecting a focus on the individual. He also encouraged Black Americans to view God in their own image. In many ways, Cone just confirmed how Black Christianity had functioned for a few centuries.



Viewing God as Black wasn't an entirely new concept. Speaking before the turn of the 20th century, African Methodist Episcopal Bishop Henry McNeil Turner made it clear that Black people "have as much right biblically and otherwise to believe that God is Negro." Certainly, there had been others before him, as well as those like Marcus Garvey and others after him, who expressed similar sentiments.

Music for the soul

Music is one of the most distinguishable aspects of Black Christianity. Many historians trace Black music and dance back to the ring shout, a religious ritual that is the oldest documented African performance style in this country. Typically performed after formal worship, the *ring shout* — which includes two groups, shouters (or dancers) and singers organized in a circle — exemplifies two key characteristics of the Black church and Black music:

- **Call-and-response:** The leader sings (or calls) and the group responds. Black preachers often perform the same function with their congregations during sermons. They also tend to speak rhythmically, using their voice in ways similar to vocalists that many scholars cite as a precursor to rap.

» **Use of rhythm:** Slaveholders banned drums after the Stono Rebellion in 1739 (see Chapter 4), so clapping and foot tapping provided the rhythm considered essential to African music. Often performed in unison, songs themselves embodied the communal nature of many African cultures, especially because freedom served as a major theme in early spirituals. (Read more about Black music in Chapter 16.)

Building and Sustaining the Black Church

The African Baptist (or "Bluestone") Church, founded on the William Byrd plantation near the Bluestone River in Mecklenburg, Virginia in 1758, could be the first established Black church in America, but that distinction frequently goes to the Silver Bluff Baptist Church in Beech Island, South Carolina. Silver Bluff's offshoots, the Springfield Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia, and the First African Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia, are also among the oldest Black churches in the United States. While these early Black churches existed in the South, the North, which tended to have more documentation, especially surrounding the important creation of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) orders, dominates early Black church history.



HISTORICAL ROOTS

SILVER BLUFF BAPTIST CHURCH

Located on the estate of slaveholder George Galphin, Silver Bluff Baptist Church got its start between 1773 and 1775 through the work of white minister Gait Palmer, who baptized those enslaved by Galphin, including David George and Jesse Peters (also known as Jesse Peters Galphin). Georgia-based Black preacher George Liele, a childhood friend of George's, also preached at Silver Bluff.

During the Revolutionary War, the congregation of about 30 sought the protection of the British in Savannah, who promised freedom to any enslaved person who sided with them. After the British defeat, George relocated to Nova Scotia, where he established a church, before continuing his ministry in Sierra Leone. Liele left the United States in 1782 for Jamaica and established a church. Before leaving, he converted an enslaved man named Andrew Bryan, who went on to lead the First African Baptist Church of Savannah, which predates the white Baptist church there.

Peters didn't flee following the Revolutionary War. Instead, he returned to Silver Bluff and eventually gained his freedom. Around 1787, he established the Springfield Baptist Church, located in Augusta, Georgia. Morehouse College traces its roots back to this historic church. Today, Silver Bluff, Springfield, and First African are still active churches.

Black churches in the North

Racial mistreatment within churches produced the independent Black church movement in the North. Two important orders, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ), didn't necessarily set out to become independent Black churches. Both of these orders began with parishioners who were content to worship with white people of faith. Generally, white parishioners didn't feel the same.

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church

At St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the congregation included Black and white worshippers. When the white membership decided to segregate worship and force the Black membership to the back of the church in 1787, two Black members, Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, made plans to establish their own church. Historians believe that Jones and Allen left St. George's several months after they formed the Free African Society (see Chapter 3) that same year. By 1794, the two men had successfully spearheaded the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas.

Plans changed when the Methodist Church refused to supply the church a minister. A majority of the St. Thomas congregation voted to affiliate with the Episcopal Church, so Allen, a die-hard Methodist, detached himself from the church and Jones, credited as the first Black ordained Episcopal priest, led the congregation. Allen began a congregation within the official confines of Methodism, but by 1816, united Black congregations in Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland formed the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, a uniquely Black organization operated by Black people. Allen, who had purchased his freedom at age 38, became the AME Church's first bishop. His Philadelphia church, Bethel AME, frequently referred to as "Mother Bethel," served as the order's anchor.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Allen explained his refusal to abandon Methodism with this observation: "I was confident that no religious sect or denominations would suit the capacity of the colored people so well as Methodists, for the plain simple gospel suits best for any people, for the unlearned can understand, and the learned are sure to understand."

The African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church

Despite their similar names, the AME and AME Zion Church aren't the same. The AME Zion Church traces its roots back to 1796 to the John Street Methodist Church of New York City. Although the Methodist Church, in keeping with founder John Wesley, opposed slavery, it refused to ordain Black ministers, among other things. So in 1796, Black members broke off and, by 1801, had their own church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church of the City of New York, also known as Zion.

Although separate, Zion and its affiliate churches operated under the guidance of the white-controlled Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) for a number of years. Once they decided to make a clean break, they teetered over joining forces with the AME Church, headed by Allen, but formed their own order, AME Zion or AMEZ, instead.

James Varick assumed leadership around 1820 and became sanctioned by the general Methodist Episcopal Church in 1822. They didn't completely break from the MEC until 1824, however. High-profile abolitionist members such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth earned the AMEZ Church the label "the Freedom Church."

The Black church in the antebellum South

Black people found worshiping in the South more precarious. Southern laws generally prohibited literacy, which was practically synonymous with religious instruction. Even before the increase in the religious conversion of the enslaved, laws prevented enslaved people from gathering in large numbers. As the Christian conversion became more common among the enslaved, some Southern states prohibited Black people from ministering to each other and punished such acts with whippings, among other things.

As a result, many Black preachers conducted ministries in secret. Meeting in the woods, Black people weren't just free to worship but, more importantly, were able to worship freely. Those who could read the Bible didn't have to hide that fact in these gatherings. Even the most learned, however, kept the gospel simple to appeal to everyone. One of Christianity's biggest draws for those enslaved was the reaffirmation of their humanity.

Threats of violent consequences didn't deter preachers who maintained that if Jesus died on the cross for their sins, they could withstand beatings for ministering God's word. Surprisingly, however, many slaveholders didn't object to their holding worship services as long as it didn't interfere with their work. During times of rebellion or on suspicion of insurrection, slaveholders were more restrictive. Perhaps some slaveholders acquiesced to separate worship services because proving that the Bible sanctioned Black enslavement was a cornerstone of early conversion efforts, particularly in the South. Nonetheless, some scholars refer to these meetings, secret and open, as the *invisible church.*

Not all early Black churches in the South were unorganized, however. Pockets of the South such as Richmond, Virginia; Charleston, South Carolina; and New Orleans, Louisiana, had free Black communities that established churches that drew Black people who were both enslaved and free. Baptists and Methodists were the predominant denominations of Southern Black people, mostly because of the

Great Awakenings (refer to the earlier section "The Great Awakenings: Called to convert"). The South had an estimated 468,000 Black church members in 1859.

Baptist churches in the South

The earliest known Black churches in the South were largely Baptist. In the midst of enslavement, there were still Black churches (such as the African Huntsville Church in Alabama and the Rose Hill Church in Natchez, Mississippi) that white religious orders recognized. Churches such as the Grand Gulf Church in Mississippi and Mount Lebanon Church in Louisiana, though technically integrated, had relatively few white members. Border states such as Kentucky also boasted independent Black churches prior to the Civil War.

These churches weren't necessarily white-controlled either. Sir Charles Lyell, in his book *A Second Visit to the United States of North America*, marveled at the First African [Baptist] Church of Savannah in 1846. Noting that he was the only white man out of about 600 Black people, Lyell commented favorably not just on the excellent singing; the preaching also impressed him. He wrote that the minister, Andrew Cox Marshall, preached his sermon "without notes, in good style and for the most part in good English." Lyell also felt Marshall's preaching style was very imaginative and held the congregation's attention. Lyell concluded that his experience at First African marked "an astonishing step in civilization."



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

GOWAN PAMPHLET

Gowan Pamphlet, the property of a female tavern owner, began preaching in Williamsburg, Virginia, in the 1770s. Undeterred by the local Baptist organization's decision that "no person of color should be allowed to preach," Pamphlet persisted and negotiated with her to get time away to attend to his ministry. By 1781, his congregation was possibly as large as 200.

When Pamphlet's owner relocated her business, he didn't abandon his ministry. With a new slaveowner, he returned to Williamsburg In 1791. Confident in his congregation of about 500 and faithful that he could evade the law prohibiting the enslaved from preaching, Pamphlet applied to the Dover Baptist Association for official recognition and received it after a two-year inspection period.

During the antebellum period, after Pamphlet was long gone, his church weathered many storms, including being shut down for a year due to Nat Turner's Rebellion. In 1843, decades after Pamphlet's death, forced reorganization subordinated the church's Black pastors, but Black leadership resumed after the Civil War. A testament to Pamphlet's legacy, First Baptist Church, which preceded white Baptist churches in Williamsburg, is still standing.

The Methodist Church in the South

While the AME church grew very slowly in the South, there were AME churches in Baltimore, Maryland; Charleston, South Carolina; and New Orleans, Louisiana. Through the efforts of Daniel Coker, Black Methodists in Maryland, a critical border state during the Civil War, were among the original AME founders in 1816. Morris Brown led the African Church of Charleston until local authorities uncovered Denmark Vesey's plots for rebellion (see Chapter 4). Barely escaping death, Brown made it north, but Black Methodism didn't return to Charleston until after the Civil War.

New Orleans, well-known for its large Black Catholic population, had four Black Methodist churches, three led by enslaved preachers supervised by white ministers, before the Civil War. The exception was St. James AME, led by Charles Doughty. In Missouri, two free Black men led Black Methodists there.

White Methodists, however, usually ministered to Black Methodists, largely enslaved, in the South, a curiosity because Methodism's founder, John Wesley, opposed slavery. Such ministries, however, were directly born out of early attempts to convert the enslaved. During the early 1800s, the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) softened its stance on slavery. Interestingly, its ministry to the enslaved accounted for a significant portion of the church's growth in the 19th century.



Even with a softened stance on slavery, it was generally unacceptable for Methodist clergy to enslave others. When Rev. James Osgood Andrew in Georgia inherited an enslaved woman in 1840, conflict erupted, but he wasn't expelled. When Andrew later married a woman who was also a slaveholder, he had a choice to either free those enslaved or leave the church, which created a rift among Methodists. In 1844, Southern Methodists broke away and formed the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Up until the Civil War, the Black Methodist population, largely enslaved, continued to grow.

Post–Civil War and Reconstruction

After gaining freedom at the Civil War's end, Black Southerners wanted to seize control over their own spiritual needs, and Black churches of all denominations flourished in the postwar South. Both the AME and AMEZ church made considerable inroads outside the Northeast.

New denominations that emerged included the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (renamed the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in the 1950s) when, with the blessings of their white Methodist counterparts, 41 men gathered in Jackson, Tennessee in December 1870 to form the church. At least three-fourths

of the South's estimated 200,000 Black Methodists joined the CME, taking $1.5 million in buildings and properties with them.

As more Baptist churches emerged, they began to assert their racial heritage more. They also began forming more-complex Black-led Baptist organizations. Prior to the Civil War, Black Baptists in the North had already attempted to form greater affiliations. On the brink of Civil War, Black Baptists in Illinois and Ohio were among the first to form successful all-Black Baptist organizations on a larger scale. Nearly 2 million formerly enslaved people helped bolster the Baptist membership rolls, further increasing the need to organize.

Of the many organizations that emerged, the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A. (formed in 1895 at Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta), is one of the most significant. Although several Baptist organizations merged to create the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., key splits in 1915 and 1961 splintered the organization into the National Baptist Convention of America and the Progressive National Baptist Convention, whose original membership included Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In 1988, the National Missionary Baptist Convention also joined those ranks. Disputes involving publishing concerns were the reason for some of the splits, but differing opinions regarding the Black church's role in the civil rights movement were also at play (read more in the section, "Politics and the Church," later in this chapter.).

Worship in the early 20th century

In the 20th century, the biggest shift for Black Christians became the advent of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). Emerging around the turn of the 20th century, the Church of God in Christ, a Pentecostal offshoot, mainly traces its roots back to Rev. Charles Harrison Mason. After being expelled from one Baptist college and dropping out of another, Mason found kindred spirits in Arkansas minister J.A. Jeter and Mississippi ministers Charles Price Jones and W.S. Pleasant.

Relieved of his duties at a Baptist church in Arkansas over his beliefs in sanctification, Mason, along with his newfound colleagues, hosted a revival for Black Baptists in Jackson, Mississippi in 1896. Filled with the spirit, the revival, while a success, alienated even more-traditional Black Baptists, who considered Mason and his cohorts' behavior extreme.

According to Mason, he and his group "only wanted to exalt Jesus and put down man-made traditions." When the local Baptist association ostracized Mason and Jones for their adherence to the doctrine of sanctification, they felt they had no choice but to create something new. In 1897, Mason, who claimed that the name came to him as he walked down a street in Little Rock, Arkansas, birthed COGIC. His journey, however, wasn't complete.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

WILLIAM JOSEPH SEYMOUR

An important catalyst to the global Pentecostal movement and considered by some the father of Pentecostalism, William Joseph Seymour was born to formerly enslaved parents in Louisiana. As a child, Seymour, who was raised Baptist, had visions. His holiness teachings began when he relocated to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1901 and joined the "reformation" Church of God. Around 1903, he joined a Houston church pastored by Lucy Farrow, a Black woman, who connected him with white evangelist Charles Fox Parham, whose students spoke in tongues.

With the aid of Farrow and Parham, Seymour relocated to Los Angeles and eventually found a home for his Pentecostal message. To accommodate the large number of people drawn to him and his teachings, he held services in a warehouse on Azusa Street. His main message was one of "love, faith, and unity," but Los Angeles newspapers concentrated more on the congregation's practice of speaking in tongues. Negative press actually drew more people to Seymour's Azusa Street Revival, which peaked between 1906 and 1909.

Although Seymour inspired many, including COGIC founder Charles Harrison Mason, his movement collapsed. Some attribute Seymour's failure to a jealous female member taking his mailing list. Others believe his rift with his white Chicago leader William Howard Durham diluted his movement's white membership. Regardless, Seymour, who died in 1922, made great contributions to the modern Pentecostal movement.

Looking for an even more meaningful and complete experience, Mason later changed COGIC's direction after encountering Pentecostal pioneer William Joseph Seymour (see the nearby sidebar). In line with the Holiness Movement, which focused on restoring the personal holiness and connection originally taught by John Wesley, COGIC began placing special emphasis on the resurrection of Christ. COGIC followers believe in the Trinity. They believe that God grants repentance and salvation to all Christian believers who ask for it. In addition, they're known to speak in tongues; as a result, their services are usually spirited. Although they believe in divine healing, they don't eschew modern medical services. Jeter and Jones rejected Mason's Pentecostal message, and the three men split.

COGIC continued to grow, especially as Black people migrated to the cities, largely because Mason sent evangelists to urban centers such as Detroit and Chicago to help migrants, who responded to the more fervent style of worship many of them knew from their rural communities. So although COGIC, headquartered in Memphis, began as a more rural religion, by the time Mason died in 1961, its membership was largely urban.

The modern era: Megachurches

At the close of the 20th century and start of the 21st, megachurches helmed by Black pastors became increasingly visible. Even as overall church membership or the number of smaller-sized churches dipped in the Black community, charismatic Black religious leaders began attracting large flocks ranging from 5,000 to 20,000 members and more. Schools, childcare, and banking are a few of the services Black megachurches offer.

In her book *The Black Megachurch: Theology, Gender, and the Politics of Public Engagement* (Baylor University Press), professor Tamelyn Tucker-Worgs observes that "like the storefront churches of the early twentieth century fulfilled the socioreligious needs of black migrants from the South, black megachurches fulfill the needs of the new black middle-class suburbanites." Tucker-Worgs notes that the circumstances, and thus the needs, of modern Black churchgoers differ from many decades before. Modernity, along with prosperity, became important.

Few have arguably adapted to this new reality better than T.D. Jakes, who leads Potter's House in Dallas. Jakes found initial success in his native West Virginia through his "Woman, Thou Art Loosed" mission reclaiming Black survivors of sexual abuse. Black ministers like Jakes are also televangelists who have built multimedia empires by creating successful YouTube channels, producing large events, publishing books, and even producing films as Jakes has done with the big screen version of *Woman Thou Art Loosed,* starring Kimberly Elise, and *Not Easily Broken* with Taraji P. Henson and Morris Chestnut. This exposure has made many of these churches even global. OWN (Oprah Winfrey Network) captured this phenomenon with its groundbreaking megachurch drama *Greenleaf,* which premiered June 21, 2016, and ran for five seasons, ending in 2020.

As megachurches boomed, Black believers also began joining multiracial congregations. Black pastors also welcomed non-Black believers, particularly Hispanic or Latinx, to their congregations. White pastors such as Joel Osteen and Paula White attracted large numbers of Black believers in the early 2000s. During Donald Trump's presidency, Paula White, who served as one of Trump's spiritual advisers, lost her appeal. Though there were rumors of Osteen having an affiliation with the 45th president, known for his divisive racial politics, the Houston-based pastor, unlike White, never officially supported him. Multiracial megachurches, as well as white ministers, began to lose some of their appeal during Black Lives Matter for being slow to condemn police killings and racial injustice.



A MUSICAL FOUNDATION

Music led to another major turning point in the church during the 20th century. After the Civil War, many outside the Black community learned of spirituals. Most churches rejected secular music genres such as blues and jazz, even though spirituals had contributed greatly to their creation. Still, the church wasn't unaffected by the rise of Black secular music. During the 1930s, Thomas Andrew Dorsey, a former blues piano player, began mingling the blues with sacred music. Eventually that resulted in gospel music, which injected more instrumentation and individuality into Black church music. It's noteworthy that Pentecostal/Holiness churches often had full bands that included drums and other instruments, a huge contrast to the organ-based music of many Northern churches. In this way, music was one of the main ways COGIC and other Pentecostal/Holiness churches distinguished themselves from more traditional Black churches.

By the 1950s, gospel music, thanks in large part to Sister Rosetta Tharpe and Mahalia Jackson, was a widely known byproduct of the Black church. Gospel singers such as Sam Cooke brought greater attention to the music of the Black church. During civil rights marches and other protest efforts, songs of the church were commonplace. Music was and is an important component of the Black church.

The rise of "prosperity gospel," as practiced by Osteen and Atlanta-based Black pastor Creflo Dollar, noted for his jet and other trappings of wealth not uncommon to megachurch ministers, seemed to wane as mass protests against racial injustice and police killings erupted and the COVID-19 pandemic dragged on in 2020. Megachurches (especially those with large digital outreach capabilities) that sprang into action to feed the hungry, offer free COVID-19 testing, pay the bills of the needy, and speak up for racial equity fared better.

The changing role of women

Following the civil rights and Black Power movements, not to mention the advent of a stronger feminist movement, reconciling the role of women in the church became a major issue. Historically, Black women had assumed key leadership roles. Born enslaved in 1797, Sojourner Truth is one of the earliest known Black preachers. In 1819, Richard Allen authorized Jarena Lee to preach eight years after her initial request. Lee, however, found it difficult to sustain a ministry and became an itinerant preacher. Rebecca Cox Jackson, who had a significant Black female following, led her own community of Shakers (a female-founded religious order).

In the 20th century, however, sexism kept Black women out of the pulpit. Black men generally viewed the church as one of the few arenas where they could exert power. Quietly, however, Black women ran everything from church-based schools to church fundraisers. This was particularly evident during the civil rights era. When many ministers tried to close the church's doors to civil rights workers, Black female church leaders opened them.

During the 1970s, more Black women began seeking official leadership roles, particularly in the pulpit traditionally reserved for men. Prior to this push, a few Black women held leadership roles, exceptions that didn't all date back to the 19th century. Ordained in the 1950s, Reverend Dr. Johnnie Coleman, for example, the founding minister of Christ Universal Temple in Chicago, led a megachurch during a time when the highest leadership positions available to most Black women included church secretary and the title of first lady as the minister's wife.

In recent years, Black women such as Dr. Vashti Murphy McKenzie, the AME Church's first female bishop, have made additional strides. Congregations led by husband-and-wife spiritual teams became more common, however. Some high-profile ministers do acknowledge their wives as spiritual leaders. Creflo Dollar of World Changers Church International in Atlanta has been credited with doing so with his wife Taffi Dollar. Prior to their divorce, co-pastors June Robinson and Kenneth O. Robinson led Restoring Life International Church in Maryland from 1991 to 2011.

Though the role of minister remained largely male in many Black churches even as women dominated their congregations, the numbers of women pursuing the ministry increased. From 1988 to 1998, the Association of Theological Schools reported that Black women graduates of their affiliated schools tripled. That growth more than doubled by 2018. Black women have taken increasingly proactive roles to usher other Black women into the pulpit. WomenPreach! Inc. from Reverend Valerie Bridgeman, dean of the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, offers a Jarena Lee Preaching Academy. At the end of 2019, Reverend Dr. Jacqueline Thompson took the helm of Oakland's historic Allen Temple Baptist Church, one of the oldest Black churches in California, to become the first woman pastor in its 100-year history and just its ninth pastor.

Politics and the Church

The Black church is no stranger to politics. Even before its formal inception, politics dominated the Black church. From debates regarding whether to convert enslaved Black Americans to the role the Black church played in eliminating slavery, building schools, and supplying the civil rights movement with its army,

religion has been a powerful political force in the lives of Black people — so much so that some Black religious leaders have assumed national positions of power outside the church.

Getting more political

During the mid-1950s and 1960s, Black churches actively battled Jim Crow. White supremacists burned countless churches in recognition of the power that the Black church wielded among Black Americans. More conservative Black church leaders, especially those whom local white politicians controlled, didn't embrace the civil rights movement, but the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. became a leading national figure (see Chapters 8–10). During the 1970s and 1980s, Black churches became more active in the political process, mainly through voter registration drives, to help elect Black politicians and others.

On the heels of the Black Power movement, younger Black people began to view the Black church as a place where Black people, as Malcolm X consistently charged, worshiped the "white man's god" and followed "the white man's religion." Countering that charge, some churches embraced Black Power. James H. Cone termed this new philosophy *Black liberation theology* (refer to the earlier section "Christianity, Black American style"). Potential members, in other cases, embraced alternative religious organizations such as the Nation of Islam.

Minister-politicians: Pulling double duty

Some ministers directly mixed formal politics with the pulpit. Ordained AME minister Hiram Revels, who ironically replaced Jefferson Davis, the Confederate president, became the first Black American member in the Senate during Reconstruction. Powerful U.S. congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr., pastor of New York's legendary Abyssinian Baptist Church, was arguably the most prominently active minister-politician on the national level.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

Using the power of Abyssinian, Powell became a prominent civil rights leader during the Great Depression. Through mass meetings, rent strikes, and public campaigns, Powell forced companies and utilities, including Harlem Hospital, to hire or promote Black employees. In 1941, he became New York City's first Black councilman and then, in 1945, he began service as New York's first Black congressman in the House of Representatives. Congress attempted to remove Powell, who had served on several important committees, in 1967 on charges of misappropriating funds for personal use. Charles Rangel defeated Powell in the election of 1970.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

JESSE JACKSON AND AL SHARPTON

One of the chief beneficiaries of the King legacy, Reverend Jesse Jackson made two credible runs for the presidency of the United States using a Christian foundation as his base. A proponent of economic rights, Jackson has led many successful boycotts as well as advocated that Black Americans cultivate wealth, mainly through Wall Street. Active internationally, Jackson has successfully negotiated the release of American prisoners and hostages from hotspots around the world (read more about Jackson in Chapter 10).

Reverend Al Sharpton, who acknowledges Jackson as a mentor, has created a career similar to Jackson's. Ordained at age 10, Sharpton served as youth director of Jackson's Operation Breadbasket as a teenager and founded the National Youth Movement. Through the National Action Network, founded in 1991, Sharpton has expanded his political and social activism. Yet his support in 1987 of Tawana Brawley, a New York teen whose claim of rape by several white men was ruled unfounded, damaged his credibility in many circles. Sharpton, often ridiculed for the signature processed hairstyle he wears to honor music legend James Brown (for whom he once worked), has failed to win his bids for a U.S. Senate seat, New York City mayor, and the U.S. presidency. Sharpton, however, became even more viable through political media with his radio show, *Keepin' It Real,* and the MSNBC show *Politics Nation with Al Sharpton*.

On the national level, former congressman Floyd Flake, of the influential Greater Allen A.M.E. Cathedral of New York in Jamaica, Queens, in New York City, has been the most prominent Black minister to serve in the federal government in recent years. Reverend Raphael Warnock, the longtime pastor of Martin Luther King Jr.'s family church, Ebenezer Baptist Church, in Atlanta, attracted national attention when he won a U.S. Senate seat in Georgia in a January 2021 runoff. Reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton have both unsuccessfully sought the presidency of the United States (see the nearby sidebar).

Fighting for civil rights: Minister-activists

The majority of Black ministers have been active on the issue of civil rights and equality without ever holding or seeking an elective office. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., for example, brought national and international attention to the prominent role the Black church played in politics and issues of moral righteousness. Far from the first Christian minister to involve his congregation in the fight for civil rights, King is still considered the most successful one to date. Through the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), King and his colleagues spurred other ministers to greater political action.



Thirty-three delegates, including King, representing 14 states formed the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) in 1961. The PNBC gladly supported the efforts of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. True to the one-time tagline "A people of faith and action," the PNBC continues to uphold an activist tradition.

Continuing the struggle

The Black church remains the single most influential institution in the Black community, and that power hasn't gone unnoticed in the battle to address many issues critical to Black Americans. In recent years, the Black church, despite being absent early, has become effective in the ongoing battle against HIV/AIDS. Black churches have also become health and wellness advocates for healthy eating and exercise in the fight against diabetes, high blood pressure, and other diseases that disproportionately impact Black Americans. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Black churches like Philadelphia's Enon Tabernacle Baptist Church pivoted to digital church services, amplified their food drive initiatives, and stepped up to become testing sites.

Politically, some religious leaders denounced the complacency that set in with many Black churches in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s and 1990s, encouraging them to return to more activist stances. Pastor Jamal Harrison Bryant and his New Birth Missionary Baptist Church congregation, in partnership with rapper/actor T.I. and VH1 reality personality Scrapp Deleon, made headlines in 2019 for posting bail for nonviolent offenders in the Atlanta metro area. Named for the Virginia-born pastor who was a mentor and friend to the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, founded in 2003, is composed of a cross-section of progressive Black faith leaders and their congregations, whose action items prominently address mass incarceration.

As the Black Lives Matter movement (read more about it in Chapter 11) gained steam in the 2010s, religious leaders like Reverend Dr. William Barber, co-chair of King's resurrected Poor People's Campaign, became more visible to the mainstream. On the heels of the police killings of Eric Garner in New York City; Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri; and Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio, esteemed Bishop John R. Bryant suggested churches hold National Black Solidarity Sunday, which took place December 14, 2014. Members wore all black as pastors incorporated messages on systemic racism and peaceful protesting into their sermons.

During Donald J. Trump's presidency, several Black pastors, including Dale Bronner of Word of Faith Family Worship Cathedral in Atlanta; Michael E. Freeman of Spirit of Faith Christian Center in Prince George's County, Maryland; and John Gray of Relentless Church in Greenville, South Carolina, drew widespread

criticism in the Black community for meeting with the nation's 45th president. Prior to becoming president, Trump had been an outspoken leader of the Birther Movement, questioning whether President Barack Obama was born in the United States to undermine his leadership.

Worshiping Outside the Black Christian Mainstream

Although Baptists, Methodists, and Pentecostals dominate the Black American religious experience, Black people have considerable roots outside the Black Christian mainstream. While the Black religious net is wide, Muslims, Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists constitute the majority of those outside the Black Christian mainstream. Religious leaders, considered demagogues, have also played major roles in the Black community, especially in the 20th century.

Muslims and the Nation of Islam

Muslims made tremendous inroads into Africa prior to the transatlantic slave trade and made up as much as 20 percent of the enslaved population of some plantations. Yet large numbers of the African Islam influence didn't survive that period. In the 20th century, however, universally recognized Islamic traditions haven't attracted as much media attention as prototypical Islamic organizations such as the Moorish Science Temple and the Nation of Islam (NOI), which emphasized Black nationalism despite the fact that Islam doesn't generally make racial distinctions.

The Moorish Science Temple

Founded in Newark, New Jersey, in 1913 by the Prophet Noble Drew Ali (born Timothy Drew), the Moorish Science Temple began as the Canaanite Temple and contended that Black Americans were of Asiatic descent and thus were originally Islamic. Ali, who relocated his movement to Chicago in 1925, admired Marcus Garvey and considered him a prophet (refer to Chapter 7). Like Garvey, Ali supported Black Power but insisted on referring to Black people as "Moorish Americans." Trademarks of the Moorish Science Temple include fezzes, turbans, membership cards, the star and crescent, and adding an "El" or "Bey" to one's surname. Its main teachings come from the *Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America.*

The Nation of Islam

The Nation of Islam (NOI) is perhaps the most well-known alternative to the traditional Black church in the Black community. Influenced by Noble Drew Ali and Marcus Garvey, Wallace D. Fard infused the Allah Temple of Islam, a precursor to the NOI that he founded in 1930, with elements of Black nationalism, Islam, and Christianity. The NOI is focused on community development and leaders speak out on white supremacy unlike traditional Islam.

Working in various professions such as door-to-door salesman and a street vendor in Detroit, Fard attracted several thousand followers. Black separatism was at the core of Fard's teaching, and so was the belief that white people were inherently evil. Elijah Muhammad, born Elijah Poole in Georgia, discovered Fard's teachings in Detroit and seized control of the NOI in Chicago. Muhammad's many improvements included the introduction of the newspaper *The Final Call to Islam* in 1934 (which evolved into *Muhammad Speaks* in the 1960s and later as *The Final Call*). Muhammad also created an NOI school. Under Muhammad's leadership, the NOI's strict moral code against drinking, smoking, and premarital and extramarital sex provided well-received discipline to the many formerly incarcerated people that the organization targeted for membership.

The NOI's most legendary member was Malcolm X (whom you can read about in Chapter 9). After his departure and murder, the NOI lost its momentum. Muhammad's death in 1975, divided the organization into two factions; an estimated 100,000 members followed Muhammad's son, Imam Warith Deen Muhammad, later Warith Deen Mohammed, who favored Islam in its more traditional form. Displeased with Warith Deen Mohammed's vision, Louis Farrakhan assumed leadership of the NOI in 1978, but reportedly restored the organization closer to its original form in 1981, emphasizing the organization's Black separatist tradition.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

A controversial leader, Farrakhan, despite frequent accusations of anti-Semitism, is highly regarded among many Black Americans, even those who find it difficult to accept the NOI's philosophical beliefs, primarily because of his willingness to challenge white authority. Others respect the NOI's policing of tough, urban areas and its continued outreach to people who have served time in prison. The hip-hop community, especially in its early years, embraced the NOI's aggressive efforts to fight urban decay. For many Black Americans, 1995's Million Man March remains Farrakhan's crowning achievement.



REMEMBER

It can't go unnoted that most Black Muslims don't belong to the NOI. Significant numbers of ex-NOI members even belong to more traditional Islamic organizations, yet the NOI tends to garner more mainstream media attention.

Black Catholics

The United States has approximately 3 million Black Catholics according to demographics from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Interestingly, however, Black Catholics — with their early presence in areas such as St. Augustine (Florida), Los Angeles, Chicago, and Baltimore — predate the formation of the United States. Following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, New Orleans became the predominant Black Catholic haven. New Orleans, along with pockets of Mobile, Alabama, where the religion is more closely associated with Creoles or mixed-race Black Americans, has retained strong Catholic identities over the years.

The Black Catholic population in the U.S. increased significantly after the Civil War. Similar to other Christian religions, white Catholics also discriminated against Black people. Patrick Francis Healy (see the nearby sidebar) and his brother James Augustine Healy succeeded in the Jesuit order, but because they were light-skinned, their race was unknown. Father Augustus Tolton, who was born enslaved in Missouri, was ordained in Rome in 1886. He led several congregations in Illinois before making his mark as the founding father of Black Catholics in Chicago with St. Monica's, the city's first Black Catholic church.

Boosting Black Catholicism, Daniel Rudd, born enslaved to Catholic parents, founded *The American Catholic Tribune,* the first national Catholic newspaper owned and operated by a Black man. He also spearheaded the National Black Catholic Congress, the first mass meeting of Black Catholics, in 1889. For reasons unknown, the group stopped meeting in 1894, but resumed activities in 1987, many decades after Rudd's death in 1933. Over the years, other Black Catholic organizations have included the Federated Colored Catholics, the National Office of Black Catholics, and the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

PATRICK FRANCIS HEALY

Born in Macon, Georgia, to a white Irish-American father and a mixed-race enslaved mother, Patrick Francis Healy, along with his siblings, attended a Jesuit school in the North to escape the South's racial limitations. When discovery of Patrick Francis Healy's race threatened to disrupt his studies, his father sent him to a university in Belgium, where he received his Ph.D. Ordained as a priest in 1864, Healy returned to the United States in 1866, and began teaching philosophy at Georgetown University, where he eventually became president. Often referred to as Georgetown's "second founder," he's buried on university grounds, and Healy Hall was named for him. His brother James Augustine Healy became bishop of Portland, Maine. Some additional Healy siblings served as priests and nuns.

Historically, stellar secondary educational institutions, especially in urban centers, were a gateway for Catholics into Black communities. Mother Katharine Drexel, a white heiress, was instrumental in increasing the Black and indigenous Catholic population by building schools and parishes for them. Actions from other white Catholics like North Carolina Bishop Vincent Waters to integrate Catholic schools in 1953, prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision the next year, sowed goodwill among some Black people. In later years, in Chicago, the dominant Irish-Catholic political structure also contributed significantly to the rise in the Black Catholic population, manifested particularly in several historic Black Catholic elementary and high schools. New York's and Miami's large Haitian populations and growing Afro-Latinx populations typically brought a long-standing Catholic tradition with them. New Orleans, where Xavier University is still the nation's only Black Catholic university, remains a Black Catholic stronghold.

On the leadership level, Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory, the first Black American to head the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2001–2004), was a leading voice during the Catholic Church's sex abuse scandal. Many credit him for restoring faith in the Catholic Church in general by quickly denouncing priests guilty of child molestation. Gregory's historic position also reinforced the Catholic Church's commitment to serve all its members. On November 28, 2020, Gregory made history again as the Catholic Church's first Black American Cardinal.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses trace their origins back to the Bible Students, a group organized by Charles T. Russell in the 1870s. Once influenced by Nelson H. Barbour's predictions that Christ would visibly return to earth, Russell broke from Barbour in 1879 over substitutionary atonement, the belief that Jesus died for all people's sins. In 1881, Russell established the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society in Pennsylvania. He also founded the International Bible Students Association in the United Kingdom.

Followers adopted 1914 as the beginning of Christ's presence (albeit invisibly) on earth and his enthronement as king, thus kicking off "the last days." By 1922, the organization, believing that God selected them as his people, began to emphasize preaching house to house. Although they began calling themselves Jehovah's Witnesses in 1931, the organization thrived after Nathan Horner Knorr took over in 1942. During his leadership, membership rose from just over 100,000 to more than 2 million in 1975. That number was more than 6.6 million worldwide in 2005.

According to the Pew Research Center, Jehovah's Witnesses are extremely diverse, with 27 percent of its membership being Black and 6 percent multiracial in 2016. Although Jehovah's Witnesses believe all humans are God's children and don't

track race in their religion, critics have noted that its core leadership remained largely white throughout much of the 20th century. Some even point to racially insensitive references to Black people found in issues of *Watchtower*, its main publication, throughout the early 20th century.

Traditionally Jehovah's Witnesses have dressed very moderately and abstained from many popular activities. They don't celebrate holidays or birthdays, don't believe in whole-blood transfusions, and typically oppose political involvement. Well-known Black Americans who grew up as Jehovah's Witnesses include the Jackson and Wayans families, Serena and Venus Williams, and singer Jill Scott. Global music icon Prince, who grew up Seventh-day Adventist, was a practicing Jehovah's Witness at the time of his unexpected death in 2016.

Seventh-day Adventists

Less restrictive than Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists trace their roots back to followers of the Baptist lay leader William Miller of the early 19th century, who believed that the Bible contained coded language regarding the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus. Miller is credited for inspiring the Second Great Awakening (refer to the earlier section "The Great Awakenings: Called to convert" for details on how this event contributed to the early Christian conversion of Black Americans). Black Seventh-day Adventists constitute around 27 percent of the estimated 14 million members worldwide. Alabama's Oakwood College, alma mater to Al Jarreau, Take 6, and Brian McKnight, who all grew up in the faith, is a predominantly Black Seventh-day Adventist institution.

Seventh-day Adventists celebrate the Sabbath on Saturday. They also believe in higher education and have a special concern for health issues. Religious tenets such as original sin and the resurrection of Christ are in line with conservative Christian beliefs. While Seventh-day Adventists contend that Christ's return is imminent, they don't necessarily believe in spiritual immortality.

Black demagogues

Father Divine, Sweet Daddy Grace, and Reverend Ike are three of the most well-known Black demagogues, with all three of these religious leaders boasting considerable numbers of followers that include Blacks and white people:

- **Father Divine:** According to *The New York Times,* Father Divine's International Peace Mission Movement had 50,000 members in the 1930s. Father Divine, who claimed himself as God, had an admirable social agenda that fought lynching and opposed school segregation. He also didn't believe in racial segregation. After his death in 1965, his second wife and widow, who was

white and nearly 50 years his junior, carried on his movement (which, interestingly, forbade sex) until her death in 2017. When Jim Jones, proclaiming himself a follower of Father Divine, led a mass suicide in Guyana in 1974 that claimed 914 lives, remaining momentum for the movement dramatically slowed. The 2017 documentary *Father's Kingdom* details the movement and its remnants.

- **Sweet Daddy Grace:** Born in Brava, Cape Verde Islands, Charles "Sweet Daddy" Grace immigrated to the United States in the early 1900s. He built his United Houses of Prayer for All People in Massachusetts, North Carolina, Washington, D.C., and Egypt. Unlike Father Divine, Sweet Daddy Grace used the Bible as his main text. A flamboyant dresser frequently accused of exploiting poor people, Grace and his followers performed ample community service and modeled Black economic self-sufficiency. Although Grace died in 1960, the United House of Prayer, which celebrated its centennial in 2019, continues to boast millions of members.
- **Reverend Ike:** A pioneer of "the gospel of prosperity," Dr. Frederick Eikerenkoetter, or Reverend Ike, peaked in the 1970s when some 1,700 television and radio stations broadcasted his message from his Christ Community United Church in New York City. Once quoted as saying, "The lack of money is the root of all evil," a less flamboyant Reverend Ike later stressed "Thinkonomics," encouraging followers to reject thoughts of limitation and lack to create abundance, a message consistent with many popular New Age teachings against scarcity. Well into the later years of his life, Reverend Ike continued operating a mail campaign and website. Upon his passing in 2009, his son, Xavier, continued his legacy.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Following the progression of early education
- Moving up to higher education
- Recognizing the impact of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)
- Examining the uniqueness of the Black Greek system

Chapter 13

More Than Reading and Writing: Education

Perhaps no other group of Americans has had its access to education blocked more than Black people. During the period of slavery learning to read and write was punishable by beatings, fines, and even death. Yet Black Americans persevered, eventually building formidable educational institutions of their own as well as excelling in the country's most prestigious schools.

Triumph over Jim Crow and its grossly underfunded and under-resourced schools in the early 20th century (see Chapter 7) didn't end education-related struggles; busing and affirmative action addressed new challenges. This chapter walks you through key periods and events in the history of both early and higher education for Black Americans. It also examines some important education-related institutions — Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), the Black Greek system, and the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) — that have had pivotal roles in the progression of Black American education.

A Brief History of Early Black American Education

Slave narratives, which were critical to rallying antislavery supporters, showed how much Black Americans had to gain from literacy. Prior to the Civil War, the majority of Black Americans were illiterate. With few exceptions, there was largely no formal educational system in place to educate Black Americans. Those who could read at all were largely independently taught. The benefit of education for Black Americans was clear.

After the Civil War, due to the efforts of Black Americans and many Northerners, education was made more accessible to Black Americans, but educational resources weren't. Plus, students and teachers alike continued to face harassment and fines. Making matters worse was the Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which said that separate facilities for Black and white Americans were acceptable as long as they were equal. In many Southern states, however, "equal" was simply having a building available to Black Americans, not resources. (Refer to Chapter 7 for details on the *Plessy* decision.)

Revolting education

Like enslaved Africans, many slaveholders equated education with empowerment. For them, illiteracy was essential to keeping the slave system intact because enslaved people who became literate were more likely to run away. The line of thinking was that enslaved people who knew how to read and write could forge the papers that free Black people were required to carry in some areas or could map their way to freedom, as many did.

COTTON MATHER, THE BIBLE, AND SLAVERY



HISTORICAL ROOTS

As early as the 17th century, intense debate raged as to whether enslaved Black people should learn to read the Bible. Massachusetts colonist and Puritan minister Cotton Mather solved the dilemma by twisting religious instruction into a justification for enslaving Black people. Mather interpreted the Ten Commandments to give slaveholders the same respect as God. Thus, Christian conversion of the enslaved became a means of reinforcing the enslaved status of Africans, shifting the justification for enslavement from *heathenism* (not believing in Christianity) to race.



REMEMBER

Overwhelmingly, revolts were the most feared consequence of educating enslaved people, and when rebellions did occur, abolishing access to education was often a response. Reactions to the Stono Rebellion in Charleston in 1739, for example, included the passage of the Negro Act of 1740, which prohibited the education of all enslaved people in South Carolina. Following Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831, Virginia passed even more legislation reinforcing punishments for Black American literacy. (To find out more about these and other significant rebellions and uprisings, go to Chapter 4.)

After the American Revolution ended in 1783, Massachusetts led many Northern states in abolishing slavery. Amid the growing chasm that formed between North and South regarding slavery, educating enslaved people quickly became one of the most highly contested issues.

In the South

As antislavery activity intensified in the 1800s, Southern states held tightly to slavery and resurrected old laws as well as passed new ones known as the *Slave Codes* (refer to Chapter 4). Among other things, these laws increased the penalties for teaching enslaved people to read and write. The punishments reflected one's status in society:

- **Free Black people:** Free Black people could be beaten, fined, jailed, and even enslaved.
- **Enslaved Black people:** To deter other enslaved Black people, slaveholders severely punished those daring to educate themselves, sometimes killing them.
- **White people:** In Georgia, in 1829, the law fined white people $500 in addition to possible imprisonment for teaching enslaved or free Black people to read. More often, in many of the Southern colonies or states, other white people ran them out of town.

Not even the threat of death quelled Black Americans' thirst for knowledge. But because of the laws prohibiting literacy, education for those enslaved was mostly unorganized and supervised:

- **By other enslaved people in secret meetings:** Enslaved people who could read and write, even at the most rudimentary levels, were compelled to teach others. In the South, *camp meetings,* similar to secret meetings held in West Africa to discuss important issues, were held in the woods. In more urban areas, *Sabbath school* lessons were conducted in secret in a house or a church, usually on a Sunday or whenever those enslaved could steal some free time.

- **By slaveholders:** Curiously, some enslaved people learned how to read with the help of their slaveholders, who were sometimes their fathers. Other slaveholders had experienced religious conversions and thus believed in the religious value of Black American literacy.
- **By luck:** Sometimes by serving as companions to the slaveholders' children, enslaved people lucked out and were educated simply by being in the right place at the right time.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Frederick Douglass expressed the thirst for education in his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave Written by Himself* (1845) when he wrote, "These dear souls came not to Sabbath school because it was popular to do so, nor did I teach them because it was reputable to be thus engaged. Every moment they spent in that school, they were liable to be taken up, and given thirty-nine lashes. They came because they wished to learn."

Underground schooling ruled much of the South, with churches often shouldering that responsibility. But even churches weren't safe. When a Richmond newspaper commented on Black children carrying books on Sundays, local law enforcement raided the church. Laws restricting education for Black Americans persisted in the South, even after the Civil War.



REMEMBER

Just because free Black people couldn't legally attend schools in the South didn't mean they didn't pay for them. For example, free Black people in Baltimore (then considered a solid part of the South) were forced to pay taxes for schools they weren't allowed to attend.

In the North

Leading up to the Civil War, educational opportunities for free Black people improved considerably in the North. In 1758, the Anglican-affiliated Associates of Dr. Bray opened a school for free Black people in Philadelphia. By 1770, Frenchman Anthony Benezet, a teacher who educated enslaved children in his home, had established the Negro School of Philadelphia with his Quaker peers. In addition to private education efforts, public education for Black Americans developed in the North, including the following:

- **Boston:** In 1820, the city established a Black public school, and in 1855, Boston became the first school system in the country to integrate public school education.
- **Philadelphia:** The city's first public school for Black Americans began in 1822, and by 1850, there were eight such schools.

» **New York City:** The first Free African School opened in 1787, followed by another school in 1820, which housed 500 boys. By the early 1830s, there were four other such schools in the city, and Black Americans took full control of them in 1832 until a public school system emerged in 1834.

Even with the rise of education among free Black people, resistance continued to simmer in the North. New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Indiana, and Ohio began developing policies, sometimes informal, of segregated education. White taxpayers were known to object to funding public schools for Black children as well as effectively delay the construction of schools for them.

Reconstructing: Education post–Civil War

During Reconstruction, education for Black Americans changed significantly. For the first time in American history, educating Black Americans became a national public policy issue of major concern. Prompted by secular aid societies and prominent philanthropists who later felt that only the government could handle the tremendous educational demands of the recently emancipated, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands — more popularly known as the Freedmen's Bureau — shouldered the responsibility of educating Black Americans. By 1867, the Freedmen's Bureau had opened almost 4,500 schools, many of them free. By the 1870s, an estimated 250,000 students had enrolled.

Many white Southerners weren't moved by this passion to educate Black Americans, so they burned schools intended for Black children and taunted and beat white teachers who taught Black students. As a means of maintaining a system of white supremacy, white Southerners who acquiesced to educating Black Americans often insisted upon elementary education only.

Interestingly, efforts to educate the recently emancipated helped create a nationwide public school system that also benefited poor white people. When Reconstruction ended in 1877, however, the federal government didn't become actively involved in educating Black Americans again until the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that legally desegregated public schools (see Chapter 8).



REMEMBER

Emboldened by the end of Reconstruction and the landmark Supreme Court *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896 proclaiming that separate institutions for Black and white Americans were acceptable if they were "equal," white Southerners showed no pity when it came to educating Black Americans. A year before the *Plessy* ruling, South Carolina spent $3.11 per white pupil compared to a paltry $1.05 per Black pupil. By 1930, that gap had widened to an $52.89 per white pupil and just $5.20 per Black pupil. In addition, Black teachers received a third of the salary white

teachers received. With these realities, it's no surprise that, in 1915, there were more privately owned Black schools than county-owned ones in Georgia, for example. These schools were often funded by local churches and Black benevolent societies.

Even with great numbers of Black Americans migrating North, schools for Black Southerners were still in high demand. By the 1930s, Black school attendance equaled that of white students. Black students, however, attended school in shorter terms, mainly because of the *sharecropping* system in which families worked land they didn't own in exchange for a wage or portion of the land's crop profits; parents often needed their children's help plus the landowners, as well as government officials, kept the kids out of school.

Curiously, the Great Depression (from the late 1920s through the 1930s) increased educational opportunities for Black children. With less cotton to pick, there was more time for school. Black high school enrollment, for example, was five times greater during this period than in 1920. Lack of facilities, however, tempered much of that growth. Separate schools required funds, and with funds low due to the Depression, there simply weren't enough schools to accommodate the demand.

20th-Century Educational Milestones

Despite the many challenges, there were amazing wins in the struggle to educate school-age Black children who, not too long prior, were punished for even wanting to learn to read. Contemporary public school education advanced considerably, especially considering that the idea of a nationwide public school system wasn't even two centuries old and that a fully equitable school system not legally determined by race was even younger.

Mixing it up with the Brown case

On a national level, legal cases challenging school segregation largely focused on higher education. Various protests were mounted, but in the North and in some Southern cities, Black people focused their energies on improving school facilities, building new schools, and securing more Black teachers, among other issues. Then, with *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the Supreme Court ruled in favor of integration in public schools, essentially overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson* (see Chapter 8 for the details of the *Brown* case).

In the South

White Southerners vehemently resented the federal intervention of the *Brown* ruling. In 1957, an angry white mob greeted the nine Black students who attempted to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. To force compliance with the Supreme Court's decision, President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent federal troops to escort the students (see Chapter 8 for details).

In 1960, six-year-old Ruby Bridges attended a New Orleans public school for a year by herself with one white teacher because white parents and school officials spurned integration. Other efforts to integrate also met with resistance and required the presence of federal troops to enforce the law. In fact, many Southern schools didn't desegregate until the early 1970s.

In the North

Prior to the 1930s, many Northern schools could be deemed integrated when they really weren't. Although the North didn't have a formal policy of segregation in place, Black Americans, already relegated to all-Black neighborhoods, were forced into all-Black schools. Thus, segregation in the North was more informal and therefore harder to challenge than in the South.

The 1971 Supreme Court decision in the case of *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* helped change that. Although the case specifically addressed conditions in North Carolina, the ruling also affected the North. The Supreme Court upheld a judge's decision to achieve desegregation through busing Black students to white schools. It rejected de facto (unofficially sanctioned) racial segregation and cleared the way for similar desegregating strategies in Northern school systems.

In the 1973 case *Keyes v. Denver School District No. 1,* Denver became the first major city outside of the South to have its school policies in respect to desegregation challenged before the Supreme Court. This case is significant for two primary reasons:

- It turned school desegregation into a national and not just Southern problem.
- It established that schools with substantial numbers of Black American and Hispanic (Latinx) students weren't desegregated because the two groups suffered similar conditions.

The Supreme Court gave Denver instructions to use school busing to achieve school desegregation.

Prior to this case, busing had already been in use in certain areas like Berkeley, California. During the 2019 Democratic presidential primary debates, California Senator Kamala Harris spoke of being bussed as a little girl in Berkeley. Local NAACP leader Reverend Roy Nichols, who began advocating this strategy in the 1950s, was pivotal to the city's early push behind busing to remedy school segregation. It was an effort that the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whom Nichols knew, was aware of and approved prior to his untimely death in 1968.

As the Supreme Court continued handing down key decisions on the heels of its critical 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which helped transform the nation, busing became a key strategy in ongoing efforts to desegregate the nation's public schools in both the North and the South throughout the 1970s into the 1980s.

Turning back the clock?

More than 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, some activists in the 1990s and 2000s argued that the United States had returned to de facto segregation in education. Others asked whether school desegregation should still be the goal. At issue with the *Brown* decision was the assumption that separate, by its very nature, was deemed not equal; therefore, the only way to equalize the quality of education was to integrate schools. Some civil rights activists contended that two 2006 cases *(Meredith v. Jefferson County [Kentucky] Board of Education* and *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1)* challenging the use of race to achieve school diversity could reverse the historic *Brown* decision. With the absence of retired Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and the addition of conservatives Justice Samuel Alito and Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr., an end to *Brown* wasn't inconceivable. Deciphering the impact of the reversal in terms of affirmative action initiatives in elementary, secondary, and higher education has been difficult, especially as ideology around how to deliver equality in education has changed.

Vouchers and school choice

Because a student's residency determines where that student attends public school, Black parents, especially those who are poor, have had relatively fewer choices regarding where they can send their children if their neighborhood school is inadequate. Therefore, *public vouchers,* government-funded tax credits that allow poorer students to attend private schools, and *public charter schools,* publicly funded schools exempted from certain local and state regulations to allow for more creative education solutions, became viable educational alternatives for many Black Americans.



RE-SEGREGATING?

One study of the nation's largest school systems during the 1997–1998 school year revealed that cities like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Dallas had public school enrollments that were less than 20 percent white, even though public school enrollment for predominantly white neighborhoods remained quite high nationwide. This suggested that

- In areas with substantial nonwhite populations, white parents don't send their kids to public schools at the same rate as parents in predominantly white neighborhoods.
- Because public school attendance continues to reflect the complexion of the neighborhoods in which the schools are located, white Americans even into the 21st century, may still elect to live in predominantly white areas, even when more-diverse areas are an option.

Supporters of voucher programs and charter schools argue that these initiatives provide alternatives to lower-income families while also challenging public schools to improve or lose students. Those opposed to the initiatives warn that voucher programs and charter schools can only help a handful of students and fail to address how public schools can work for all students.

The idea of voucher programs and charter schools is a divided topic with Black Americans. In a public opinion poll conducted in 2000 in Milwaukee and Cleveland, each with public voucher programs, 57 percent of Black Americans favored public vouchers. Despite constituting 17 percent of the public school population nationally during the 2000–2001 school year, Black Americans made up an estimated 33 percent of the charter school population. What's not completely clear is how big a difference these initiatives have made and whether Black children have benefited significantly.

Leaving no child behind? Maybe

Congress's approval of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, generated more nationwide dialogue around elementary school reform than any other legislation in at least two decades. The cornerstone of No Child Left Behind was creating accountability for the nation's failing public schools. Some key provisions included

- Allowing parents to transfer their children to better-performing schools
- Providing financial assistance for tutoring and summer programs

- Making reading a mandate for every child
- Improving teaching quality
- Expanding federal support for charter schools

Critics of No Child Left Behind, which passed Congress with bipartisan support, charged that because the program was severely underfunded, schools couldn't meet the benchmarks No Child Left Behind mandated.

Many Black Americans appeared to support No Child Left Behind in theory. Some seemed to like the idea of a national report card presenting student performances categorized by race, and others believed that No Child Left Behind could help identify and eliminate core racial problems in public education.

Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal

No Child Left Behind critics saw their worst fears realized in 2009, when the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* published an article pointing out statistical discrepancies in Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT) results from Atlanta Public Schools. An investigation by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) revealed in 2011 that 44 of 56 schools cheated on their CRCT. No Child Left Behind critics argued that the Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal was a result of the pressures No Child Left Behind put on schools to meet mandated benchmarks, not educate students.

As many as 178 educators were accused of correcting student answers during testing. Thirty-five people were indicted. Everyone took a plea deal except for 12 of the accused, who chose to stand trial. All but one person, Dessa Curb, were convicted of racketeering and received sentences ranging from 5 years of probation to 20 years of prison time, as well as fines as high as $25,000. Two appealed and lost.

The GBI determined that once-celebrated Superintendent Beverly Hall either knew of the wrongdoing or should have known about the scandal. She was indicted but died from breast cancer before her case could be resolved.

Obama and Trump on education

After more than a decade of No Child Left Behind, the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was restored when President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) into law on December 10, 2015. ESSA committed to increasing access to preschool education and demanded high academic standards to prepare students for success in college and careers. ESEA had

been passed in 1965 under President Lyndon B. Johnson, with the primary goal of full educational opportunity as a civil right.

President Donald J. Trump had different ideas regarding education. His appointment of Betsy DeVos, a generous Republican donor from one of the country's wealthiest families as Secretary of Education was controversial for several reasons, including DeVos's lack of professional experience and expertise in education as well as her fervent support of charter and private schools over improving and fortifying public school education. Under DeVos, the education budget was slashed repeatedly. DeVos also rescinded Obama-era protections against racial disparities in school discipline.

During the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, DeVos remained committed to using government funding to support private school education. Of the $13.5 billion set aside for elementary and secondary schools, she used $180 million to encourage states to create "microgrants" to help parents pay for private schools. She also advised several school districts to divert money intended to serve low-income students to wealthy private schools. For example, in one school guidance document issued by DeVos and the United States Department of Education, Louisiana could legally increase private school funding by 267 percent using government money. For these reasons and more, champions of public school education heralded the 2020 election of Joe Biden as President of the United States as a welcome change.

Higher Learning

In the 19th century, higher education was rare for the majority of Americans — Black or white. College was reserved for the wealthy. Still, Black Americans strongly believed that their fate as a race depended on education. With the majority of Black Americans enslaved, education was viewed as a prerequisite for achieving universal freedom for all Black Americans. Most historically Black colleges got their start as institutes where Black people of all ages could learn to read and write. These schools would later become well-known institutions of higher education. The founding of the following colleges and universities laid the foundation for the higher education of Black Americans:

- **Cheyney University:** Cheyney University was created in 1837 with $10,000 from Quaker philanthropist Richard Humphreys, first as the African Institute and then the Institute for Colored Youth before eventually becoming Cheyney in the 20th century. In its early years, it educated Black youth, prepared teachers, and taught trades and agriculture skills. It remains the oldest of all Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States, as well as the

oldest of the 14 charter institutions of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. Distinguished alumni include beloved *60 Minutes* journalist Ed Bradley and influential civil rights leader Bayard Rustin.

- **Oberlin Collegiate Institute:** Nudged along by a conditional donation from Arthur Tappan, a 19th-century white abolitionist and wealthy businessman, this Ohio institution was established in 1833. It became the first college in the U.S. to adopt an open policy with respect to all qualified Black students instead of accepting them on a case-by-case basis. Oberlin's first Black graduate was George Boyer Vashon, son of abolitionist and Underground Railroad conductor George Bethune Vashon.
- **Berea College:** Conceived as an institution for Black and white students, Berea College, located in Kentucky, began its troubled history in 1855. After operating as an integrated institution after the Civil War, it became a segregated institution from 1904 until 1954 due to a Kentucky law.
- **Wilberforce University:** This university was founded in 1856, by the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, an important force in establishing Black higher education. In 1963, Ohio African University merged with Union Seminary and changed its name to Wilberforce in honor of William Wilberforce, the Englishman instrumental in outlawing the slave trade in Britain. It was the first college owned and operated by Black Americans. Former congressman Floyd Flake became the school's 19th president in 2002.
- **Lincoln University:** Renamed for Abraham Lincoln in 1866, Lincoln University began in 1854 as the Ashmun Institute, named after Jehudi Ashmun, a white advocate of emigration who served as Liberia's first president. It was the first institution of higher education in the country dedicated to providing arts and sciences education for Black men. Distinguished Lincoln alumni include Thurgood Marshall, Cab Calloway, Gil Scott-Heron, and Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president.



Despite the inroads made by some institutions of higher education in the years leading up to the Civil War, only an estimated 28 Black people had bachelor's degrees by the time the war began.

Launching higher ed for the Black masses

The Civil War was a boon to Black American education. Between 1861 and 1890, Northern churches and missionary groups created more than 200 Black private schools in the South. The Freedmen's Bureau (refer to Chapter 6) later joined that effort.

THE FALL OF NOYES ACADEMY

Some members of the New England Anti-Slavery Society and the American Anti-Slavery Society (both established in the early 1830s) took a practical approach to higher education for Black Americans. From 1832 to 1834, they collected funds for what was known as the Manual Labor School, a college preparatory high school open to white and Black students.

Canaan, New Hampshire, was the location for what later became the Noyes Academy. In March 1835, 28 white students and 14 Black students, including Alexander Crummell (who would go on to become a noted Black American intellectual), began classes at Noyes Academy. The school was short-lived, however. After Noyes Academy's own anti-slavery society president, a Black student, delivered a fiery public antislavery speech on the Fourth of July to thunderous applause, some of Canaan's white residents gave the school a month to close. When the school didn't comply, Canaan's white residents and residents of neighboring towns reportedly used 100 oxen to remove the school from its foundation and dump it into a nearby swamp.

Most of these schools, public and private, didn't start out as full-fledged colleges and universities but rather as *normal* (a term for *teacher's college*) schools and institutes, many with an emphasis on agricultural and industrial education. Because of the high illiteracy rate among Black Americans, the more-advanced institutions initially functioned as high schools. In keeping with the early beginnings of Black American education, these institutions produced preachers and teachers whose mission was to teach and prepare others. By 1872, institutions such as Atlanta University began granting baccalaureate degrees, and two institutions ventured into medicine:

- **Howard University** in Washington, D.C., chartered by an act of Congress in 1867, enjoyed close ties with the Freedmen's Bureau. That relationship resulted in the establishment of the Freedmen's Hospital in 1868, and Howard University College of Medicine in 1869.
- **Meharry Medical College** in Nashville, founded under the auspices of the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1876, is the largest and second-oldest historically Black medical school.



Until the 1970s, Meharry and Howard trained nearly 80 percent of the nation's Black physicians. Even today, the two institutions, along with the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta and the Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science, which operates a college of medicine in conjunction with UCLA, train a high percentage of the nation's Black doctors.

THE ROLE OF WHITE PEOPLE IN BLACK COLLEGES

With the end of Reconstruction and the Supreme Court sanction of separate but equal in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, Black colleges were in a precarious position. Ill-meaning whites who controlled Black public colleges in some Southern states withheld needed funds. Some well-intentioned whites exhibited paternalistic attitudes that reinforced plantation values despite their mission to educate and uplift Black students.

White leadership dominated many Black colleges simply because initially there weren't enough Black Americans qualified for such positions. (Well into the 1960s, some Black colleges never had nonwhite presidents.) Without white support, many Black colleges wouldn't have survived.

When the Freedmen's Bureau closed in 1872, Northern missionary organizations didn't abandon their original missions. One such organization was the all-important American Missionary Association that was created in 1846, specifically to educate and prepare Black Americans to lead themselves. Aid from missionary and benevolent aid societies as well as donations from Black people kept Black colleges afloat. After 1900, *Negro colleges,* as they were called, benefited greatly from the expansion of aid from secular foundations, particularly those created by Northern philanthropists. Funding from organizations such as the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Southern Education Board, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, the Phelps-Stokes Fund, and the Carnegie Foundation helped Black colleges thrive.

The Morrill Acts: Making it stick

The Morrill Acts are some of the most important pieces of legislation for higher education in the United States. In 1857, Vermont representative Justin Morrill introduced a bill to the House of Representatives proposing that the government set aside land for each state to create at least one "land-grant college" to educate those who worked the land. Morrill's system would provide liberal and practical education to farmers and laborers, among others, especially in the agricultural and mechanical arts (hence the A&M moniker in the name of many land-grant colleges). Originally vetoed by President James Buchanan, the Morrill Act was reintroduced and passed by Congress in the midst of the Civil War. A second Morrill Act in 1890 demanded that states either distribute equal funding to Black land-grant colleges or admit Black students to the existing, predominantly white institutions.


REMEMBER

Although Southern states, in particular, continued to underfund comparable Black institutions and bar Black students from attending predominantly white institutions, the Morrill Acts set important precedents in higher education that the NAACP Legal Defense Fund used in later decades in its attempts to desegregate higher education (refer to Chapter 8 for more).

Determining the goal of higher education

An intense intellectual debate divided Black American intellectuals for nearly half a century. Booker T. Washington, the elder statesman, and W.E.B. Du Bois, an emerging leader, differed on the most beneficial kind of education for Black Americans. Washington was in the industrial education camp; Du Bois favored liberal arts education.


REMEMBER

While historically Du Bois and Washington, whom you can read more about in the political realm in Chapter 7, have been portrayed as polar opposites, the truth is that they weren't diametrically opposed to one another. Given the fact that Washington often said one thing while secretly doing another and that Tuskegee offered courses in what are traditionally considered liberal arts areas, Washington and Du Bois may have had more middle ground than the academic community at large suspected. Ultimately, both men were deeply concerned with the overall well-being of Black people, and each worked tirelessly to uplift the race. Although Black educators bitterly debated their arguments long after Washington's death in 1915, each man's argument has some truth to it. The right answer for Black higher education may be a combination of both philosophies.

Booker T. Washington's position

At the turn of the 20th century, Booker T. Washington, shown in Figure 13-1, was the most powerful Black man in the United States and one of the nation's most powerful men of any color. Born in Virginia in slavery's last days, Washington studied to become a teacher at Hampton Normal and Agriculture Institute. Inspired by the white principal's emphasis on industrial education, moral fortitude, and manual labor, Washington eventually headed the newly formed Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama and built a formidable institution steeped in the values he had learned at Hampton.

Washington influenced countless other institutions, big and small, across the educational spectrum. Known as "the Wizard" for all his complex maneuvering, his ability to relate to various audiences aided him well. Careful not to offend Southern white planters, Washington managed to "stay in his place" while attracting large amounts of money from Northern philanthropists.



FIGURE 13-1: Booker T. Washington with his wife Margaret Murray.

Library of Congress/Getty Images

Washington's emphasis on trade or industrial education addressed the realities of the recently freed masses. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Washington knew Black Americans had a strong connection to agriculture and used Tuskegee to address those immediate needs. Thanks to the work of scholar George Washington Carver (see the nearby sidebar), an important agricultural science pioneer, Tuskegee taught local farmers new techniques that allowed them to get the most from the land. The Tuskegee model empowered students to become self-sufficient and to spread that message to other Black people by teaching and serving as examples, in addition to founding their own schools.

W.E.B. Du Bois's position

Born in 1868 in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, where he was one of just 50 Black people, Du Bois's experience differed from that of most Black Americans. Unable to afford Harvard, he attended Fisk College in Nashville, where he encountered the plight of Black Southerners for the first time. After graduating, Du Bois was able to enter Harvard and eventually became the first Black student to complete a Ph.D. there. He also spent a year of study in Berlin.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

Tuskegee's George Washington Carver favored fields and labs to the spotlight. Carver was an agricultural genius, and his outstanding work is still relevant today. Born enslaved around 1864 or 1865, Carver spent much of his early life with his one-time slaveholders Moses and Susan Carver, who also raised his brother.

A sickly child, Carver showed an early aptitude for horticulture. Susan Carver encouraged his education, and Carver, who wasn't permitted to attend school in his hometown in Missouri, set out for high school in Kansas at age 13. Rejected by several colleges because of his race, Carver eventually attended Simpson College in Iowa, where he excelled in art and music before transferring to Iowa State Agricultural College. Asked to pursue graduate studies, Carter received national recognition as a botanist for his work in plant pathology and mycology, the study of fungi.

In 1896, Booker T. Washington recruited Carver to Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama, where Carver remained until his death in 1943. At Tuskegee, Carver tackled the plight of Black farmers: To solve the problem of soil depletion, he suggested they alternate planting cotton crops with legumes such as peanuts or sweet potatoes to restore depleted nutrients to the soil. He also created new uses for crops, especially peanuts, to make them more profitable. Even President Teddy Roosevelt praised Carver's work. Today, Carver's innovations regarding multiple uses for peanuts and soy continue to set the tone for agricultural study.



TECHNICAL STUFF

Du Bois was an influential faculty member at Atlanta University, now Clark Atlanta University, the leading institution in the Atlanta University system. During his lifetime, he authored several pioneering scholarly works, including *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America 1638–1870* (1896) and *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899).

Highly educated and an impeccable scholar, Du Bois applied a scientific approach to the so-called "Negro Problem." Unlike Washington, whose educational approach favored the Black masses, Du Bois believed in educating a *Talented Tenth*, the best and brightest members of the race who would then lead the Black masses. Although Du Bois acknowledged a need for industrial education, he didn't view industrial education as a means of elevating the race overall. Du Bois believed that only the exceptional men of the race could save it and that Black colleges had a responsibility to train this Talented Tenth to become "leaders of thought" and "missionaries of culture." Therefore, he advocated a classical education steeped in languages, such as Latin and French, and texts by Aristotle and Plato.

Du Bois's emphasis on a classical education didn't exclude Black culture. As the author of numerous books, many scientific and sociological in scope, Du Bois pioneered early Black American–focused education. Nor did Du Bois believe in excluding Black women from receiving a classical education. When citing men who embodied his ideals of the Talented Tenth, Du Bois often mentioned that their wives read Homer or other venerable works.



THE UNITED NEGRO COLLEGE FUND

Private Black colleges faced serious financial challenges in the 1940s. Although they were educating an estimated half of the South's Black students, the Great Depression and World War II complicated fund-raising efforts. Faced with this financial crisis, Tuskegee Institute's third president, Dr. Frederick D. Patterson, published an open letter in *The Pittsburgh Courier* urging other presidents of Black private colleges and universities to pool their resources and raise funds cooperatively. The next year, with 27 colleges and universities on board, the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) raised nearly $800,000.

Pending school desegregation threatened to undermine the UNCF's efforts: With white institutions theoretically opened to Black students, the UNCF had to work harder to convince donors to give to Black institutions. Always full of surprises, the UNCF kicked off its second capital campaign in 1963 at the White House; the event was hosted by President John F. Kennedy, who donated the Pulitzer Prize money he had received for his book *Profiles in Courage.*

In 1972, the UNCF adopted the slogan "A Mind Is a Terrible Thing to Waste," which was destined to become one of the most recognizable slogans in American advertising history. First televised in 1979, the star-studded telethon *The Lou Rawls Parade of Stars,* now *An Evening of Stars,* has contributed more than $200 million to the UNCF. Publishing magnate Walter Annenberg's $50 million gift to UNCF in 1990, was the largest single contribution to Black colleges.

UNCF donor and Black billionaire Robert F. Smith attracted national attention during his 2019 commencement address at UNCF member institution Morehouse, the nation's only all-male HBCU, when he pledged to pay off the student loans of the graduating class, totaling $34 million. In response to the police killing of George Floyd captured on video in Minnesota on May 25, 2020 (read more about it in Chapter 11), Netflix co-founder Reed Hastings and his wife Patty Quillin donated $120 million, giving $40 million to UNCF and its member institutions Morehouse and Spelman in Atlanta. UNCF is also a participant in the $1 billion Gates Millennium Scholars Program, funded by Bill and Melinda Gates. For more on the UNCF, check out `www.uncf.org`.

Desegregating higher education

Black American attendance at predominantly white institutions dates as far back as the 18th century, with a number of Black students graduating from mainstream universities in the 19th century. The bulk of Black students, however, entered white colleges in significant numbers in the 1960s and 1970s on the heels of *Brown v. Board of Education.* Today, Black students continue to attend and graduate in significant numbers.

To ensure diversity on college campuses, many schools instituted affirmative action programs in the 1970s. Because some of these programs utilized racial quotas to meet their diversity goals, legal challenges contesting this practice began. The most notable was *Bakke v. California Board of Regents* in 1978. Although the Supreme Court ruled against the use of racial quotas as the main criterion for admitting a student, it decided that a college or university could consider race as one of its criteria in admission policies.

Beginning in the 1990s, attacks on affirmative action increased. In 1996, California voters passed Proposition 209, which eliminated affirmative action in public school admissions and government hiring. Civil rights activists contend that, as a direct result of Proposition 209, Black and Latinx enrollments in California colleges plummeted to all-time lows. States such as Michigan and Florida adopted similar measures. Despite overwhelmingly choosing former Vice President Joe Biden to replace Donald Trump as President of the United States during the November 3, 2020 election, Californians solidly voted against Proposition 16, which would have repealed Proposition 209.



REMEMBER

Historically competitive colleges and universities, like those in the Ivy League, use a number of factors when considering enrollment, including region, community service, and socioeconomic status. In addition, they use test scores and academic performance, which remain the strongest requirements for entry. By insisting Black and other minority students have been admitted to some of the nation's most prestigious institutions based solely on race, affirmative action challengers (many of them white and male) have created the perception of Black intellectual inferiority.



TECHNICAL STUFF

John Singleton's 1995 film *Higher Learning* centers on the challenges of college life, particularly for Black students, at a predominantly white institution.

HBCUs: NATIONAL TREASURES

The Higher Education Act of 1965, which introduced the label "HBCU," declared such institutions national treasures. Increased Black enrollment at predominantly white institutions and declining numbers at some HBCUs raised concerns, however, about the viability of HBCUs into the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, especially financially. Presidents from Jimmy Carter to George W. Bush signed executive orders intended to enhance HBCUs. Despite evidence that state and federal funding for these educational institutions increased considerably since 1965, HBCUs still struggled. Inequities in funding for predominantly Black and white universities, as charged in the 30-year court case of *Ayers v. Fordice* involving predominantly Black public institutions such as Jackson State University, haven't disappeared. In 2002, an agreement was reached to distribute $503 million to Mississippi's Black public universities — Jackson State, Alcorn, and Mississippi Valley State — over 17 years.

Private HBCUs such as Atlanta's all-female Spelman College started sidestepping financial limitations with aggressive individual fundraising efforts in the 1990s. Under the leadership of then-president Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole, Spelman raked in more than $100 million. In December 2020, MacKenzie Scott, ex-wife of Amazon leader Jeff Bezos, donated an estimated $560 million to various HBCUs, including gifts of $50 million to Prairie View A&M University in Texas and $40 million to Morgan State University in Maryland. Scott kicked off the giving spree early with gifts of $20 million and $40 million to Morehouse College and Howard University, respectively.

According to an October 2019 article by *The Hechinger Report*, HBCUs have produced 80 percent of the country's Black judges, 50 percent of its Black doctors, 27 percent of its Black graduates with STEM degrees, and roughly 50 percent of its Black teachers, despite making up just 3 percent of all four-year colleges. Notable HBCU alums, including Martin Luther King Jr. (Morehouse), Oprah Winfrey (Tennessee State University), and Vice President Kamala Harris (Howard University), are too numerous to name in full. The enrollment spike at some HBCUs in the early 21st century has been attributed to increased racial harassment at predominantly white institutions as well as in the nation at large, particularly under President Donald Trump.

School Daze: The Black Greek system

Marshaling the spirit of racial uplift with a commitment to academic excellence, community service, and brotherhood/sisterhood, Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) are one of the few institutions uniting Black students at both mainstream universities and HBCUs. Outside Black collegiate circles, knowledge of the *Divine Nine* — the nine fraternities and sororities that compose the National Panhellenic Council (NPHC), the governing body of Black Greek organizations — is rare. Yet they remain an important force in the overall Black community.

BGLOs' historical relevance is profound. Particularly during the early 20th century, BGLO membership at mainstream universities provided a social network to students often isolated because of race. In some cases, funding from BGLOs provided housing in close proximity to schools during a time when Black students couldn't live in dorms and often traveled long distances to pursue their educations at predominantly white institutions. Aspiring members must meet acceptance criteria that includes a designated grade-point average, letters of recommendation, and a commitment to community service.

Five fraternities and four sororities (see Table 13-1) make up the Divine Nine; five of these organizations trace their origins to Howard University. Each BGLO is an intense network that connects students and alumni of undergraduate and graduate colleges and universities across the nation and even across the globe for a lifetime, not just their school years. In addition to chapter meetings, BGLOs have regional meetings and national conventions.

TABLE 13-1 **The Divine Nine**

Organization	Date Founded	Founding College	Colors	Prominent Members
Fraternities				
Alpha Phi Alpha	1906	Cornell University	Black and Old Gold	W.E.B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King Jr., former Atlanta mayors Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, actor Paul Robeson, billionaire Robert F. Smith
Kappa Alpha Psi	1911	Indiana University	Crimson and Cream	Former NFL player Colin Kaepernick, BET Founder Bob Johnson, former L.A. Mayor Tom Bradley, tennis legend Arthur Ashe
Omega Psi Phi	1911	Howard University	Royal Purple and Old Gold	Historian Carter G. Woodson, Jesse Jackson, NBA great Shaquille O'Neal, legendary radio broadcaster Tom Joyner, comedians Rickey Smiley and Steve Harvey
Phi Beta Sigma	1913	Howard University	Royal Blue and Pure White	Black Panther cofounder Huey P. Newton, Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah, NFL Hall of Famer Emmitt Smith, gospel music legend Bobby Jones, civil rights activist John Lewis
Iota Phi Theta	1963	Morgan State University	Charcoal Brown and Gilded Gold	*Good Morning America* weatherman Spencer Christian, journalist Michael Frisby, Baltimore Commissioner of Housing Daniel Henson
Sororities				
Alpha Kappa Alpha	1908	Howard University	Salmon Pink and Apple Green	Actress Phylicia Rashad, astronaut Dr. Mae Jemison, Vice President Kamala Harris, Miss America 1990 Debbye Turner

(continued)

TABLE 13-1 ***(continued)***

Organization	Date Founded	Founding College	Colors	Prominent Members
Delta Sigma Theta	1913	Howard University	Crimson and Cream	Journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Senator Carol Moseley Braun, Olympic gold medalist Wilma Rudolph, AME Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie
Zeta Phi Beta	1920	Howard University	Royal Blue and White	Writer/folklorist Zora Neale Hurston, opera singer Grace Bumbry, comedian Sheryl Underwood, poet Gwendolyn Brooks
Sigma Gamma Rho	1922	Butler University	Royal Blue and Gold	Finance author Cheryl Broussard, actress Hattie McDaniel, gospel singer Vanessa Bell Armstrong, artist Ruth Russell Williams, U.S. Congresswoman Robin Kelly

BGLOs IN POP CULTURE

Step shows, one of the BGLOs' most recognized cultural activities, are elaborate productions in which opposing Greek organizations or chapters of the same organization demonstrate coordinated body and dance moves that feature rhythmic stomping and clapping accompanied by boastful chanting. Many historians have noted the African retentions in these rituals.

Beyoncé exposed a large segment of the world to this tradition with her 2018 Coachella performance, dubbed "Beychella," and her subsequent 2019 Netflix documentary *Homecoming.* In addition to putting Black marching band culture in the spotlight, Beyoncé also put BGLOs there as well, creating her own sorority, BDK, Beta Delta Kappa, for the occasion.

The Black Greek experience also inspired the 2017 film *Burning Sands*, starring Trevor Jackson, as well as the 2007 film *Stomp the Yard,* produced by Will Packer and Rob Hardy, both members of Alpha Phi Alpha. Although the 2002 film *Drumline* centered on the grand Black marching band tradition, glimpses of Black Greek life were also evident. Spike Lee's 1988 film *School Daze* is arguably the first film to really explore the Black college experience with a huge spotlight on the Black Greek experience. (*School Daze* was also about colorism and the division amongst Black people.) On television, that distinction largely belongs to the long-running Black college series *A Different World* on NBC.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Finding roots in folktales and personal narratives
- Reflecting the post–Civil War experience
- Exploring Harlem Renaissance artists and those who followed
- Following the rise of Black women writers
- Looking at Black literature since the 1990s

Chapter 14

Writing Down the Bones: Black Literature

Because enslaved Black people were prohibited from learning how to read or write for much of the nation's early years, a greater portion of Black Americans were illiterate until after the Civil War. But despite the fact that Black Americans were denied basic literacy, some Black people, like Phillis Wheatley, who was praised for her ability to learn the English language quickly, still created works of great literary merit. As with music (which you can read more about in Chapter 16), Black American literary roots can be traced back to the African continent.

This chapter explores those roots, from a rich oral tradition to early novels by writers such as William Wells Brown, 20th-century literary high points like the Harlem Renaissance, and the explosion of Black women writers in the 1970s and 1980s.

Troubled Beginnings

English wasn't the native tongue of the Africans who arrived in what would become the United States. The first enslaved Africans hailed from different parts of the African continent, with some arriving in the colonies by way of the Caribbean. Consequently, enslaved people didn't share a common African language. However, they did share several similar traits, including the all-important oral tradition. Eventually they melded those similarities with their new European-inspired environment and adapted to the characteristics that would come to define the nation overall.



REMEMBER

Africans valued spoken language, and that continued in the New World, especially given the many barriers preventing them from learning to read and write English. On the African continent, official storytellers known as *griots* were responsible for keeping the history of their respective villages. They also passed on morality tales and tales of creation, better known as *folktales.* Although some of the details changed to reflect American realities, these tales remained essentially the same as their African predecessors. Folklore became an important means of transferring essential information, particularly survival mechanisms and key Black values such as the importance of community.

As literature developed in the Black community, folktales were the first stories of Black culture and among the first for the broader American culture. The *griot's* role as a historian proved to be a vital one as the oral history tradition became the method by which many Black people preserved their collective and individual histories. Early published works by Black writers, however, didn't directly reflect Black folk traditions. Many such works rarely contained any indications of race.

Early poets

Separated from those who spoke their language, enslaved Africans had to find a way to communicate with each other as well as their white slaveholders. In the early 18th century, American literature was still developing and Black literature generally didn't exist. Yet despite these limitations, some Black writers beat the odds to lay the foundation. First among them are

- **Lucy Terry:** Although published a little more than 100 years after it was composed in 1746, Lucy Terry's only surviving poem, "Bars Fight," about the Indian massacre of two white families in Deerfield, Massachusetts, makes her, for many scholars, the first published Black writer in the United States. In the poem, Terry's race is undetectable, even though she was born in Africa and kidnapped into slavery.
- **Jupiter Hammon:** Frequently credited as the first published Black writer, Jupiter Hammon, who was born enslaved, composed "An Evening Thought: Salvation

by Christ, with Penitential Cries," in 1760. Enslaved by several generations of the Lloyd family in Long Island, New York, Hammon was formally educated.

- **Phillis Wheatley:** Phillis Wheatley, who was captured from her native Senegal in West Africa and was enslaved at age 7, mastered English by the age of 13 and became the most famous of the early Black poets. Wheatley's slaveholders, John and Susanna Wheatley, cultivated her intellectual abilities by permitting her to study Greek, Latin, mythology, and history. By 1767, the 13-year-old published her first poem. Many sources cite Wheatley's work in poetry as the genesis of Black literature.



Because asserting that the intellectual inferiority of enslaved Africans was a cornerstone of American slavery (see Chapters 4 and 5 for details), some colonists, including Thomas Jefferson, questioned Wheatley's authorship, forcing Wheatley to prove her authenticity in court in 1772. Boston luminaries like John Hancock certified Wheatley as genuine. When a London publisher published Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* a year later, it included a certificate of authenticity. Because of Wheatley's race, Boston publishers had refused to publish the book.

OTHER EARLY WORKS ABOUT AND BY BLACK WRITERS

The designation of Black poets Lucy Terry and Jupiter Hammon as the first published Black writers in this nation isn't controversy-free. Books about Black Americans, including some credited to Black Americans, preceded these works. Typically, however, these early Black American works were "as told to" stories. Examples include the following:

- *Adam Negro's Tryall,* which appeared in 1703, arose from a case in which Adam Negro, an indentured servant, sued John Saffin for not honoring his freedom and enslaving him. Negro eventually won the case, mainly through the aid of Samuel Sewell, who disdained Saffin. Because *Adam Negro's Tryall* contains an amalgamation of documents surrounding the case and lacks one clear author, many scholars have decided that it isn't a true slave narrative.
- *The Declaration and Confession of Jeffrey, a Negro, who was executed at Worchester, October 17, 1745, for the murder of Mrs. Tabitha Sanford, at Mendon, the 12th of September Preceding* is a criminal narrative with questionable Black authorship.
- *Some Memoirs of the Life of Job, the Son of Solomon, the High Priest of Boonda in Africa,* a 1734 book by white author Thomas Bluett, tells the story of ex-slave Job Ben Solomon (also known as Ayuba Suleiman Diallo) who was reputed to be from an influential family. (For more on this story, refer to Chapter 3.)

In later decades, religious conversion to Christianity became the primary context in which Black Americans, enslaved and free, learned to read. Under that circumstance, the Bible became increasingly more important to early Black writers. (Flip to Chapter 12 for more on religious conversion and literacy during enslavement.)

Slave narratives

After the American Revolution, the North and South began to divide themselves as antislavery and proslavery. Unlike the work of the earliest known Black writers in this country, race was a primary concern of Black writers during this period. As a result, a new genre known as the *slave narrative* emerged. Even though these narratives were autobiographies to an extent, they served a greater abolitionist function (read about slavery and abolitionism in Chapters 4 and 5). Slave narratives share certain key characteristics:

- **Claim of authorship:** Proslavery factions often accused those opposed to slavery of making up horrific stories about slavery. Therefore, it was critical for slave narratives to establish the authenticity of the individual telling the story. As the slave narrative developed, many were written by the formerly enslaved themselves, but some were dictated to others.
- **Testimonial from a respected white abolitionist or editor:** Few slave narratives went unauthenticated. The words of William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, two of the nation's most prominent abolitionists, appeared at the beginning of Frederick Douglass's 1845 slave narrative.
- **Tales of bondage:** "I was born" begins the first sentence of many slave narratives as authors (usually male) shared the early details of their lives. Quite often, the author's father was white or unknown. Recognition of one's status as being enslaved was critical in the early part of the narrative. Meanwhile, the bulk of the narrative discussed the actual bondage experience, with the author frequently including details about Christian conversion and learning to read. Whippings that they themselves or others received was another prominent feature, as were tales of separated family members and failed escape attempts by themselves or others.
- **Escape and freedom:** Typically, considerable planning went into successful escapes, and in the narratives, the authors disclosed enough details without being too specific, for fear that too many details would prevent others from escaping. Becoming free was the ultimate goal, so slave narratives ended with the author's freedom.



REMEMBER

Although proslavery factions frequently accused the slave narrative authors of exaggerating the horrors of slavery, more often than not, the authors hadn't exaggerated the incidents but rather humanized them. Because slavery functioned on a belief in the inhumanity of Black people, slave narratives rebuked this thinking by asserting and affirming that humanity.



TECHNICAL STUFF

Before 1865, an estimated 100 slave narratives were published, with the bulk of them published between 1830 and 1860. Given the high illiteracy rates among both whites and Black people in early America, the number of published narratives is quite high. Scholars frequently cite *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa* as the first published slave narrative.

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave

Slave narratives became an important tool to advance abolitionism, and few were as influential as Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave,* published in 1845. A skilled orator, Douglass already had quite an abolitionist following prior to the publication of his *Narrative*. Although simple and full of the slave narrative tropes discussed earlier, Douglass's writing possessed an uncommon eloquence.

More than contributing eloquence, Douglass brought attention to the hidden messages in "slave" or *sorrow* songs, suggesting enslaved Black people developed strategies to manage slavery. As later generations discovered, Douglass's work revealed that Black Americans possessed a unique culture that was distinct from that of white Americans. That reality fueled Black literature for generations.

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

Orators such as Maria Stewart and Sojourner Truth discussed sex and sexuality before Harriet Jacobs, but their prose lacked the emotional and sustained punch of Jacobs's slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* published in 1861.



TECHNICAL STUFF

Because *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* came out in the same year the Civil War began, it made a greater impact in the 20th century as a direct testimony of the sexual exploitation experienced by enslaved women.

A novel journey

By providing the first portraits of Black heroes, slave narratives played a key role in the development of the Black American novel. Readers of slave narratives learned that Black Americans possessed great intellect and tremendous courage, remarkable qualities for fictional characters. Therefore, it's of little surprise that

slavery figured so prominently in *Clotel; or The President's Daughter*, the first Black American novel. After all, its author, William Wells Brown, published his successful slave narrative, *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave*, in 1847.

Published in London in 1853 and inspired by Thomas Jefferson's long-rumored relationship with Sally Hemings, whom he enslaved, *Clotel* traces several generations of racially mixed women linked to Thomas Jefferson. Brown, whose father and grandfather were white, established the *tragic mulatto* as a key literary archetype in Black literature. Historically, the tragic mulatto has been a female tormented by being neither Black nor white. *Clotel* was so successful that it went through several editions. (Nella Larsen successfully explored this archetype in her 1928 and 1929 novels, *Quicksand* and *Passing*.)

Other key early novels include the following:



- ***Our Nig,* by Harriet E. Wilson (published in 1859):** Like Brown, Wilson used the tragic mulatto theme but went a step further by also presenting an interracial marriage. Much of *Our Nig* mirrored Wilson's life.

  Our Nig is the first novel published in the United States by a Black American female. Until Harvard's Henry Louis Gates rediscovered *Our Nig* in the early 1980s, however, it was a forgotten text.

- ***The Garies and Their Friends* (1857), by Frank J. Webb:** This rarely studied novel, published in London, was the first known work to feature free Black people as well as a lynch mob. It was also among the first works to discuss the concept of passing for white in detail.

- ***Blake,* by Martin Delany (serialized in two Black publications in 1859 and 1860):** *Blake*, whose full title is *Blake; Or the Huts of America: A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba,* is noteworthy for its trailblazing Black nationalist and Pan-Africanist sensibilities. Unlike in *Clotel* or *Our Nig,* Delany's protagonist isn't biracial. In addition, *Blake* is largely about a rebellious plot to liberate both Black Americans and Black Cubans. First published in book form in 1970, the novel advocates Black self-reliance over white benevolence and boldly references white oppression of Black people.

  The newer edition of *Blake*, prepared by textual scholar Jerome McGann, offers the first correct printing of the work in book form. It establishes an accurate text, supplies contextual notes and commentaries, and presents an authoritative account of the work's composition and publication history. In a lively introduction, McGann argues that Delany employs the resources of fiction to develop a critical account of the interconnected structure of racist power as it operated throughout the American Atlantic. He likens *Blake* to Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, in its willful determination to transform a living and terrible present.

After the Civil War, racial inequality replaced slavery as the hot-button issue, and literary works by Black Americans reflected that. As Black literacy rates increased, Black writers could no longer assume their audience was almost exclusively white. Two key developments during this period include *racial uplift* and the *Black folk tradition*.

Racial uplift

The concept of racial uplift prevalent in Black American works from the late 19th and early 20th centuries acknowledged the challenges of racial inequality but remained hopeful that Black Americans could rise above them. Therefore, many of the early protagonists in these works were model characters, often suppressing their individual wants for the greater good of the larger Black community while also communicating the middle-class values white people found acceptable. The work of Pauline E. Hopkins and others reflected these tensions. The most popular texts embodying the "racial uplift" mantra include

- ***Iola Leroy* by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper:** Although better known as a poet, Harper published the novel *Iola Leroy* in 1892. Set at the close of the Civil War and the onset of Reconstruction, the novel covers some important historical events such as reuniting with family after the war. Ultimately, the biracial heroine, though raised as white, chooses not to marry a white suitor who insists that she never reveal her race. Instead, she marries a biracial Black doctor, and they dedicate themselves to uplifting the race.
- ***Up From Slavery* by Booker T. Washington:** Tracing Washington's life from his birth and experience of being enslaved to his journey to educate himself before becoming Tuskegee's renowned leader, *Up From Slavery* champions middle-class values, emphasizing education and hard work as key qualities to help Black people overcome racial inequality. Read more about *Up From Slavery* in Chapter 21.

  Some people consider *Up From Slavery* the last of the great slave narratives because Washington was born enslaved. However, more often, the book, published in 1901, in the 20th century, is acknowledged as the first great Black American autobiography.



- ***The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. Du Bois:** W.E.B. Du Bois's influential work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), is a myriad of things: social commentary, history, poetry, and sociological treatise. Du Bois's essays highlight the challenges Black Americans face, particularly the "twoness" of Black culture, or simply the reality of being Black in a white world. In *The Souls of Black Folk,* Du Bois advocates the idea of a *Talented Tenth,* in which the best and brightest of the Black community would bear the responsibility of advancing the race. This concept fueled many debates during the Harlem Renaissance. (See the next section for information on the Harlem Renaissance and turn to Chapter 21 for more about *The Souls of Black Folk.*)

Black folk tradition

A few Black writers began incorporating Black vernacular and folk culture in their work. This development didn't occur in a vacuum, however. White writers, most notably Mark Twain, were also embracing "common" folk and their speech. Others, such as Thomas Nelson Page, Joel Chandler Harris, and George Washington Cable, were writing tales where the plantation played a prominent role. Two early Black pioneers of Black folk tradition are

- **Paul Laurence Dunbar:** With his book *Lyrics of a Lowly Life* (1896), combining two previously published volumes, Dunbar became the first Black poet since Phillis Wheatley to enjoy widespread popularity. The Dayton, Ohio native's expert mixture of English and dialect brought Black American folk traditions into Black literature. His two notable fiction works include *The Strength of Gideon and Other Stories* (1900), dealing with the plantation and featuring only Black Americans as the primary characters, and *The Sport of the Gods* (1902), one of the first novels set in Harlem as well as one of the first to deal with the negative aspects of city life.
- **Charles Chesnutt:** Considered the first major Black fiction writer, Chesnutt consciously employed Black folk tradition to counter the proslavery spin white authors such as Joel Chandler Harris, who penned the popular Uncle Remus series, put on Black American folklore. Chesnutt's Uncle Julius in *The Conjure Woman, and Conjure Tales* (1899), his most popular work of fiction, outsmarts a transplanted white Northerner. Black folklore served as tales of both morality and survival, a function not always communicated by Harris and others. Chesnutt went beyond simply using Black folk tradition; he also placed emphasis on the positive aspects of that tradition, which Harlem Renaissance writer Zora Neale Hurston later expanded.


REMEMBER

In the face of racial uplift, the creative choices of using Black folk tradition appeared counterproductive, especially to those who felt literature could show that Black Americans possessed the same values the white population treasured. Other Black Americans felt that emphasizing and embracing Black folk culture and speech could empower Black Americans.

Writers' Party: The Harlem Renaissance

No period of Black literary history receives as much attention as the Harlem Renaissance, which roughly spanned from the beginning of World War I to the Great Depression. For the first time, Black artists from various realms — literature, art, and music — formed a collective movement that hit in various parts of the

country. Harlem still gets most of the credit, but Washington, D.C., specifically Howard University, was also another extremely important site, mainly because of the role Howard University professor Alain Locke played in this movement.

Influenced heavily by his studies abroad, when he explored the African influence on Western civilization, Locke, the nation's first Black Rhodes scholar (see Chapter 20), encouraged Black American artists to look to Africa for inspiration and weave that influence into their own work. Lack of culture was one of the reasons cited to justify enslaving Black people. Locke felt that disproving that theory would affect both Black and white people positively. In addition to identifying artists and hosting discussions among them, Locke published the important anthology *The New Negro,* a collection of essays about Black contributions to the arts as well as a sampling of fiction and poetry by emerging Black artists in 1925.

Even though he received much of the attention, Locke wasn't the only one who recognized the impact Black artists could have in improving race relations. Both the National Urban League (NUL) and the NAACP, the nation's two leading civil rights organizations, played significant roles in cultivating writers in particular. From 1923 to 1928, the NUL's Charles S. Johnson fostered the careers of many artists by organizing dinners that allowed writers to network with book publishers, magazine editors, and other writers as well as by establishing literary contests with monetary prizes. Jessie Redmon Fauset, a noted Harlem Renaissance writer in her own right, also nurtured new talent by publishing their works in the pages of the NAACP magazine, *The Crisis.*

Why Harlem?

Several factors outside of New York serving as the headquarters for both the NAACP and the NUL contributed to Harlem serving as the mecca for this movement:

- **Harlem was a cultural center for Black Americans.** The Black Broadway invasion (refer to Chapter 15) generated more interest in Black culture among white people. White dramatists such as Eugene O' Neill took a strong interest in Black life and culture. In 1920, O'Neill's play *The Emperor Jones* starred a Black American. The next year, the Black Broadway musical, *Shuffle Along,* captivated both Black and white audiences. All this coincided with the increasing popularity of jazz, and Harlem was a major nucleus for it all. Several clubs such as the Cotton Club purposely catered to white patrons intrigued by Black culture.
- **Harlem was one of the primary destinations for the Great Migration.** The Great Migration refers to the mass exodus of Black people from the South that began in 1914 (flip to Chapter 7 to read about the Great Migration). As a

result, Harlem artists hailed from various parts of the United States, creating an atmosphere full of new ideas. At the same time, Harlem wasn't shielded from the migration's negative effects, such as overcrowding, segregated housing, and race riots, either. Therefore, many of the works created by the artists who lived in Harlem or at least visited it regularly reflected a national Black identity.



The movement wasn't originally dubbed the Harlem Renaissance. Alain Locke and others referred to it as the *New Negro Movement*, which reflected the sweeping changes Black Americans all over the nation were experiencing. Jacksonville, Florida native James Weldon Johnson, a writer who became an NAACP leader, coined the term the "Harlem Renaissance," and the name stuck.

Key Renaissance artists and themes

A large number of artists representing various parts of the country participated in the Harlem Renaissance. The overwhelming majority were highly educated, hailing from some of the most prestigious Black and mainstream universities. Many were very accomplished in other professions. For example, Rudolph Fisher, noted author of *City of Refuge*, was also a medical doctor.

Harlem Renaissance writers embraced a myriad of themes, but middle-class Black America figured prominently in many of their works, as did the theme of *passing*, an expansion of the tragic mulatto theme first introduced in the mid–19th century (refer to the earlier section "A novel journey"). Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), about a chance encounter reuniting two childhood female friends, one who is passing for white and another living as a Black person, is an influential work. Another highly regarded book on the subject is James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912). Written as a fictional autobiography of a man who ultimately chooses to pass as white to free himself from the mistreatment Black people receive, the book achieved popularity when it was reissued in 1927.

Ultimately, class tensions created a sizable rift among many Harlem Renaissance writers, with Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston becoming the most famous advocates of common Black folk. Both Hughes and Hurston rebuffed arguments that writing about the Black middle class would improve race relations by showing white readers how alike they and many Black Americans were. Hurston and Hughes's critics felt that embracing common Black folk reinforced primitive stereotypes about Black people instead of setting the record straight. Other Black people internalized feelings of Black life and culture as inferior to that of white Americans.

Jean Toomer

Jean Toomer's background was racially mixed, and he didn't identify himself as Black American until time spent in Sparta, Georgia, brought him into intimate contact with Black rural life. *Cane* (1923), a mixture of poems, short stories, and drama, presents Black Southern culture as well as the Black Southerner's adaptation to the urban North before reconciling those two realities in the Black South.


REMEMBER

In critical ways, *Cane* encapsulated the massive search for Black identity that underscored the key debates of the Harlem Renaissance. Many artists and leaders, even those who embraced their racial heritage, weren't quite sure how to incorporate their past into their present. While this tension wasn't a new concern, rendering it in a distinctly artistic mode was unique. *Cane* demonstrated the artistic potential and merit of these tensions as grounding forces for great literary work.


TECHNICAL STUFF

Scholars include Toomer's *Cane* in the Harlem Renaissance and consider him part of the Lost Generation, a group of World War I–era American writers that included F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and T.S. Eliot.

Langston Hughes

One of the Harlem Renaissance's first published writers, Hughes's poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" appeared in the NAACP magazine *The Crisis* in 1921. Even though Harlem Renaissance artists were encouraged to depict Black life, some advisors championed Black middle-class life and values over those of the working class. Hughes disagreed, and in his influential 1926 essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountaintop," he asserted that the Black artist who ran away from himself couldn't be great. Hughes, a Midwesterner, championed Black art reflective of Black life, not just Black life palatable to white people. Hughes was later known for his seminal 1951 poem "Harlem," often erroneously labeled "A Dream Deferred" for its famous line of "what happens to a dream deferred?" and other works.

Zora Neale Hurston

Zora Neale Hurston never outgrew her Harlem Renaissance fame. A student of anthropology who studied with Columbia University's Franz Boas, Hurston also worked for noted Black historian Carter G. Woodson and accompanied Alan Lomax on some of his folklore missions. Raised in the all-Black town of Eatonville, Florida, Hurston was an outspoken supporter of rural Black people and Black folk traditions. Hurston's white patronage did trouble many of her Black contemporaries who accused her of pandering to them.

SUPPORTING THE ARTS

Alain Locke, Charles S. Johnson, and Jessie Redmon Fauset may have been intimately involved in fostering black artists, but these artists still required financial support and additional exposure. Therefore, several patrons, white and Black, including a few key white organizations, facilitated that process. Here are some of the more prominent:

- **Charlotte Osgood Mason:** The influential Charlotte Osgood Mason, a financial patron to both Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, became involved in the Harlem Renaissance after hearing Alain Locke lecture on Black artists in 1927. Extremely meddlesome, Mason, who hosted many gatherings for Black artists in her Park Avenue apartment, tried to dictate Hughes's whereabouts and reportedly had Hurston sign an agreement not to publish anything without her approval. Both writers had fallen out with her by 1932. Soon after, she withdrew all financial support from the Harlem Renaissance.
- **Carl Van Vechten:** A writer himself, Carl Van Vechten was fascinated with Harlem's vices and frequently commented on the "exoticism" and "primitivism" of Black culture, which bothered many people because he, himself, was white. His 1926 novel titled *Nigger Heaven* didn't alleviate those concerns. Still, he brought a lot of mainstream attention to Harlem and Black artists in various genres. A photographer as well, Van Vechten included a number of prominent Black artists among his famous portraits.
- **The Harmon Foundation:** Although more noted for its contributions to Black artists, the Harmon Foundation, endowed by white real estate tycoon William E. Harmon, also provided financial awards to writers. While its influence extended beyond the Harlem Renaissance years, it first established its reputation as a premier supporter of Black fine arts and artists during the Harlem Renaissance.
- **A'Lelia Walker:** One of the few Black patrons, A'Lelia Walker, the only daughter of Madame C.J. Walker (who became a millionaire in the Black haircare industry), was notorious for her well-attended Harlem parties but not for any outright monetary gifts to Harlem Renaissance artists.

To the dismay of artists such as Claude McKay, these patrons sometimes had their own creative ideas and dictated them to the artists. Faced with the threat of withdrawal of funds, some artists acquiesced to their demanding patrons.

Despite winning several contests for impressive short stories like "Spunk" and writing for a number of noted publications during the height of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston published most of her acclaimed works in the 1930s, during the Harlem Renaissance's decline. After Alice Walker's rediscovery of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) in the 1970s, the novel became an important text in the

Black literary canon and in many Southern literature classes as well. (For more on this work, check out Chapter 21.)

Other noteworthy artists

Other important Harlem Renaissance figures include Wallace Thurman, best known for *The Blacker the Berry* (1929); poet Countee Cullen, noted for his poem "Heritage"; and poet Claude McKay, known for his poem "If We Must Die" and the novel *Home to Harlem* (1928).

Post–World War II, Civil Rights–era Literature

Literary scholars are often at a loss in clearly defining the literary period following the Harlem Renaissance. Although Richard Wright began his writing career during the last years of the Harlem Renaissance, he became the dominant Black literary voice of the 1940s. He was such a literary titan that critics frequently dubbed male writers who followed him as "sons of Richard Wright." Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin wrote in Wright's shadow.

Naturalism, realism, and modernism became the predominant literary styles of this period. Much of Wright's early work follows the rules of *naturalism,* where an author attempts to apply scientific principles to human behavior. *Realism,* as its name suggests, is a realistic rendering of life even in fiction. Therefore, many Black writers embraced the common Black man and woman, specifically tying the unrealized potential of Black Americans to racism.

Rejection of previous traditions is a key component of *modernism,* and a number of Black writers embraced this concept as well. They broke with the Harlem Renaissance theme of using literature for the purpose of social acceptance but didn't unconditionally embrace all things "folk." In addition to experimentation with form, the incorporation of Black American myth and ritual became important elements that would later resurface in works by Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor in particular. Black writers during this period continued to grapple with the effects of the Great Migration, which ebbed and flowed. Although the city took center stage, vestiges of rural Southern life remained, often resulting in underlying tensions relating to class and culture.

While a number of very good writers such as Ann Petry, Pulitzer Prize–winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks, William Attaway, Chester Himes, and Dorothy West (who is lumped with Harlem Renaissance writers) emerged in the post-Renaissance,

pre–Black Arts Movement of Black literature, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin are the most well-known.

Richard Wright

A legend in his lifetime, the Mississippi-born Richard Wright became the benchmark for Black writers. Black writers, especially male writers, either embraced him or spurned him, but they couldn't ignore him. Although he joined other Black artists like Josephine Baker in Paris to escape American racism in 1946, he remained an American literary titan, even after his death in 1960. A few of his most notable literary achievements include

- ***Uncle Tom's Children* (1938):** Wright first attracted attention with this collection of four novellas exploring the brutal reality of surviving racism in the American South. Trying to find dignity and a realization of self within the systematic oppression of Jim Crow was a unifying theme for the collection. In "Big Boy Leaves Home," for example, white mob violence mars an innocent outing to the swimming hole, prompting Big Boy to flee the South. Another edition of *Uncle Tom's Children,* with a couple of new stories, appeared in 1940.
- ***Native Son* (1940):** In this novel, Bigger Thomas, poor and uneducated, takes a menial job with a rich white family. When the daughter ignores the social taboos dictating proper contact between a white woman and black man, Thomas becomes fearful to the point that he accidentally kills her. During his trial, where the main objective becomes saving Thomas from the death penalty, Wright emphasizes that American racism turns many well-meaning black men into Bigger Thomas on a routine basis. Although Bigger is guilty, Wright makes a strong argument that forces beyond his control have crippled his life by severely limiting his choices. (Chapter 21 discusses this book in greater detail.)
- ***12 Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the Negro in the United States* (1941):** Like Wright's autobiography *Black Boy* (1945), *12 Million Black Voices* addresses the Great Migration, among other pivotal events. In this work, Wright's poetic words match the powerful images of Black American history.

Ralph Ellison

Unlike Richard Wright and James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison produced few works (*Juneteenth*, his second novel, was published posthumously). Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* (1952) is such a crowning achievement, however, that it alone has solidified his place not only in Black literature but also in the broader category of American literature. In *Invisible Man*, an unnamed Black protagonist born, raised,

and partially educated in the South tracks his 20-year journey of social invisibility from the South to New York City, documenting his transformation from racial naiveté to enlightenment. He also documents his journey from subscribing to the belief that the fabled American dream is a possibility for Black Americans to the ultimate realization that that belief is untrue. In the North, he finds that while the color line isn't as firmly fixed as in the South, it still exists. Yet he holds onto his grandfather's deathbed advice to, in essence, keep living.



REMEMBER

Unlike protagonists in novels of the past, Ellison's unnamed protagonist doesn't seek the social acceptance of white America, nor is he uncritical of Black America. Prominent Black Americans such as Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey, albeit fictionally rendered, aren't safe from Ellison's social critiques. *Invisible Man* draws from a broad historical context but doesn't reject the Black folk past, either. The novel embraces the uniquely American art forms of jazz and blues, particularly in the context of a Black American experience marked by racism and oppression.

James Baldwin

Primarily with the novel *Another Country* (1962), James Baldwin stretched conversations regarding personal and racial identity issues further by adding homosexuality and consensual interracial relationships to the Black literary discussion. The Harlem native was also among the first to criticize the Black church beyond a Black-white dynamic; in his largely autobiographical first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1955), Baldwin, a former child-preacher tormented by his preacher stepfather, places the Black church under a microscope, examining its historical function as well as its repressive effects. Even though the Black church disdains homosexuality, the novel has an unstated homoerotic tension. An outspoken civil rights supporter, Baldwin's essays *Notes of a Native Son* (1955) and *The Fire Next Time* (1963) proved as popular as his works of fiction, some of which didn't feature any Black characters.

Frank Yerby

Successful writer Frank Yerby enjoyed quiet success with best-selling novels like *The Foxes of Harrow* (1946), which became an Oscar-nominated film starring Rex Harrison and Maureen O'Hara. A thorough researcher, the Augusta, Georgia native often footnoted his historical novels. Before he died in 1991, Yerby published 33 novels, including *The Dahomean* (1971), later published as *The Man from Dahomey.*

The Breakthrough: The Black Arts Movement

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, Black writers had become more secure with their own identities and no longer felt obligated to speak to white audiences directly. Instead, they turned inward, bringing their literary journey full circle to embrace the values advocated by the Black Arts Movement.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Unlike the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement was free of white patronage and Black middle-class restraints; essentially, it was far more self-contained. According to Larry Neal, one of the movement's chief architects, "The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his community. Black arts is the aesthetic and the spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black Americans."

The beginning of the movement

Acknowledged as a leading force of the Black Arts Movement, LeRoi Jones, who adopted the name Amiri Baraka, enjoyed considerable mainstream success before embracing Black nationalism. His critically acclaimed tome *Blues People* (1963) tied Black music to various social and political developments. His 1964 play *Dutchman,* which uses the flirtation between a Black man and white woman to attack the white racist power structure, won an Obie (the Off-Broadway theater award), which it shared with Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro.* Yet despite these successes and his position as an influential Beat poet, he severed his ties to the white community, including his white wife, Hettie Cohen Jones.

Prompted by Malcolm X's assassination in 1965, Jones left Manhattan's Lower East Side to establish the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BARTS) with a group of other artists in Harlem. For many, this marked the formal beginning of the Black Arts Movement. Although BARTS was short-lived, its formation inspired others in Chicago, Detroit, the Bay Area, and other urban centers. More importantly, artists in these areas embraced the Black Arts ideology as national publications such as the *Negro Digest* (later known as *Black World*) kept the Black Arts concept in the public eye.

Welcoming new voices

Many new Black voices, particularly that of poets, emerged during the Black Arts Movement. In Detroit, Dudley Randall's Broadside Press published a slew of new

poets, including Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Etheridge Knight, and Don L. Lee (better known as Haki Madhubuti). Acclaimed poet Gwendolyn Brooks, who, in 1950, became the first Black writer to win the coveted Pulitzer Prize, served as a treasured advisor and member of the Chicago-Detroit arm of the Black Arts Movement. Other popular Black Arts affiliates included spoken-word artists The Last Poets and Gil Scott-Heron.

Theater was also a major component of the Black Arts Movement, with Barbara Ann Teer's National Black Theatre in New York and Val Gray Ward's Kuumba Theatre in Chicago serving as hallmarks. On the university level, professor Nathan Hare helped lead the charge for universities to establish Black studies programs. Dismissed by Howard University in 1967 for his Black Power activities, including his demand that Howard become an institution more responsive to the Black community, Hare, who coined the term "ethnic studies," was key in establishing the nation's first official Black studies program at San Francisco State in 1968. He and Robert Chrisman also established *The Black Scholar,* the first journal of Black studies and research.

The Black Arts Movement legacy

By the mid-1970s, the Black Arts Movement, along with other organizations tied to the Black Power movement, began to diminish. However, its legacy of creating art for and about Black people lived on in an entirely new generation of Black artists who refused to compromise their identities. Ultimately, the movement, as Langston Hughes suggested in his 1926 essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountaintop," recognized that the new Black artist had to step away from Du Bois's notion of double consciousness as well as resist dialoguing with the white reading public at the expense of communicating with Black people about Black people.

Anthologies from the Black Arts Movement

Key publications representative of the Black Arts Movement include these:

- ***Black Fire,* edited by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal (1968):** A signature work with more than 180 selections, including essays, poetry, and short stories, from 75 writers.
- ***Black Voices,* edited by Abraham Chapman (1968):** An impressive collection drawing from Black voices such as Frederick Douglass, Richard Wright, Malcolm X, Mari Evans, and historian John Henrik Clarke spanning over a century.

Black Women's Words

Men have historically dominated Black literature. Before the 1970s, only a handful of Black women writers had created what many scholars touted as "important work." Toni Cade Bambara's 1970 anthology *The Black Woman* helped launch an entirely new literary movement. This momentous work celebrating the unique voices of Black women was unprecedented and helped change the core of Black literature, taking it to new heights both creatively and commercially.

As Black women writers like Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, and a host of others focused on Black women in their work, a fuller sense of the Black community emerged. Not just consumed with racial equality, Black women writers contemplated questions of self-love, motherhood, and sexuality. They tackled serious explorations of how women related to men and how women related to each other.

Unlike other literary movements, there's little debate over when the Black women writers' explosion began. With the publication of Bambara's anthology, *The Black Woman;* Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland;* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye,* 1970 was a watershed year for Black women's literature. Although many excellent writers emerged during this time, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison became the most prominent.

With Walker and Morrison leading the charge as literary innovators, Black women writers ushered in a new generation of women writers; the Brooklyn-born Gloria Naylor, author of *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982) and *Mama Day* (1988), stood out from the bunch. Black women writers dominated the period so completely that, aside from Ernest Gaines, few Black male writers received considerable attention.

Alice Walker

Born to sharecroppers in 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia, and active in the predominantly white feminist movement, Alice Walker pushed the literary boundaries of Black female characters. Her most enduring work, *The Color Purple* (1982), which discussed the rape and sexual exploitation of Black women by Black men, angered some Black men and women who accused her of airing the Black community's dirty laundry. Her depiction of Black lesbianism also generated criticism.

A former civil rights worker, Walker, mainly in her novel *Meridian* (1976), was among the first writers to use fiction to explore the complexities of that movement, especially from the perspective of a Black woman. Aware of Black women's displacement in both Black and women's literature, Walker restored Hurston's literary legacy when she discovered her work in the 1970s.

BLACK WOMEN WRITERS BEFORE 1970

Black women writers began building a literary tradition long before 1970. Writers such as Harriet Jacobs, Harriet E. Wilson, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, among others, from the slavery and Reconstruction eras were early pioneers of the Black female literary tradition. The lesser known Alice Dunbar-Nelson drew from her New Orleans Creole upbringing for her unique stories before the more well-known Jessie Redmon Fauset, Nella Larsen, and Zora Neale Hurston emerged. Hard return Gwendolyn Brooks, Ann Petry, and Dorothy West were the prominent female writers of the 1940s and 1950s. In 1959, Paule Marshall published her groundbreaking *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, which injected the voice of the Black female immigrant into the American literary landscape. Margaret Walker Alexander, best known for her acclaimed collection of poetry, *For My People*, contributed the novel *Jubilee* in 1966, which showed the literary possibilities of the neo–slave narrative from a female perspective.

Recognizing feminism's limitations regarding Black women, Walker proposed a new context in which to view Black women's experiences that she labeled *womanism* in her book of essays *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983). Derived from the Black Southern term "womanish," usually applied to little girls who act older than their years, womanism is a feminist view that addresses the Black woman's unique experience of double marginalization as both Black and female.

Toni Morrison

Born Chloe Ardelia Wofford in Lorain, Ohio, in 1931, Toni Morrison (see Figure 14-1) didn't pursue writing until in her late 30s. A graduate of Howard and Cornell Universities, Morrison taught at the college level for several years before becoming a book editor. As an editor at Random House, she shepherded Black writers such as Toni Cade Bambara and Gayl Jones. Morrison also edited *The Black Book* (1974), an overview of Black American history. While working on it, Morrison encountered the story of Margaret Garner an enslaved fugitive from Kentucky who killed her child and was attempting to kill another child before her recapture because she didn't want her children to return to slavery, an event that became the seed for Morrison's Pulitzer Prize–winning novel *Beloved* (1987), which was adapted into the 1998 film starring Oprah Winfrey.



FIGURE 14-1: Toni Morrison.

Ims Classic/AGE Fotostock

Rich in ritual, fable, and folklore, Morrison's Gothic approach (also laced in historical embellishment) to Black literature distinguished her as one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century. In 1993, she received the Nobel Prize for Literature, making her the first Black woman to receive the Nobel Prize. Her tremendous body of work also includes *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Jazz* (1992), and *Home* (2012). Packed with Black American history, Morrison's work explores the complexity of Black culture, racism, and sexism in a nuanced manner that's both individual and collective. The Middle Passage, where countless Africans lost their lives making the journey from the African continent to the New World, slavery, the Great Migration, and Jim Crow are just a few of the topics she explores in depth. In 2012, President Barack Obama awarded Morrison the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Morrison passed away in 2019 at age 88. She participated in a handful documentaries about her work, including *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am*, released months before her death.

Black Books from the 1990s On

Black literature continued its considerable strides into the 1990s, hitting *The New York Times* Best Seller list with regularity, a major departure from the one or two at a time in years past. Authors of these best sellers didn't necessarily become spokespersons for all Black people either, and few of the books were hailed as definitive platforms for improving the nation's race relations even as most of them significantly featured Black life and culture.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

OCTAVIA E. BUTLER

Born in Pasadena, California, in 1947, Octavia E. Butler rose to become the most prominent Black author in science fiction and arguably one of the most popular figures of the entire genre. Raised an only child by a widowed mother, Butler, who was extremely shy and bullied as a child, turned to books early in her life, finding solace in science fiction. By age 10, she was already writing her own stories. As a college freshman, she won a short story competition. Her career got a huge boon when she met renowned science fiction writer Harlan Ellison, who was instrumental in her attending the Clarion Science Fiction Workshop (where she began a lifelong friendship with fellow Black science fiction pioneer Samuel Delany) who even purchased one of her early short stories. Still, Butler struggled for years to establish herself as a writer.

Attending college during the Black Power movement as well as being raised by a mother who did domestic work impacted Butler's writing. Race, sex, and power figures appeared prominently in Butler's work. Intertwining Black history with science fiction is considered one of the most compelling aspects of her writing. Butler's more than 15 books are largely grouped in series: *Patternist, Xenogenesis (Lilith's Brood),* and *Parable (Earthseed).*

The Patternist series, spanning from the 17th century into the far future and featuring telepaths, consists of five books, including the popular *Wild Seed* (1980) and *Mind of My Mind* (1977). *Xenogenesis,* also *Lilith's Brood,* is a trilogy that includes *Dawn* (1987) and centers on the main character Lilith, the human responsible for the series' subsequent human-Oankali people. *Parable (Earthseed),* which deals with the political and socioeconomic collapse of the 21st century, consists of two of her most popular books, *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998). Butler's blockbuster standalone novel *Kindred* (1979) about a Black woman traveling back to the 19th century and meeting her ancestors, a white slaveholder and a free Black woman who is enslaved, expanded her audience beyond science fiction.

Celebrated later in her career, Butler became the first science fiction writer to win a MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowship and received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the PEN American Center in 2000. Butler, who struggled with depression, died in 2006 at age 58. Her legacy, however, lives on. Her success paved a wider road for other Black science fiction writers. She even contributed a story to the groundbreaking anthology *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (2000) edited by Sheree Renée Thomas, which helped introduce new voices such as Nalo Hopinkson and included established ones like Samuel R. Delany, Stephen Barnes, and Charles R. Saunders as well as acknowledged contributions from unsung figures like W.E.B. Du Bois and Charles W. Chestnut.

Some also consider Butler's work as a key inspiration to *Afrofuturism,* which is a loose cultural framework in which Black artists can apply a creative lens to examine and explore Black culture and life, facilitating conversations with the past, present, and/or future, separately or simultaneously.

Los Angeles native Walter Mosley, who published his first novel in 1990, scored big with his Easy Rawlins mysteries (even claiming former President Bill Clinton as a fan), which include *Devil in a Blue Dress.* Some best-selling Black authors self-published before a major publisher picked them up. E. Lynn Harris's unlikely best seller, *Invisible Life* (1991), in which the lead male character takes readers into a world where seemingly heterosexual Black men secretly engage in homosexual behavior, is a good example of a self-published novel that attracted a major publisher. However, few authors of any race top the self-published-to-mainstream success of Terry McMillan.

Seizing on a formula that has dominated women's commercial fiction for decades, Michigan-born Terry McMillan's novel *Waiting to Exhale* (1992) engaged white and Black readers with the standard tale of four female friends who maintain their friendship throughout their individual trials and tribulations. It was so successful that it hit its tenth printing only three weeks after its release! A subsequent film starring Whitney Houston and Angela Bassett made McMillan one of the first commercial Black writers to achieve multimillionaire status.

Looking for the next big Black writer, mainstream publishers signed up Black authors in unprecedented numbers. In addition to *Black chick lit,* a category referring to books by Black women writers duplicating Terry McMillan's style, other commercial genres sprouted. Zane, author of *Addicted* (2001) and *The Sex Chronicles* (2001), pioneered Black erotica, even adapting her work for both film and TV. Taking inspiration from the late 1960s and early 1970s *street literature* of Donald Goines and Iceberg Slim, the momentum for the contemporary street literature movement reignited with Teri Woods's self-published novel *True to the Game* (1998) and activist Sister Souljah's *The Coldest Winter Ever* (1999). Carl Weber, author of *Baby Momma Drama* (2003), and Vickie Stringer, a former drug dealer who wrote *Let That Be the Reason* (2002), published other writers in the genre through their respective publishing companies, Urban Books and Triple Crown Publications. In the 2010s, Woods's *True to the Game* became two feature films, and Weber found success with his *The Family Business* series with BET.

BLACK CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG ADULT BOOKS

Amelia E. Johnson is credited as the first Black children's book writer with *Clarence and Corinne, Or, God's Way*, published in 1890; others point to Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1895 collection of poems titled *Little Brown Baby* as the first.

Walter Dean Myers, with more than 100 books to his credit, and Virginia Hamilton, who wrote 41 books, are generally acknowledged as the two biggest trailblazers for Black children's literature. *The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales* (1985) is one of Hamilton's most well-known children's books. Myers, whose many popular books include *Monster* and the controversial *Fallen Angels* about the Vietnam War, pioneered the Young Adult (YA) space for Black writers. Others like Jacqueline Woodson, recipient of the MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowship, and Tonya Bolden, winner of several Coretta Scott King Awards, have also elevated the space.

In the 2000s, newer voices addressing younger, multicultural audiences as they tackled difficult topics like police brutality and interracial dating emerged. Angie Thomas's *The Hate U Give* (2017) and both Nicola Yoon's *Everything, Everything* (2015) and *The Sun Is Also a Star* (2016), which all topped the *New York Times* Best Seller list, were made into Hollywood feature films.

Married couples who have been influential in publishing Black children's books include Cheryl and Wade Hudson, who launched Just Us Books in 1987, as well as award-winners writer/editor Andrea Davis Pinkney and illustrator Brian Pinkney. In 1998, Davis Pinkney was a founder of *Jump at the Sun* at Hyperion, the first Black children's book imprint at a major publisher. Just US Books, which has published many books, made its initial splash with *AFRO-BETS ABC Book*. The Pinkneys have collaborated on several books as writer and illustrator that include *Sit In: How Four Friends Stood Up by Sitting Down* and *Dear Benjamin Banneker.* In 2019, prolific *New York Times* bestselling author Denene Millner, whose many collaborations include Steve Harvey's *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man* (2009) and R&B singer Charlie Wilson's memoir *I Am Charlie Wilson* (2015), moved her children's book imprint, Denene Millner Books, to Simon & Schuster.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Receiving attention in minstrel shows
- Singing out through musical theater
- Staking claims on the dramatic scene
- Expanding the American dance repertoire

Chapter 15
The Great Black Way: Theater and Dance

Eighteenth-century performances of Shakespeare's *Othello,* about a Moor (someone typically Black from northern Africa) who kills his white wife Desdemona, for example, almost never featured a Black actor as Othello. In the 18th-century English comic opera *Padlock,* a white actor in blackface typically played the drunken West Indian slave named Mungo who speaks in dialect. In addition, early American plays such as *The Fall of British Tyranny* faithfully included Black characters but never Black actors.

In time, Black theater took root, starting with Black musicals. As Black dancers wowed Broadway, American society began co-opting popular Black dances. This chapter traces Black theater from its early beginnings to the more recent triumphs of George C. Wolfe and the late, great August Wilson. It also touches upon Black dance history, celebrating masters like Katherine Dunham, Alvin Ailey, and Arthur Mitchell.

Making an Early Statement

In 1821, after being denied an opportunity to participate in mainstream theater (even when productions called for Black Americans), James Henry Brown and James Hewlett founded the African Grove Theater, the first known Black theater in the United States. The African Grove Theater grew out of gatherings that began around 1816, and were held in Brown's backyard. After hiring a group of actors, the theater company's performances included Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *Othello.* There's also evidence that the company staged *King Shotaway*, a play Brown penned about a 1796 uprising of Black Caribs on the island of Saint Vincent; it's believed to be the first full-length Black American play.

White patrons weren't excluded from African Grove Theater performances or relegated to the balcony, but their typically unruly behavior relegated them to seats in the back of the theater. Because of disturbances by white patrons and the police, the African Grove Theater relocated several times. In 1823, the African Grove Theater burned down, but its demise didn't squash Black Americans' desire to master the stage.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

IRA ALDRIDGE

A graduate of New York's African Free School, Ira Aldridge launched his acting career at the African Grove Theater. Frustrated by American racism, Aldridge relocated to England to further his career. He served as a dresser to a British actor before taking to the stage. Eventually, Aldridge's talent, especially his portrayal of Othello, overwhelmed British audiences, and by 1825, Aldridge had top billing at London's prestigious Royal Coburg Theater as Oroonoko in *The Revolt of Surinam, or A Slave's Revenge.* Aldridge used his talent in many antislavery productions. He also played white characters, donning whiteface for the title role in Shakespeare's *Richard III* and Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice.*

As Aldridge's reputation grew, he toured Europe and Russia. Aldridge died in 1867 in Poland before a planned trip back to the United States. Of the 33 actors of the English stage who have bronze plaques at the Shakespeare Memorial Theater at Stratford-upon-Avon, Aldridge is the only Black American actor.

Minstrelsy: Performing in Blackface

Almost like a sad, cruel joke, the origins of minstrelsy are traceable to the many talented enslaved dancers, comedians, and musicians who performed, often for their owners, on their respective plantations. In the early 1800s, white performers in America and England darkened their faces with burnt cork and either imitated those performances or simply performed the popular English and Irish dances of the day.



REMEMBER

Performing in *blackface* wasn't new — even for dramatic performers — but duplicating the rhythms of Black performers was. As the antislavery movement heated up in the 1850s, minstrel shows became decidedly proslavery.

White minstrels

Minstrelsy as an American institution, which began around 1830 when white performer Thomas Rice, more popularly known as Daddy Rice, observed an old Black man singing and dancing. Rice found the performance hilarious, co-opted it, and began performing a song and dance number, "Jump Jim Crow." Rice's performance spawned many imitators.



HISTORICAL ROOTS

By the 1880s, the term "Jim Crow" had moved beyond its minstrel roots and become synonymous with racial segregation. You can read about Jim Crow and life in the segregated South in Chapter 7.

Ethiopian minstrelsy was the label some used to describe the practice of white performers consciously imitating Black American songs, dances, and humor. It was not until 1843, however, at New York's Bowery Amphitheater that four actors calling themselves the Virginia Minstrels ushered in the *minstrel show* by performing comic skits and songs in blackface continuously. Until the Virginia Minstrels, minstrel performances supported a main show, such as the circus; they weren't the main show themselves.



TECHNICAL STUFF

Proslavery factions twisted Harriet Beecher Stowe's antislavery treatise *Uncle Tom's Cabin* through unauthorized stage adaptations. These contributed to the portrayal of Uncle Tom, for example, as a harmless yes-man eager to please his white slaveholder — a misinterpretation that has persisted for generations.

Black minstrels

Around 1855, minstrel shows with Black performers emerged. Despite being billed as more authentic than their white counterparts, Black minstrels still followed the same conventions as white minstrels: They too blackened their faces and painted their lips white and outlined them in red to exaggerate their size. They also perpetuated the two common stereotypes: the plantation darky, who had a happy and nostalgic view of slavery, and the Northern dandy, who was typically a lazy and overdressed city boy concerned with having a good time. As scholars such as Robert Toll have noted, these were the conventions Black minstrels inherited, not what they created.

In addition to attracting white audiences, Black minstrel shows appealed to Black audiences despite the genre's many proslavery conventions. Scholars have suggested that Black minstrel shows contained a subversive element that escaped the attention of white audiences. Perhaps Black audiences simply enjoyed seeing Black performers. As this form of entertainment grew in popularity, Black minstrels incorporated new dances into their shows, created new jokes, and introduced a new music now known as *ragtime* (see Chapter 16).



REMEMBER

Black minstrel shows were the first large-scale opportunity for Black Americans to enter show business. Overall, the minstrel show formalized the incorporation of Black American culture into general American entertainment.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

WILLIAM HENRY LANE

William Henry Lane, better known as Master Juba, helped pave the way for other Black performers. Tutored by "Uncle" Jim Lowe, an older Black dancer, and named after the *juba,* the African dance he had mastered, Lane became so popular that he and John Diamond, the reigning white dance champion, squared off several times. Although both Lane and Diamond declared themselves victorious, the contests bolstered Lane's career. Until Lane, minstrel shows were a white-only affair. Lane was such a masterful talent that he began receiving top billing at white minstrel shows by 1845. Far from just an American sensation, Lane took London by storm in 1848. He remained there and died in 1852 at age 27. Frequently credited as the creator of modern tap dance, Lane is among America's first great Black performers.

Moving toward Broadway: Black Musical Theater

As Black musical theater developed, the racist conventions of the minstrel show slowly began to fade. The change was gradual, however, and was influenced by the following artists and their productions, which helped move the Black minstrel show closer to the modern musical format:

- **Sisters Anna Madah and Emma Louise Hyers and *Out of Bondage*:** Better known as the Hyers Sisters, these women played a frequently uncredited role in the development of Black musical theater. Born in California in the 1850s, they were trained opera singers and performed outside the general minstrel tradition. In 1876, they began performing a musical play initially called *Out of the Wilderness* but changed to *Out of Bondage* because the general story traced the lives of Black Americans from slavery until after the Civil War. Before they disbanded in the 1890s, the Hyers Sisters staged several similar productions.
- **Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins and *Slaves' Escape*:** A prolific writer and early Black literary pioneer born in Portland, Maine, and raised in Boston, Massachusetts, Hopkins, whose most well-known novel is *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life, North and South* (1900), got her start early. She wrote the musical play *Slaves' Escape; or, The Underground Railroad* (later revised as *Peculiar Sam; or, The Underground Railroad*), when she was just 20. By presenting the requisite "plantation darky" as unhappy, *Slaves' Escape*, which ran in Boston from 1879 to 1881, subtly critiqued one of the minstrel show's most potent racial stereotypes. Hopkins, a performer who later also became distinguished for her political writing, performed in various productions of the play with her family, the Hopkins Colored Troubadours.



REMEMBER

- **Sam T. Jack and *The Creole Show:*** This production, which ran from 1890 to 1897, changed Black entertainment the most. By adding a chorus of 16 beautiful Black women performers, *The Creole Show,* produced by Sam T. Jack, a white man, shook up the all-male Black minstrel show formula and greatly expanded opportunities for Black female performers. It also embraced contemporary costumes, a significant departure from the plantation gear featured in previous shows.
- **John W. Isham and *The Octoroons* and *Oriental America:*** With the 1895 production of *The Octoroons,* Isham, who could pass for white, pushed the envelope by including more female talent and boasting a continuous plot. His 1896 production of *Oriental America,* credited as the first Black show on Broadway, distanced itself even further from the minstrel show by replacing the customary minstrel finale with a medley of operatic-style solos and choral numbers. Acclaimed singer Sissieretta Jones, dubbed the "Black Patti" after reigning opera diva Adelina Patti, expanded on the musical innovation Isham had introduced with her own *Black Patti Troubadours.*

More than minstrels

Considered the first true Black musical, *A Trip to Coontown* (1897) — composers Bob Cole and Billy Johnson's take on the white Broadway hit *A Trip to Chinatown* — was the first major show conceived, written, produced, performed, and managed by Black Americans. Despite its frequent use of the term "coon" and other such words (which were common at the time), the production was revolutionary, especially its final song, "No Coons Allowed," which dramatized a man's inability to treat his girl to a night out at the city's "finest" restaurant because "no coons were allowed." There was no recourse, either, because coons weren't allowed in the courthouse. Such parody wasn't lost on the Black audience. Cole, along with Rosamond Johnson (civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson's brother) also created *The Shoo-Fly Regiment* (1906) and *Red Moon* (1909).

Clorindy, the Origin of the Cakewalk, which opened in 1898, mixed comedy, songs, and dances. Presented by composer Will Marion Cook, *Clorindy* marked the first time a Broadway cast of any color danced and sang simultaneously. Thrilling audiences, *Clorindy* ushered in a new creative force, making the Black musical a Broadway staple.

Williams and Walker on Broadway

Bert Williams and George Walker started out as a minstrel duo before becoming one of Broadway's most successful teams. Partnering with Will Marion Cook and celebrated poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, Williams and Walker created *In Dahomey* (1902).

Unlike other Black musicals, *In Dahomey* positively incorporated African themes. The song "Evah Dahkey is a King," translated today as "every Black person is a king," is just one example. Well-received, the show toured England. Williams and Walker became more ambitious with African themes in *Abyssinia* (1906), but that play didn't match the success of *In Dahomey*. For *Bandana Land* (1908), they focused on the South.

While touring with *Bandana Land* in 1909, Walker fell ill. He died in 1911, before he was even 40. After Walker's death, it became more difficult for Black Americans to appear in groups on Broadway. One factor was the tense atmosphere following New York's 1910 race riot in response to Black heavyweight Jack Johnson's defeat of boxing's "great white hope," Jim Jeffries (see Chapter 19). Williams, however, continued to perform to critical acclaim, primarily as a member of the *Ziegfeld Follies,* which he joined in 1910. Performing in blackface obscured his talent so much that he became a poster child for all Black American blackface performers.



From 1913 to 1917, Williams was the only Black artist on Broadway. His loyalty to the race was so great that, though frustrated by the limited but acclaimed work he did with the *Ziegfeld Follies*, he remained with the group for ten years. Without him, he feared that there would be no Black artists on Broadway. "We've got our foot in the door," Williams said. "We mustn't let it close again."



Marlon Riggs's classic 1978 documentary *Ethnic Notions* used Williams as an anchor to examine the deeply rooted anti-Black stereotypes in American culture. Spike Lee also linked his lead characters to Williams in his 2000 film *Bamboozled*, which tackled the perpetuation of the minstrel show tradition.

The rumblings of serious Black theater

Outside minstrel work, 19th-century stage roles for Black Americans were those of servants and slaves. George Aiken's 1852 stage adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* allowed Black actors — especially in the roles of Uncle Tom, the dutiful slave, and Topsy, the unruly enslaved girl transformed by love — to demonstrate their acting skills. Perhaps the lost *King Shotaway*, written by African Grove Theater cofounder James Henry Brown and assumed to be the first play by a Black American (see the earlier section, "Making an Early Statement") had richer roles.

Not until 1858 did another play by a Black American appear. Yet that play — William Wells Brown's *The Escape; or, A Leap of Freedom*, which tells the story of two enslaved people from different plantations who marry and try to escape to freedom via the Underground Railroad — was never produced. Instead, Brown, who published the novel *Clotel* in 1853, frequently read the play at antislavery gatherings.

While musicals such as *Out of Bondage* and *Slaves' Escape* provided a transitional point between the Black musical and the Black drama, several dramatic associations also existed in various locations, particularly in the 1880s. Washington, D.C. had the Lawrence Barrett Dramatic Club (1882), Baltimore, Maryland had the Our Boys Dramatic Club (1888), and there was the Aldridge Dramatic Association (1889) in New Haven, Connecticut.

Black theater became a more serious enterprise in the 20th century. Playwright Loften Mitchell, who wrote *Black Drama: The Story of the American Negro in the Theater* (1967), referred to the period between 1909 and 1917 as the First Harlem Theater Movement, even though Harlem wasn't the only city active in cultivating serious Black actors and Black drama.

Prompted primarily by the 1915 release of the anti-Black film *The Birth of a Nation*, about the KKK, the NAACP's Washington, D.C. branch organized the Drama Committee, which successfully presented Angelina Weld Grimke's *Rachel*, a play about

the impact witnessing lynching and other forms of racial violence had on the choices the Black female lead made. It was the first drama written, performed, and produced by Black Americans.

Early Black theater companies

Although early Black theater companies didn't embrace material by Black Americans initially, they did play important roles in cultivating Black actors. Here are the two most influential:

- **Pekin Stock Company:** This Chicago-based company, also known as the Pekin Players, was the first high-profile Black theater company to present serious drama. Organized in 1906, the Pekin Players produced several "white" plays such as well-known dramatist Bronson Howard's *Young Mrs. Winthrop,* about a husband and wife bound by their child. These productions showed white critics especially that Black actors were more than the caricatures infused into the minstrel show format.

  In its "serious" format, the Pekin Players championed mainstream (read "white") productions. When it committed itself to musicals, however, it vowed to present those written by Black Americans. One standout was *The Mayor of Dixie,* a work by the successful writing team of Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles, who later took Broadway by storm with *Shuffle Along* (read more in the upcoming section "Shuffling ahead").

- **The Lafayette Players:** The Lafayette Players, the most famous of the early Black theater companies, shared the Pekin Players' original mission to feature Black actors in productions that usually excluded them. To demonstrate that Black Americans could play any role, the Lafayette Stock Company performed Shakespeare, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (with Clarence Muse, known for his butler roles in film, performing in whiteface), and *The Three Musketeers,* among others.

Hitting the larger stage

As Black theater companies provided new opportunities for Black actors, white playwrights began discovering Black life and culture. During the Harlem Renaissance, white playwrights created several key productions. In 1917, Ridgely Torrence made the first big splash with the following three plays:

- ***Granny Maumee:*** The story of a grandmother who went blind after a lynch mob killed her innocent son and now anxiously awaits another male heir before her death

- ***The Rider of Dreams:*** A story centered on a husband and wife who possess different ideas about spending and saving money
- ***Simon the Cyrenian:*** A story based on the biblical account of Simon from Cyrene, who played a key role during the crucifixion of Jesus

White critics and the largely white audience were very receptive to Torrence's presentation of Black actors in dramatic roles, a Broadway first.

Eugene O'Neill kept the momentum going with *The Emperor Jones*, first staged in 1920. Charles Gilpin, a former member of both the Lafayette and Pekin Players, played the lead to critical acclaim. Harlem audiences weren't bowled over by the story of a prison escapee who establishes himself as a king on a Caribbean island, but white audiences loved it. In contrast, O'Neill's 1924 play *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, a story about an interracial marriage starring Paul Robeson and white actress Mary Blair, generated bomb threats in addition to vilification from the press for its interracial casting and subject matter.

Other productions by white playwrights featuring Black actors include

- ***In Abraham's Bosom*** **(1926):** Paul Green won the Pulitzer Prize for his play about a Black Southerner's tragic attempt to start a school for Black children in North Carolina.
- ***Porgy*** **(1927):** Set in Charleston, South Carolina, on fictitious Catfish Row, *Porgy,* a story about a beggar, achieved critical acclaim for its unique presentation of Southern Black life and use of Gullah language, a creolized form of English with significant Africanisms. Husband-and-wife team Dorothy and DuBose Heyward created the play from DuBose's 1925 novel.
- ***The Green Pastures*** **(1930):** Adapted from a folk novel by Roark Bradford, Marc Connelly's *The Green Pastures,* about a child who sees the Bible through her own eyes, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1930.
- ***Porgy and Bess*** **(1935):** Intrigued by the original *Porgy,* George Gershwin collaborated with its creator DuBose Heyward to create a folk opera about Black Southern life in Catfish Row. Problematic from the start, many Black actors and Black audiences in general viewed *Porgy and Bess* as stereotypical, especially for its attempts at Southern Black dialect and its focus on poverty and violence. Although criticized musically as well for approximating jazz and other forms of Black music, *Porgy and Bess* did produce the classic American song "Summertime."

Shuffling ahead

As influential as some of the dramas by white playwrights featuring Black actors became, the Black musical *Shuffle Along* generated the most excitement about Black talent and, in many eyes, officially ushered in the Harlem Renaissance.

Known as the Dixie Duo, Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake were one of the first Black acts to perform without blackface and in elegant dress on the white vaudeville circuit. At an NAACP benefit, the duo met Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles, show-biz veterans who once had a blackface comedy-dancing act. Together, the four created the musical revue *Shuffle Along,* which became a surprise hit when it opened in 1921.

The breathtaking choreography and energetic songs overwhelmed Broadway's white audiences. Barriers were broken when, during the run of *Shuffle Along,* Black audiences, though still segregated, were allowed to sit beyond the balcony, and white audiences, which had previously rejected presentations of romantic love scenes, applauded the song "Love Will Find a Way" and its accompanying love scene. "I'm Just Wild About Harry" also became a popular song. Dance, which you can read about in the section, "Black Dance in America," later in this chapter was another important contribution from *Shuffle Along. Shuffle Along*'s success spawned many similar shows, including *Runnin' Wild,* another Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles collaboration.

Encouraging more serious fare

Civil rights leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois weren't content with having just white dramatists and Black musical phenoms represent the Black experience. During this time, the NAACP and the National Urban League, primarily via awards presented by *Opportunity* magazine, stepped up to reward and encourage Black creative development with more serious fare. The following theater companies were also critical in nurturing that talent:

- **Krigwa Players:** In 1925, inspired by the NAACP Drama Committee, Du Bois cofounded the New York–based Krigwa Players with Regina Anderson (also Regina Andrews) to encourage the creation of serious stage work by and for Black Americans that spoke to the political issues of the day. Two plays written by Anderson — *Climbing Jacob's Ladder,* about a lynching, and *Underground,* about the Underground Railroad — were among the plays produced.
- **The Howard Players:** Formally founded in 1919, with roots tracing back to the College Dramatic Club (led by Ernest Everett Just), The Howard Players of Howard University became a prominent voice and example for Black theater. Shaped by T. Montgomery Gregory (also T.M. Gregory and Thomas Montgomery Gregory), with assistance from Alain Locke (a professor and

leading voice in the New Negro/Harlem Renaissance Movement), as well as Coralie Franklin Cooke and Marie Moore-Forest, The Howard Players diverged from Du Bois's vision of Black drama to focus not so much on the message and the political propaganda as on the artistic development of Black actors and, later, playwrights. In 1923, Jean Toomer's *Balo, A Sketch of Negro Life,* about a Black peasant in Georgia, became among the first plays by a Black American the group produced. Ossie Davis, sisters Phylicia Rashad and Debbie Allen, Taraji P. Henson, Isaiah Washington, and Chadwick Boseman, among other actors, later honed their craft with The Howard Players.

- **Gilpin Players:** With beginnings as the Dumas Dramatic Club in 1920, the Gilpin Players were renamed in 1922 as an homage to pioneering actor Charles Sidney Gilpin, noted for his trailblazing stage performance in *The Emperor Jones.* The Gilpin Players became the gold standard for Black theatrical performances. They operated out of the Cleveland, Ohio Playhouse Settlement (officially renamed Karamu House in 1941), the nation's oldest Black theater, which had been founded by husband and wife Russell and Rowena Jelliffe. The Gilpin Players (later the Karamu Players) attracted top Black theater talent, including actors and playwrights. Especially noteworthy are their early productions of plays by one-time Cleveland resident Langston Hughes, such as *Joy to My Soul,* a comedy about the Cleveland underworld.

Early noteworthy dramas

Plays about Black life written by white dramatists dominated early Broadway, but some plays by Black Americans did break through. In 1923, pioneering Black dramatist Willis Richardson's one-act play, *The Chip Woman's Fortune*, about a younger man conspiring to rob an older woman of her hidden fortune, was the first serious, nonmusical play by a Black American to have a Broadway run. Former bellhop Garland Anderson's *Appearances*, about the incidents in the life of a bellboy, followed Richardson's in 1925, and has the distinction of being the first full-length, nonmusical play on Broadway by a Black American. The show's mixed-race casting, which was illegal at the time, created quite a stir.

In 1929, *Harlem*, the play Wallace Thurman co-wrote with a white writer about the struggles of a Black family who migrated from the South, received mixed reviews and had limited success. Thurman is best known for the book *The Blacker the Berry*, about intraracial prejudices within the Black community.

Technically, Langston Hughes's 1935 play, *Mulatto*, believed to be autobiographical for its story about a white father's rejection of his mulatto son, was the first hit Broadway production written by a Black American. Hughes, however, was displeased because the show's white producer added a rape scene and made other changes without his knowledge.

The Harlem Renaissance period would only crack open Broadway's doors to Black actors and playwrights; it would take continued pushing to open them. Plays such as Zora Neale Hurston's *Color Struck* and Georgia Douglass Johnson's *Blue Blood,* exploring intraracial and interracial strife, along with the continued development of Black theater companies to train Black actors, generated excitement for Black theater overall.

Black Theater Comes of Age

Musicals, Black and white, declined when the Great Depression took root in the 1930s. Hollywood absorbed a considerable amount of Broadway's white talent, but Black performers, with the primary exception of dancers, had little recourse. Hope for Black dramatic productions came from the most unlikely of sources: the Negro Theater Unit of the Works Progress Administration's Federal Theater Project (FTP).

Although the Federal Theater Project lasted only a short four years before the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HCUA) ended it in 1939, it had a tremendous decades-long impact on Black theater and drama. As Black theater moved into the 1940s, the need for Black artists and their communities to cultivate their talents remained, and other theater companies, most notably the American Negro Theater, stepped up to fill the void.

The Federal Theater Project and Black drama

Headed by Hallie Flanagan, previously a drama professor at Vassar, the Federal Theater Project operated in various regions throughout the country, with the Harlem and Chicago units being among the most popular. Unlike Broadway, the Federal Theater Project favored dramatic productions featuring Black Americans that enabled Black actors to develop their craft and prepared them for more mainstream fare and encouraged Black-oriented productions.

In addition to all-Black versions of mainstream plays, such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* the classic tale of power and betrayal, and George Bernard Shaw's *Androcles and the Lion,* about a slave saved by a lion, other key Federal Theater Project performances included new plays written by Black Americans:

- ***Walk Together Chillun,*** by Frank Wilson, about the trials of Georgia laborers who migrated to New York after World War I and the division that migration created within the Northern Black community
- ***Conjur Man Dies,*** by Rudolph Fisher, a Harlem murder mystery featuring a Black Sherlock Holmes–inspired detective
- ***Big White Fog,*** by Theodore Ward, about a father who invests his family's money in Marcus Garvey's UNIA Movement while Garvey sits in prison (see Chapter 7 for details on Marcus Garvey)

Artistic disagreements between white administrators and Black talent, coupled with censorship from the government and other entities, played a role in the slow production of plays by Black dramatists. Another factor was the expectation of the audience — both Black and white — to see singing and dancing popularized by Black musical and vaudeville acts. Nonetheless, the Federal Theater Project helped prepare actors, dramatists, other Black theater professionals, and equally important, audiences, Black and white, for the bolder Black theater that emerged during the civil rights era.

The American Negro Theater (ANT)

One of the most influential institutions that emerged during the 1940s was the American Negro Theater (ANT). Spearheaded by playwright Abram Hill and actor Frederick O'Neal, the ANT launched in Harlem in 1940 as an artist cooperative, with the artists agreeing to work as a collective and to donate 2 percent of any income they made back to the ANT. Hill's *On Striver Row,* a satire of Black middle-class social climbing, became the ANT's first successful production. By 1942, the ANT added the Studio Theater, a training program for actors that Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, and Ruby Dee, among others, attended.

Anna Lucasta, a Polish drama about a prostitute and her family dynamic adapted for a Black cast, became such a success that it opened on Broadway in 1944, and ran continuously until 1946. Broadway success, however, undermined the ANT, moving it away from its community roots to achieving Broadway acclaim. By 1949, the ANT was no more, but its legacy paved the way for more dramatic success. ANT alums included playwrights such as Alice Childress, best known for her 1970s play and film *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich,* about a young Black boy caught up in drugs and crime.

CIVIL RIGHTS THEATER: THE FREE SOUTHERN THEATER

The Free Southern Theater (FST), founded in 1963 by Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) field directors Doris Derby and John O'Neal, along with *Mississippi Free Press* writer Gilbert Moses, was an offshoot of the civil rights movement. Well-supported by established actors, both black and white, the FST took theater productions to areas throughout Mississippi that had never been exposed to live theater. Continual harassment in Jackson forced the FST to relocate to New Orleans. Debates about direction and form, among other issues, resulted in the company's disbanding in 1971.

A place to call home

With more Black theatrical talent than available roles or plays in mainstream theater, Black Americans once again turned inward. Several influential dramatic enterprises began in the late 1960s and the early 1970s:

- **The Negro Ensemble Company (NEC):** Douglas Turner Ward and Robert Hooks officially founded the Negro Ensemble Company in 1967, to nurture actors and playwrights. In addition to esteemed NEC participants such as Esther Rolle and Roscoe Lee Browne, the NEC also welcomed talented playwright Charles Fuller, noted most for his Pulitzer Prize–winning *A Soldier's Play,* about the murder of a Black soldier on a Southern army base. Ward's own *A Day of Absence,* a play performed in whiteface about a town whose Black population disappears, and Joseph A. Walker's *The River Niger,* about a Harlem family's struggles in the 1970s, were among the first plays the NEC produced.
- **The New Federal Theater:** Unlike other theaters that struggled to survive from the beginning, the New Federal Theater, founded in 1970 by Woodie King Jr., scored early with classics such as Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf* and actors such as Denzel Washington.
- **Frank Silvera Writers' Workshop:** Counting Morgan Freeman among its early founders, the Frank Silvera Writers' Workshop (FSWW), spearheaded by stage manager Garland Lee Thompson, set up shop in Harlem in 1973. It was named for Jamaican-born actor Frank Silvera, who nurtured Black theater talent out of his own pocket. Talent the FSWW supported included Richard Wesley, who served as writer for the Sidney Poitier/Bill Cosby films *Let's Do It Again* and *Uptown Saturday Night.*



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

LORRAINE HANSBERRY

Lorraine Hansberry became the first Black American and youngest playwright to win the New York Drama Critics Circle Award with her play *A Raisin in the Sun,* which opened on Broadway in 1959. Inspired by her own family's experience integrating a white neighborhood in Chicago, Hansberry's play presented a complex portrait of a working-class Black family's human struggle with one of the most complex issues of the day. The play starred Sidney Poitier, Ruby Dee, and Louis Gossett, and it was the first play on Broadway directed by a Black American (Lloyd Richards).

Phylicia Rashad, best known as Clair Huxtable from *The Cosby Show,* became the first Black actress to win the Tony Award for Best Performance by a Leading Actress in a Play for the 2004 Broadway revival of *A Raisin in the Sun,* which also starred rapper/producer Sean "Diddy" Combs, Hollywood actress Sanaa Lathan, and Broadway titan Audra McDonald (winner of more Tony Awards than any other actor).

Black musicals, 1940s and beyond

During the 1940s, *Carmen Jones,* the Black version of the Georges Bizet opera *Carmen*, hit big, but shows such as *St. Louis Woman*, set among the Black horse-racing set, flopped. Despite Lena Horne's successful Broadway debut in *Jamaica* and a revival of *Porgy and Bess*, Black performers were largely absent from Broadway in the 1950s. The 1960s were slightly improved. Influenced by the success of *A Raisin in the Sun* and the turbulent times, musicals took on a sharper social edge. Diahann Carroll starred in the 1962 musical *No Strings* as the Black model girlfriend of a white expatriate writer living in Paris. *Golden Boy*, the 1964 musical starring Sammy Davis Jr. infused the civil rights struggle into the musical with Davis playing a boxer from Harlem whose brother worked for the Congress of Racial Equality.

In 1961, *Purlie,* the Black musical version of *Purlie Victorious*, written by veteran actor Ossie Davis and set on a cotton plantation in Georgia, not only made Melba Moore a star but also kicked off the 1970s Black musical revival. In the 1970s, *The Wiz*, a Black version of the *Wizard of Oz*, literally averted financial ruin by appealing directly to Black audiences. Other musicals like *Ain't Misbehavin'*, which used the music of Fats Waller, and *Sophisticated Ladies*, based on the music of Duke Ellington, were also Broadway hits.

Nothing compared to the 1981 debut of *Dreamgirls*, as the Supremes-inspired musical enthralled audiences, making stars of Sheryl Lee Ralph and Loretta Devine and a legend of Jennifer Holiday and her big song "And I'm Tellin' You," which jumped straight to classic status. At the Tony Awards, *Dreamgirls* won an impressive 6 of its 13 Tony Award nominations. In 2007, Jennifer Hudson won the

Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for playing Effie in the 2006 film version also starring Oscar winner Jamie Foxx and Beyoncé Knowles (read about it in Chapter 17).

Dance-heavy musicals such as *Black and Blue* and *Jelly's Last Jam* (read about some of Broadway's best dancers and choreographers in the later section "Black Dance in America") dominated the end of the 1980s and 1990s. Also in the 1980s, *Mama, I Want to Sing!* — a gospel stage play about a shy, church-honed singer who ventures into secular music — ushered in an entire movement that in recent years helped propel the Christian-inspired plays of Tyler Perry, best known for his role as the mouthy older woman Madea. *Diary of a Mad Black Woman,* his dramatic adaptation of Bishop T.D. Jakes's best-selling self-help book for women who've survived sexual abuse, is his most well-known stage play. Perry's stage success became his launch pad to building a trailblazing film and TV empire (read about it in Chapter 18).

David E. Talbert's stage plays, while largely Christian in theme, scored by dealing more directly with romantic relationships and, in recent years, embracing R&B-tinged songs. Shelly Garrett, best known for his popular relationship-gone-wrong play *Beauty Shop,* set in a beauty shop during the late 1980s, inspired Talbert, whose best-known plays include *The Fabric of a Man,* involving a love triangle between a successful fashion designer, her disgruntled husband, and a sexy tailor. Like Perry, Talbert also embarked on a Hollywood career.

Two Visionaries

Beginning in the 1980s, two visionaries — August Wilson and George C. Wolfe — emerged, representing different spectrums but both bringing a fuller and more textured portrait of Black American life and culture to the stage. Together they, more than any other individuals in the 1980s and 1990s, challenged the theater's cultural gatekeepers and audiences to delve deeper into the Black American experience and to see music, in particular, as an extension, not simply a product, of that experience. Quite often, they didn't choose, as many had before them, to elevate music over drama, or vice versa. Instead, they celebrated that richness in all its glory, bringing the beauty and pathos of jazz and blues to life in ways never before imagined.

August Wilson

Easily among the greatest American playwrights of the 20th century, August Wilson almost singlehandedly reshaped the American theater's perception of

Black American life. Meshing drama with music and laughter with tears, Wilson proposed and delivered his astounding ten-play series known as *The Pittsburgh Cycle*. With one play for each decade, it documents Black American life throughout the 20th century.

Wilson used his native Pittsburgh as his primary canvas, painting majestic characters and situations of everyday people and everyday life. *Fences* — a complex story of a former Negro League baseball player turned garbage man at odds with his athletically gifted son in the 1950s — won the Pulitzer Prize. The Pulitzer Prize–winning *The Piano Lesson* is a story about a sister and brother from Mississippi at odds over the family's ancestral piano. In this work, Wilson, who changed his name to honor his mother, used the piano as a metaphor for the tug between discarding the past and its pain in order to begin anew and maintaining a balance in order to inherit and maintain the strength that's made survival possible.

Wilson frequently collaborated with Yale School of Drama dean Lloyd Richards, who directed *A Raisin in the Sun* on Broadway. Wilson's plays, therefore featured top Yale talent such as Angela Bassett, Charles Dutton, and Courtney B. Vance. The first and last installments of *The Pittsburgh Cycle, Gem of the Ocean* for the 1900s and *Radio Golf* for the 1990s, were staged in 2003 and 2005, respectively. Sadly, Wilson died of liver cancer in 2005.

Theater titan Kenny Leon (see the later section "Black Theater in the 21st Century") and legendary actor Denzel Washington (see Chapter 17) are the two most prominent advocates of Wilson's work, with Leon keeping Wilson's legacy alive primarily on stage and Washington committed to bringing all of Wilson's work to the big screen. Washington directed Wilson's *Fences* (2016), which scored an Academy Award nomination for Best Actor and earned Viola Davis the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress. He also produced *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (2020), which earned multiple Oscar and Golden Globe nominations, including Best Actress and Best Supporting Actor nods for Viola Davis and Chadwick Boseman (which he posthumously won a Golden Globe).

George C. Wolfe

Raised in segregated Kentucky in the 1950s and 1960s, playwright and director George C. Wolfe opened the theater to Black Americans and other underrepresented populations in his role as artistic director and producer of the New York Shakespeare Festival/Public Theater from 1993 to 2004. After cutting his teeth at Los Angeles's Inner City Cultural Center, Wolfe made noise off-Broadway with his satirical look at slavery and other events in Black American culture in *The Colored Museum*. He took the Black Broadway musical to new heights with *Jelly's Last Jam*, which combined great music and dance numbers with an introspective story of jazz's self-proclaimed founder, Jelly Roll Morton.

In a departure from Black-themed material, the openly gay Wolfe directed Tony Kushner's groundbreaking AIDS drama *Angels in America* to critical acclaim, winning a Tony for his direction. He also directed Suzan-Lori Parks's *Topdog/Underdog,* a contemporary story of two brothers grappling with their lives past and present, which won the 2002 Pulitzer Prize.

Wolfe conceived and directed *Bring in Da Noise, Bring in Da Funk,* tap dancer Savion Glover's star-turning vehicle that earned them both Tony Awards for direction and choreography, respectively. He directed playwright/actress Anna Deavere Smith in her solo rendition of the L.A. riots in 1994's *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992* as well as *Shuffle Along* in 2016 and *The Iceman Cometh,* starring Denzel Washington, in 2018. Wolfe also expanded his talents to film. His many films, mostly for TV, include *Lackawanna Blues* (2005) and August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (2020) from the stage, as well as *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2017) and *Nights in Rodanthe* (2008).

Black Theater in the 21st Century

Black professionals, both on and off stage, have continued to make contributions in the theater in the 21st century. The following sections identify some.

Kenny Leon

A native Floridian born in 1956, Kenny Leon began his theater career as an actor. Leon thrived in Atlanta, Georgia, where he attended what is now Clark-Atlanta University, making moves on stage and behind it. In 1990, Leon made national headlines when he became artistic director of the Alliance Theater Company in Atlanta, a rarity for a mainstream, predominantly white arts institution in the South. During his decade-long tenure, Leon staged various productions, premiering Pearl Cleage's *Blues for an Alabama Sky* and the musical *Aida* from Elton John and Tim Rice, which went on to hit big on Broadway.

In 2002, he co-founded True Colors Theater Company. Though based initially in both Washington, D.C. and Atlanta, the latter increasingly won out as the primary city. Operating largely out of the Southwest Arts Center in a predominantly Black community in Atlanta, True Colors, with its abundance of classic and new works created by Black playwrights and featuring Black life and culture, became reminiscent of the imprint made by Jomandi Productions, Atlanta's legendary Black theater company operating from 1978 into 2000.

Leon expanded his reach as a director with Broadway productions like his 2004 revival of Loraine Hansberry's groundbreaking *A Raisin in the Sun*, with Sean "Diddy" Combs, Sanaa Lathan, Audra McDonald, and Phylicia Rashad (for which she won a Tony); he also directed the production for ABC in 2008. Meanwhile, he doubled down on his personal commitment to preserving and elevating the legacy of Wilson, especially *The Pittsburgh Cycle*. He directed the Broadway premieres of the first and last installments of *The Pittsburgh Cycle* with *Gem of the Ocean* in 2004 and *Radio Golf* in 2007. Leon's 2010 Broadway revival of *Fences* resulted in Tony wins for Denzel Washington and Viola Davis. On the heels of Wilson's 2005 death, Leon and Todd Kreidler, longtime collaborators of the theatrical great, created the August Wilson Monologue Competition for young people, a national and annual competition depicted in the 2020 Netflix documentary *Giving Voice*.

Beyond Wilson, Leon has kept Black theater in the mainstream, directing productions such as the 2005 opera *Margaret Garner* with a libretto by Toni Morrison, the 2014 Tupac-inspired musical *Holler If Ya Hear Me*, the 2015 NBC broadcast of *The Wiz Live!*, as well as the 2020 Broadway premiere of Charles Fuller's Pulitzer Prize–winning play, *A Soldier's Play*, starring Blair Underwood and David Alan Grier. Leon's film and TV work as a director includes the 2012 Black cast version of *Steel Magnolias* starring Queen Latifah, 2019's *American Son* starring Kerry Washington (which he also directed on Broadway the year before), *Private Practice*, and the CW's *Dynasty*.

Suzan-Lori Parks, Lynn Nottage, Tarell Alvin McCraney, and beyond

Although Suzan-Lori Parks, born in Kentucky in 1963, wrote plays well before the 2000s, she didn't make a huge splash until her play *Topdog/Underdog* received rave reviews in its off-Broadway and Broadway runs in 2001 and 2002. Directed by George C. Wolfe, *Topdog/Underdog* originally starred Jeffrey Wright and Don Cheadle (rapper/actor Mos Def replaced Cheadle in a later production) in the roles of two brothers, Booth and Lincoln, as they cope with a myriad of issues, including poverty and racism. Parks became the first Black woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2002. *Father Comes Home From the Wars, Parts 1, 2, & 3*, her provocative 2014 off-Broadway play that was also presented by The Public Theater, was a finalist for the 2015 Pulitzer Prize. Set during the Civil War, it explores questions of power, identity, and freedom.

Like Parks, Brooklyn native Lynn Nottage only began attracting popular attention in the early 2000s with the following plays:

- ***Intimate Apparel* (2003),** about a Black woman pursuing her dreams as a seamstress in New York City; it resulted in several award wins, including the Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Actress for Viola Davis

- ***Ruined* (2008),** about the struggles of women in civil war–torn Democratic Republic of Congo; it won the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for Drama
- ***By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* (2011),** exploring the long-term relationship of a Black maid and her white boss, a Hollywood star, particularly around their roles in an epic Southern film that starred Sanaa Lathan
- ***Sweat* (2015),** set in a working-class bar, exploring race and identity, especially among Black and white women factory workers in the midst of a struggling and changing economy; it won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for Drama after running on Broadway

While a Yale grad student, Tarell Alvin McCraney was an assistant to Wilson for the 2005 production of *Radio Golf*, Wilson's final play, with the Yale Repertory Theater. Born in 1980 in Liberty City, Florida and raised by a drug-addicted mother alongside a brother who was in and out of prison, McCraney began making a name for his own work early. His *The Brother/Sister Plays* is a set of three plays exploring complex relationships, both heterosexual and gay, against a backdrop of societal expectations, police injustice, and more in the Louisiana projects. The plays include *In the Red and Brown Water* and *The Brothers Size*, both Yoruba-influenced, and the Louisiana-influenced *Marcus; Or the Secret of Sweet*, first presented between 2007 and 2010.

McCraney, whose 2019 Broadway production of *Choir Boy* earned several Tony Awards, received the MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowship in 2013. *Moonlight*, the groundbreaking 2016 coming-of-age LGBTQ film that won the Academy Award for Best Picture, adapted from the openly gay McCraney's semiautobiographical play, *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*, also earned him an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay. Other film and TV productions from McCraney, who became the playwriting chair at the Yale School of Drama in 2017, include the film *High Flying Bird* (2019) and the OWN series *David Makes Man* (2019).

With these playwrights and more, the Black theatrical presence has a strong future. Standouts include the following:

- Dominique Morrisseau, a 2018 MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowship recipient known for her three-play cycle, *The Detroit Projects,* including *Detroit '67*
- D.C.-born Branden Jacob-Jenkins, a 2016 MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowship recipient, known for writing Black characters in plays such as *Gloria* and *Everybody,* both finalists for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2016 and 2018, respectively
- Zimbabwean-American and noted actress Danai Gurira, who was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Play for the 2016 Broadway production of *Eclipsed*
- Jeremy O. Harris, known for his controversial 2019 *Slave Play*, which received 12 Tony nominations, the most for a nonmusical

NATIONAL BLACK THEATER FESTIVAL

Larry Leon Hamlin, founder of the North Carolina Black Repertory Company, created the National Black Theater Festival (NBTF) in 1989, to unite Black theaters, actors, and other stage professionals from across the nation. The festival is held once every two years in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Maya Angelou served as the NBTF's first chairperson. The 2005 NBTF boasted over 100 performances. In 2019, the festival drew more than 60,000 attendees.

Black Dance in America

Unlike dance in the Caribbean, which retained a more pronounced African influence, Black dance in America almost immediately combined African and European influences. Africans' dancing didn't bother the Catholic Church, so the French and Spanish rarely prohibited enslaved people in their Latin American and Caribbean colonies from dancing. In the United States, however, some Protestant churches strongly disapproved of dancing. Slaveholders and other Europeans didn't understand the strong link between music and dance that enslaved Africans cherished.

Early dances

Protestant restrictions notwithstanding, few slaveholders objected to dance competitions. One of the early dances to emerge was the *cakewalk*, in which Black dancers parodied white dancers by combining their stiff upper-body movements with the fancy footwork common in many African dances.

Still, professional dance was the province of white people. In the 1830s, the white minstrel Thomas Rice traveled extensively, performing the song-and-dance number "Jump Jim Crow" he'd lifted from Black culture (see the earlier section "White minstrels"). Black American William Henry Lane was unusual for his time. He wasn't just allowed to dance; he was celebrated for it. Lane was said to be the first performer to add syncopation and improvisation to his act, making him a strong candidate as an early tap dance innovator.

By the 1900s, Black American dance found a wider audience. Black composers wrote songs that described how dances were performed, and Black vernacular dance slowly crept into white society circles. The musical *Darktown Follies* at the Lafayette Theater in Harlem in 1911, featured dances including the cakewalk, Ballin' the Jack, and the Texas Tommy, a forerunner to the Lindy; the show changed how white producers approached all-white shows in that they began

coopting Black musicals. Instead of coopting, Broadway impresario Florenz Ziegfeld Jr., of *Ziegfeld Follies* fame, purchased a circle dance from *Darktown Follies* for his own Broadway show.

Tap dance

Quite possibly, tap dance grew out of a ban on drums by slaveholders following the Stono Rebellion (see Chapter 4 for details); because they couldn't use drums, enslaved people often created rhythms with their feet and sometimes by clapping their hands. Although flamenco, clogging, and other dance forms were also influential, tap dance still bears a strong African influence.

The 1921 musical *Shuffle Along* really injected Black dance into popular American dance, introducing both the Charleston and tap dancing to white audiences. The Charleston reached frenzied heights after being featured in the 1923 musical *Runnin' Wild. Runnin' Wild* made dancer Florence Mills, who thrilled audiences with her high kicks, a star. Josephine Baker, whose unique style made her a star in France, made an impression in the chorus line.

Throughout the 1920s, dance accompanied the jazz craze. Tap dance, in particular, came into its own during the swing jazz era. Tap dancers accompanied some of the biggest names in jazz and added even more finesse to those musical performances with their elegant dance moves, often achieved while wearing a tuxedo with tails. Those smooth and thrilling routines full of jumps and synchronized moves landed some of the best of the best tap dancers onto the big screen.

Famous Black tap dancers include the following:

- **Bill "Bojangles" Robinson:** One of the first Black Americans to become a tap star, Robinson, best known for his role as a docile servant who danced with Shirley Temple in films from the 1930s, didn't become a star until 50, when he landed a breakout role in the Broadway musical *Blackbirds of 1928.* An innovative dancer, Robinson wore wooden-soled shoes and could duplicate any rhythmic sound from a drum.
- **The Nicholas Brothers:** Known for their high acrobatic moves, the Philadelphia-raised Fayard and Harold Nicholas worked at the famed Cotton Club along with Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, and other luminaries. They also worked on Broadway in productions like *The Ziegfeld Follies of 1936.* Their extensive film career, which includes *Stormy Weather,* began in 1934 and spanned several decades.
- **Charles Atkinson:** Better known as Cholly Atkins, Atkinson earned fame as the man behind the smooth Motown moves. As the in-house Motown

choreographer, Atkins worked with many groups, most notably the Temptations. While the Temptations didn't tap dance, they did emit a collected cool typically associated with the best tap dancers of the time. In 1988, Atkinson, Fayard Nicholas, and a few others choreographed the Broadway musical *Black and Blue,* which won a Tony Award.

- **Sammy Davis Jr.:** He began his notable career as a dancer in the Will Mastin Trio with his father (Sammy Davis Sr.) and "uncle" Will Mastin. An all-around entertainer, Sammy Davis Jr. inspired Gregory Hines, one of tap's most noted dancers of the late 20th century.
- **Gregory Hines:** Tony winner Hines helped keep tap alive. He began his career at an early age as one-third of the family trio Hines, with his father and brother. When he later moved into film and television, he worked hard to bring the spotlight back to tap dancing in films like *Tap* (1989) and *Bojangles* (2001), about the life of Bill "Bojangles" Robinson. Hines enjoyed a Tony Award–winning turn in *Jelly's Last Jam,* which he also helped choreograph. He passed the tap dance baton to the young Savion Glover, with whom he worked in *Jelly's Last Jam.*
- **Savion Glover:** In 1996, Glover helped create the groundbreaking *Bring in Da Noise, Bring in Da Funk,* which tells Black American history through tap dance. Glover, who won a Tony for his choreography of that show, also appeared in *Bamboozled* (2000), a film that explores the legacy of racism on film and TV. Glover continued to push the boundaries of tap dance with edgy collaborations, such as with the band IF TRANE WUZ HERE, in which a poet, a dancer, and a saxophonist all interpret the music of jazz great John Coltrane.

Breakdancing

Like other popular dance crazes, breakdancing and other forms of hip-hop dance took the country by storm in the 1970s and 1980s. A recognizable element of hip-hop culture developed alongside rap music in the South Bronx in the 1970s, and breakdancing eventually had an identity of its own. Signature moves that include the head-spin and the *windmill*, in which the dancer rotates their body on the ground using one arm, also developed. Break dancing, which contains many moves that bear a striking resemblance to the Brazilian martial art form Capoeira, developed by enslaved Africans, broke into the mainstream in 1983 when Michael Jackson featured it in his groundbreaking video for the song "Beat It." From then, *breaking*, as it's also called, benefited from greater exposure in films such as *Beat Street* (1984) and *Breakin'* (1984), in addition to many rap videos. Far from dead, breakdancing was announced as a new Olympic sport in 2020 for the 2024 Olympics.

Classical dance forms

Black Americans didn't distinguish themselves only in popular dance. Masters such as Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, Alvin Ailey, and Arthur Mitchell contributed to the transformation of modern dance in America. Both trained anthropologists, Dunham and Primus imbued their work with a cultural backbone that hadn't existed before. Numerous other dancers and choreographers, such as Bill T. Jones, Donald McKayle, Debbie Allen, and Misty Copeland are also integral parts of Black dance history.

Katherine Dunham

Katherine Dunham insisted that her dancers understand the cultural significance of her choreography before they danced it. She was so serious about unearthing those connections that she studied dance in the Caribbean, most notably in Haiti. Although Dunham appeared in several films and Broadway productions, she blazed her own trails. In 1945, she opened the Dunham School of Dance in New York, and the following year she received critical acclaim for *Bal Negre,* a dance revue. The New York Metropolitan Opera commissioned Dunham to choreograph its 1963 production of *Aida.* Dunham also wrote several books. Until her death in 2006, she lived in East St. Louis, Illinois, where she used the arts to combat poverty.

Pearl Primus

Pearl Primus drew inspiration directly from Africa. Her intention wasn't to dance as a black dancer but rather as a dancer who had African roots. She favored imbuing her work with strong social commentary. For example, her Broadway debut in 1944 featured the piece "Strange Fruit," in which a woman reacts to a lynching. Her 1952 show *Dark Rhythm* reflected her travels to Africa, which incorporated dances from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and others.

Alvin Ailey

Alvin Ailey was inspired to dance by Dunham. A former athlete, he made his debut in 1953 with the Lester Horton Dance Theater in *Bal Caribe.* An instant star, he danced in the film *Carmen Jones* (1954) and appeared on Broadway with noted dancer Carmen de Lavallade in *House of Flowers.* Ailey continued his dance training and studied with masters like Martha Graham.

By 1962, Ailey had formed the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT), an integrated company of dancers committed to presenting new works along with older works, both Black and white. Artistic director Judith Jamison, one of Ailey's star dancers, took over the AAADT after his death in 1989, and continued Ailey's

pioneering efforts until handing the baton in 2011 to Robert Battle, who had been a frequent choreographer and artist in residence with Ailey since 1999.

Arthur Mitchell

Arthur Mitchell was the first Black American to become a principal dancer at the prestigious New York City Ballet. Classically trained, Mitchell rarely danced specifically Black parts. For example, he won acclaim for his role as Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

Knowing firsthand the limited opportunities available for Black Americans to train in classical ballet, Mitchell cofounded the Dance Theater of Harlem (DTH) in 1969. For decades, DTH trained dancers in some of the most prestigious companies in the U.S. and the world, including founding member and principal ballerina Virginia Johnson, whose career spanned nearly 30 years. After DTH was closed from 2004 to 2012 due to financial difficulties, Mitchell invited her to step in as artistic director in 2013. Mitchell passed away in 2018 at age 84.

Debbie Allen

Debbie Allen's professional career began in 1970 on Broadway in the chorus of *Purlie.* One of the highlights of her Broadway career includes the Drama Desk Award and the Tony nomination for Best Featured Actress in a Musical, which she received in 1980 for her role as Anita in the Broadway revival of *West Side Story*. She earned a second Tony nomination in 1986 for *Sweet Charity*. She became the first Black actress to win the Golden Globe for Best Actress in a Television Series Musical or Comedy in 1983, for her role as dance teacher Lydia Grant on the hit 1980s series *Fame*. She also won three Primetime Emmys for Outstanding Choreography — two for *Fame* and one for *The Motown 25th Anniversary Special*. She choreographed the Academy Awards for a record-breaking ten times.

In 2001, Allen, who is also a director and producer, opened the Debbie Allen Dance Academy in Los Angeles. The Shonda Rhimes–produced 2020 documentary *Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate Nutcracker* offered a glimpse into the school's work by capturing the behind-the-scenes of the holiday production.

Misty Copeland

Misty Copeland, like many Black ballerinas, didn't have a smooth journey. Yet on June 30, 2015, she became a symbol of hope to many when she was named the first Black ballerina promoted to principal dancer in the 75-year history of the storied American Ballet Theater (ABT). Growing up, Copeland faced significant challenges, including a childhood marked by uncertainty and financial struggle. Her formal introduction to ballet came in 1996 at age 13 through classes first at a California Boys & Girls Club, followed by formal study at the San Pedro Dance Center.

Training in ballet required Copeland to move in with her mentor, Cynthia Bradley, with whom she and her mother, Sylvia DelaCerna, signed a management contract entitling the Bradleys to 20 percent of her future earnings. Copeland visited her family only on the weekends until 1998, when her mother and Bradley and her husband publicly clashed. Eventually Copeland returned home, pursuing dance less intensively than before. Despite early offers to join companies, Copeland's mother insisted she graduate from high school before joining the ABT Studio Company in September 2000.

As Copeland's body began to change, she suffered body-conscious issues commonly associated with dancers of color in the largely white world of ballet. Copeland herself talks about how she was told her body wasn't that of a ballet dancer. As she continued to excel, becoming one of the youngest ABT dancers promoted to soloist in 2007, overcoming those challenges made her a role model to other aspiring ballerinas of color as well as young girls overall. From 2008 to 2020, Copeland was the only Black woman ballerina at ABT. Copeland, who overcame a number of injuries, made a mark dancing in classics such as *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker*, and *Firebird*, which became a signature performance for her — so much so that it became the basis and title of her debut picture book in 2014.

From dancing tour dates with Prince to numerous endorsement deals like Under Armour, Dannon, and Estée Lauder — not to mention her 2015 documentary *A Ballerina's Tale* and various television appearances and numerous books, including her 2014 memoir, *Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina* — Copeland's reach extended well beyond the insular world of ballet.

5 A Touch of Genius: Music, Film, TV, and Sports

IN THIS PART . . .

Ponder Black music's African roots while also exploring its evolution across various genres, beginning with the spirituals and the blues, as well as through jazz, rock and roll, soul, and R&B all the way to hip hop as it tops the charts and makes people move.

Consider the mainstream film industry's harmful stereotyping of Black Americans from its beginning and how Black filmmakers turned to the new medium immediately to counter with their own films, carrying on to deliver more balanced and rich representations even today.

Chew on how impactful television has been in perpetuating harmful myths and stereotypes about Black people as well as how Black actors, directors, and more have seized the medium to defuse that harm with ongoing success through thoughtful content that probes, entertains, and educates.

Think about the important and active role sports has played and continues to play in civil rights even before Jackie Robinson broke Major League Baseball's color line well into the 21st century, with Black athletes raising their voices and lending their platforms to fight systemic racism.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Bringing music to the New World
- Pioneering new types of American music
- Singing out through gospel and mainstream music
- Taking rap to the airwaves

Chapter 16
Give Me a Beat: Black Music

Of Black people's many contributions to American culture, music is often the most widely acknowledged one. Enslaved Africans melded their traditional musical styles with the influences and realities of their new surroundings to create even more innovative sounds. Recognized and cherished the world over, Black American musical genres include blues, jazz, gospel, R&B, and hip hop, as well as their many variations.

This chapter explores those roots and traces today's sounds back to the views early Africans held about music and how they manifested those views during slavery. It also explores jazz, blues, gospel, and R&B as well as hip hop's path from humble beginnings to global exposure.

African Roots

Every African village had musicians. In fact, most villages regarded musicians. Some worked directly for kings or chiefs, and many times such positions were hereditary. In some cultures, musicians sat near the king or chief during various ceremonies to indicate their valued status. Africans used several types of instruments, but a variety of drums such as the congas and bongos were the most common. Frequently, the drum served as a royal or sacred instrument. *Idiophones*,

instruments most typically represented by bells, gong-gongs, and xylophones, in addition to the more well-known bass and drums, were also popular. Early European travelers, who noted that Africans highly valued music, also wrote about *chordophones*, string instruments that resembled fiddles. The human voice was another important instrument.

During 18th-century voyages, slave traders intentionally separated Africans from their own cultural groups to prevent revolts. So when the Africans sang aboard ships, slave traders never imagined they were forming new alliances. Perhaps Africans, themselves, didn't initially know that music would become one of their defining cultural links.


TECHNICAL STUFF

Ironically, slaveholders also valued the musical ability of those they enslaved and sometimes included it as an attractive feature in sale announcements. Enslaved people performed at auctions, and notices for runaways even referenced musical talents. Some slaveholders hired talented musicians out, spawning the culture of Black people exclusively entertaining white people.

Black Music Fundamentals

To illustrate the fundamentals of Black American music overall, scholars often point to the *ring shout*, a religious ritual performed in a circle composed of shouters (or dancers) and singers. The ring shout is the oldest known Black American performance style. Its common features are

- **Call-and-response:** Also known as *antiphony,* the leader sings a line, and the other participants answer in unison, which was a significant part of early religious culture.

  Music wasn't a solitary act. Observers were encouraged to participate by clapping, dancing, and joining in the refrain. This call-and-response format is an important feature of all African-based music, especially Black American music.


REMEMBER

- **Vocality:** *Vocality* includes cries, calls, hollers, and moans, among other expressions. In addition, singers display an intense emotionality as well as vocal versatility.
- **Rhythm:** *Polyrhythm,* the existence of two contrasting rhythms, as well as improvisation and *syncopation,* the stressing of a normally unstressed beat, are typical in Black American music.
- **Texture:** *Texture* includes harmony and the simultaneous performance of the same melodic line with individual variations. In the absence of drums and other instrumental accompaniment, clapping and foot-tapping enhance the texture of the voice.

Feeling the Spirit: The Spirituals

Spirituals represent the greatest body of Black American songs created before the Civil War. Distinguished American folklorist and musicologist Alan Lomax noted that the repetition, relaxed vocalization, and polyrhythmic accompaniment common in spirituals was consistent with the performance style found throughout Africa. Some spirituals even contain African melodies. Although all traditional spirituals feature the call-and-response element routinely found in Black American music, thematic content makes them uniquely Black American. Freedom, faith, struggle, hope, and patience are themes born directly out of enslavement.

Drawing inspiration from the Bible, spirituals often highlighted Jacob, Daniel, Moses, and Gabriel, among other biblical figures. Death was particularly prominent, and heaven differed greatly from the real-life degradation of slavery. Enslaved people envisioned an afterlife with no white people or work. Also, spirituals were assigned different purposes. Certain songs accompanied funeral services, the ring shout, and everyday life as well as formal worship services.



Most white people were completely unaware of spirituals until after the 1867 publication of *Slave Songs of the United States*. This collection represented the first systematic effort to collect and preserve these songs. Lead editor William Francis Allen, a Harvard graduate, began collecting the songs from formerly enslaved people while working on St. Helena Island in South Carolina as part of the Freedmen's Aid Commission. The book categorizes the songs by state and includes other notations.

THE FISK JUBILEE SINGERS

Beginning in 1871, the Fisk Jubilee singers of Fisk University, located in Nashville, helped spread spirituals to a larger audience through touring. University treasurer and music professor George L. White borrowed money and took nine students — seven formerly enslaved and two children of those formerly enslaved — on the road. In high demand, the Fisk Jubilee Singers traveled throughout the United States and Europe popularizing spirituals. Most important, however, is that the Fisk Jubilee Singers, who inspired the formation of similar groups at other Black colleges, set a precedent for Black Americans to perform Black American–oriented material abroad and break down barriers domestically. Undoubtedly, the Fisk Jubilee Singers' success contributed to the later spread of ragtime, jazz, and other forms of Black American music globally.



REMEMBER

Spirituals were much more than songs of worship. Certain songs contained messages regarding secret meetings, as well as clues about escape routes for those running away. Flip to Chapter 5 for information on the role music played for those trying to escape slavery.

Ragtime

Toward the end of the 19th century, popular or secular Black music emerged in the form of *ragtime*, also known as *jig piano*. Named for its signature syncopation, ragtime is the first truly American musical genre.

The exact date ragtime emerged remains unknown, but Rudi Blesh's *They All Played Ragtime: The True Story of an American Music* (1950) points to early rumblings of it with *Le Bamboula: Danse des négres*, a music piece from celebrated 19th-century composer and pianist Louis Moreau Gottschalk in 1848. The New Orleans native was the product of a white English cotton broker and a New Orleans–born French Creole mother with reportedly non-African roots in Saint-Domingue (modern-day Haiti); however, he claimed that his *Bamboula*, which is named for the drum made out of a rum barrel as well as the dance accompanying it, was influenced by Congo Square (see the nearby sidebar), an open plaza where enslaved people were allowed to gather on Sundays in the early 1800s, with African culture on display, primarily music and dance.

Ragtime was an important milestone in Black American music because it marked a departure from the fiddles and banjos that characterized Black music before the Civil War. After slavery ended, some Black families purchased small organs on installment plans that lasted a lifetime. Those organs, as well as pianos, were pivotal to the development of ragtime.

Ragtime's popularity increased during the 1890s. However, to even get songs published or performed, usually on the minstrel stage, Black Americans had to write "coon songs," a term popular for the times. One particular song, "All the Coons Look Alike to Me" (1896) by Black songwriter Ernest Hogan was such a hit that semifinalists in the Ragtime Championship of the World Competition in 1900 were asked to rag it.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

Scott Joplin became ragtime's most famous figure. Although music publishers rejected his most famous composition, "Maple Leaf Rag," in 1898, Joplin made it popular by playing it constantly at the Maple Leaf Club in Sedalia, Missouri, where he worked as a pianist. When a small publisher released the work in 1899, "Maple Leaf Rag" quickly became the model for classic ragtime. Later in his career, Joplin taught in New York and even published a ragtime manual for musicians titled *The School of Ragtime* (1908). In addition to creating ragtime classics, including the

1902 rag "The Entertainer" that was featured in the 1973 classic Oscar-winning film *The Sting,* starring Robert Redford and Paul Newman, Joplin created the folk opera *Treemonisha* (1911), extolling the value of education for Black Americans. It wasn't staged until 1972 in a joint production between Morehouse College and Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, with dance legend Katherine Dunham directing and choreographing. Joplin also created *The Ragtime Dance,* a ballet first performed in Sedalia in 1899, and published in 1902. Despite his tremendous influence, he wasn't wealthy when he died in 1917. In recognition of his contributions to American music, he was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1976.

Singing the Blues

The blues grew out of backbreaking work conditions. Cotton plantations sprouted in the Mississippi Delta, Alabama, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Texas as a direct result of the invention of the cotton gin in 1793 and the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Singing spirituals and work songs made the work tolerable. The rhythm of work songs established a steady work pace. The blues, broken down in its simplest form, merges the saddest spirituals with work songs.


REMEMBER

Born out of the American experience of slavery and Jim Crow, the blues also comes from Black American oral tradition (refer to Chapter 14) and tells a unique story of hardship and heartache. Although the blues is considered sad music, Southern writer Albert Murray, author of "bluesy" novels like *Train Whistle Guitar,* argued that while the blues identifies life's harshest realities, it is also a coping mechanism for transcending them.

Blues basics

Blues lyrics typically follow an AAB poetic form: A different third line follows two identical lines. In Bessie Smith's "Lost Your Head Blues," for example, she sings, "I was with you, baby, when you didn't have a dime" twice before singing, "Now since you've got plenty of money, you have throwed your good gal down." In addition, many early blues songs reference the supernatural, which some have argued reflects an African cosmology. The devil is also prominent but bears a greater resemblance to the trickster figures of African folktales than to the Christian concept of an evil being.

Like the wandering verses of spirituals, blues verses freely float from one song to another, especially in early songs. The guitar is the most commonly used instrument, probably because it's a close cousin to the banjo (see the sidebar "African origins of the banjo"). Early blues artists used various guitar techniques, such as sliding a knife or other device along the strings to achieve a particular sound.



HISTORICAL ROOTS

AFRICAN ORIGINS OF THE BANJO

Descriptions of banjo-like African instruments made of drinking gourds with strings attached appear in Richard Jobson's *The Golden Trade* (1623) as well as works by other Europeans. Banjos may have been present on slave ships as well, because Adrien Dessalles, son of a Martinican sugar plantation owner and author of *Histoire Générale Des Antilles* (1847), implied that the *banza,* a banjo-like instrument, was widely used in musical celebrations in Martinique by 1678.

On American plantations, the banjo, known as a *bandore* or *banjer,* was quite common among enslaved musicians. In the 19th century, the banjo became a fixture in minstrel shows, which may explain why Black Americans abandoned the instrument in the early 20th century. White musicians, particularly in the Southern Appalachian region, embraced the banjo, a prominent instrument in bluegrass music.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

Generally regarded as the Father of the Blues, W.C. Handy popularized the blues, particularly the 12-bar blues structure, which typically has four beats in every measure and a chord progression that rises and falls. Always intrigued by the work songs and spirituals he heard growing up in Alabama, Handy really learned about the blues while working as a bandmaster and director of dance orchestras in the Mississippi Delta region, around Clarksdale, Mississippi. A better blues composer than player, Handy, who relocated to Memphis, attempted to publish blues music several times. Finally, in 1912, he self-financed the publication of "Memphis Blues," which became hugely popular. His 1914 composition "St. Louis Blues" became a classic.

Blues genres

The blues flourished and spawned several genres, including classic blues, Delta blues, and urban blues:

- **Classic blues:** Today, blues is largely associated with men, but as blues rose to prominence during the 1920s, women became the stars and songs about no-good men were extremely popular. Classic blues singers Gertrude "Ma" Rainey and Bessie Smith were two of the most popular Black American singers of their time. Both women honed their talents on the minstrel and vaudeville circuits.
- **The Delta blues:** Texas-born Blind Lemon Jefferson became the first popular male blues artist, but Mississippi-born bluesmen dominated the genre, even creating a subgenre known as the Delta blues. It was characterized by hardships such as imprisonment at Mississippi's notorious Parchman Penitentiary, unemployment, jealous women and husbands, and raunchy good times in juke joints. The Delta blues became popular with stars such as Charley Patton and Robert Johnson.

RACE RECORDS

Music recording wasn't widely open to Black musicians until Perry Bradford, a seasoned vaudeville and minstrel show performer and musician, convinced Okeh Records to record Mamie Smith when white singer Sophie Tucker became too ill to do it. The two songs Smith cut in February 1920 ("That Thing Called Love" and "You Can't Keep a Good Man Down") performed well enough that Okeh allowed Smith to record "Crazy Blues" that summer. Okeh Records promoted Smith, and "Crazy Blues" sold 1 million copies, alerting white companies to the potential of the Black American market. Other companies such as Columbia entered the business to record Black artists specifically to sell to Black audiences.

In 1921, the Black-owned Pace Phonograph Company, founded by W.C. Handy's former partner, Harry Pace, began recording artists under the label Black Swan Records, named in honor of the Black Swan Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield. Initially the company floundered, but fortunes changed when Black Swan signed Bessie Smith. The recording scored big with the public. White-owned companies took note and entered the Black music market in a fury. By 1923, Paramount had purchased Black Swan Records.

- **The urban blues:** Before Black Americans migrated to Northern cities like Chicago during the Great Migration (see Chapter 7), they went to Southern cities like Memphis, Tennessee, known for its famed Beale Street, which evolved into an important hub for the blues and later both R&B and rock and roll. Beginning in the 1940s, Chicago became another important home for the blues, with Maxwell Street occupying a similar importance as Beale Street in Memphis. Chicago was home to many transplanted Black Southerners, a significant number of them from Mississippi. A genre called urban or Chicago blues, characterized by electric guitars and a fuller band sound, sprouted there. Muddy Waters arguably became the genre's most successful artist.

Famous blues musicians

There were countless successful blues artists, many of whom recorded 150 songs or more. Yet many artists, even those who were stars, died broke. Here is just a sampling of some of the many influential blues artists:

- **Gertrude "Ma" Rainey:** Billed as the "Mother of the Blues," Rainey, born in 1886, began singing in the blues style as early as 1902, some years before her first recording in 1923. Touring the Theater Owners Booking Association (TOBA) circuit helped her career peak in the 1920s, as she sold an impressive

number of records. From 1923 to 1928, she recorded nearly 100 records but retired to her native Columbus, Georgia in 1935, on the heels of the deaths of her mother and sister. She suffered a massive heart attack and died in 1939. Oscar winner Viola Davis played her in the 2020 Netflix adaptation of Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson's 1982 play *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. Oscar winner Mo'Nique played Ma Rainey in the 2015 HBO film *Bessie*.



One-time Black vaudeville performer Sherman H. Dudley spearheaded what would become TOBA, an organization of clubs where Black acts performed for Black audiences throughout the South mainly, dating from roughly 1909 to the 1920s. Some refer to it as the Chitlin' Circuit.

- **Bessie Smith:** Chattanooga, Tennessee native Bessie Smith, known as the "Empress of the Blues," recorded mainly for Columbia Records. She was once a protégé of (as well as a rumored lover of) Ma Rainey. Smith's recording career lasted for roughly a decade, from 1923 until around 1933. Unsung blues pioneer Alberta Hunter wrote "Down Hearted Blues," one of Smith's many hits. Credited with creating a demand for a grittier blues style, Smith influenced artists such as Billie Holiday and Mahalia Jackson. A car accident in Clarksdale, Mississippi, cut her life short in 1937 at age 43. Queen Latifah played her in the 2015 HBO film *Bessie* directed by Dee Rees.
- **Charley Patton:** Often called the "King of the Delta Blues," Charley Patton, who recorded his first record in 1929, was a great influence on fellow Mississippians and Delta blues artists like Willie Brown, Son House, and the legendary Robert Johnson.
- **Robert Johnson:** Johnson is the most legendary Delta blues figure. In his short lifetime (he died in 1938 at age 27), Johnson wasn't an overwhelming blues success, but his distinctive guitar style, coupled with the tale that he sold his soul to the devil in exchange for his much-improved guitar skills, fueled his legend.
- **Muddy Waters:** Born on a Mississippi plantation, Muddy Waters was the most successful urban blues artist. By 1947, Waters, who had upgraded to using an amplified guitar, was recording for Chess Records in Chicago. Waters used the slide guitar technique and the traditional AAB blues form. Artists he influenced include Junior Wells and Buddy Guy, who played for him, and the Rolling Stones, who took their name from the Waters song "Rollin' Stone."
- **B.B. King:** Born in the Mississippi Delta in 1925, B.B. King sang gospel as a child but hit his stride singing about everyday life, particularly romantic relationships. Combining his smooth vocals with guitar expertise, he recorded no less than 50 albums. Together, he and Lucille (the name he gave to all his guitars as a reminder of the night he ran into a burning building in Arkansas to save his precious instrument) took blues, particularly his signature song "The Thrill Is Gone," all around the globe.

It's nearly impossible to list all the other influential blues artists. Those born in Mississippi alone include Chester "Howlin' Wolf" Burnett, Sonny Boy Williamson II, Willie Dixon (known as the "Granddaddy of Chicago Blues"), Skip James, Mississippi John Hurt, Bukka White, John Lee Hooker, and R.L. Burnside. Innovators of the Piedmont blues, a style from the Carolinas and Georgia, include Tampa Red. Louisiana has contributed Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter and Lonnie Johnson. Lightnin' Hopkins and T-Bone Walker hailed from Texas. Bobby Blue Bland straddled the fence between blues and soul. More contemporary blues artists include Taj Mahal, Bobby Rush, Robert Cray, and Gary Clark Jr, who emerged in the late 1990s. Female blues singers include long-gone legends like Memphis Minnie and Big Mama Thornton, as well as Chicago blues legend Koko Taylor, whose rendition of "Sweet Home Chicago" became a classic long before her death in 2009.

Let the Good Times Roll: Jazz

In simple terms, jazz is a fusion of blues and ragtime with brass-band music and syncopated dance music. Common features are *blue notes* (notes played or sung below the major scale), polyrhythm, and improvisation, along with other aspects of Black American music.



Several theories on the origins of the word *jazz* abound. Some have traced it to an itinerant Black musician in the Mississippi River Valley region named Jazbo Brown. Others claim it emanated from the musician Boisey James, who became known as "Old Jas" and played "Jas's music." In 1910, a Chicago sign painter wrote that "Music will be furnished by Jas.' Band." The white Original Dixieland Jass Band in New Orleans is credited as the first to record jazz and introduce it to the larger public. By 1918, *jazz* was a common term.

The evolution of jazz styles

Like blues and ragtime, pinpointing when or where jazz started is hard. New Orleans jazz great Jelly Roll Morton, an early jazz innovator, untruthfully boasted that he invented jazz. (In 1915, "Jelly Roll's Blues" became the first published jazz arrangement, however.) Ragtime and its offshoot, boogie-woogie, were pivotal to jazz's early development, and Morton was a top ragtime pianist. Eventually Morton, like many of his peers, began playing jazz, particularly in Storyville, a red-light district known for prostitution and hot music near New Orleans's French Quarter.

Jazz didn't begin in Storyville, but Storyville was important to jazz's overall development. New Orleans thrived as a major port city, thereby creating an environment in which great musicians like ragtime pianist Tony Jackson, who greatly influenced Morton, honed their craft.



CONGO SQUARE

Scholars have linked New Orleans's innovation in Black American music to the African-based musical heritage nurtured in Congo Square. Dating back to the 18th century, when the French ruled New Orleans, enslaved people from the Tremé plantation gathered on Sundays in Congo Square near the French Quarter and held a market where they played music, sang, and danced. In 1817, a municipal order officially sanctioned Congo Square, but it didn't begin attracting mainstream attention until around 1848, most notably when composer and musician Louis Moreau Gottschalk cited it as an influence for his popular composition *Le Bamboula: Danse des négres*.

In the 1870s and 1880s, white writers George Washington Cable and Lafcadio Hearn greatly amplified the mythology of Congo Square by writing both nonfiction and fictional stories about it in mainstream publications. Considering that Cable was a Confederate veteran who came from a slaveholding family, his contribution to Black music and culture was quite unexpected. Yet his writings greatly elevated not just Congo Square but also African contributions and innovations in American music. The World's Industrial and Cotton Centennial Exposition, held in New Orleans's Audubon Park from December 16, 1884, to June 1, 1885, brought added attention. Today, Congo Square, located at the southern corner of Louis Armstrong Park, is on the National Register of Historic Places for the pivotal role it played in New Orleans's noted musical history.

Cornetist Charles "Buddy" Bolden, in particular, had a tremendous impact on New Orleans and jazz overall. Making a living through music alone was hard, however. By 1904, Morton, like other musicians, began traveling to other cities for work. When the federal government shut down Storyville in 1917, many New Orleans musicians migrated to Chicago.

Jazzing up the North with red hot jazz

In Chicago, New Orleans musicians ushered in an era of jazz that has several names, including red hot, Dixieland, and classic jazz. Common features included a rhythm section, group and collective improvisation, cornet or trumpet as lead instrument, an infusion of emotion, and an overall jazz swing feel.

Arriving in Chicago in 1917 during the first phase of the Great Migration, Bill Johnson was one of the earliest New Orleans musicians to establish himself. By 1919, Joseph "King" Oliver, one of New Orleans's most respected musicians of the time, had joined Johnson's band in Chicago; by 1920, he was leading his own band, King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band. Louis Armstrong, whom Oliver mentored in New Orleans, joined Oliver in Chicago in 1922. Other notable New Orleans musicians who lived in Chicago included Freddie Keppard (who reportedly succeeded Bolden as "king," only to have Oliver take it later), trombonist Edward "Kid" Ory (his Kid Ory's Creole Jazz Band, or Kid Ory's Sunshine Band, was the first Black New Orleans band to record in 1922), clarinetist Sidney Bechet, and Jelly Roll Morton.

Big band jazz

Taking a lead from red hot jazz, big bands emerged during the 1920s. Unlike previous bands, where there was a greater degree of improvisation, big bands had arrangers that structured the music more but also allowed for more breakout solo improvisation. Suddenly bandleaders like Fletcher Henderson, Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington (see Figure 16-1), and Chick Webb flourished at places like Club Alabam, the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem, and on the road. Earl "Fatha" Hines and Count Basie led the Midwest's biggest big bands. Although Hines began leading his band, or "organization," as he preferred, in Chicago, Basie would later relocate there from Kansas City. Lionel Hampton, who got his start in Chicago, kept the big band tradition alive well through the Lionel Hampton Orchestra throughout the 1980s.

Swing jazz

In the 1930s, Kansas City musicians were among the first to adopt the swing style of jazz, which stressed all the beats equally, producing a smooth rhythm. Typically, in swing jazz, a large number of musicians, backed by an especially strong rhythm section, played in a medium to fast tempo. Duke Ellington's 1932 hit "It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing" provided a name for this new style of jazz, which was very danceable.



FIGURE 16-1: Duke Ellington with Ella Fitzgerald.

Bettmann/Getty Images

Central Avenue jazz

From roughly 1920 to 1955, Los Angeles was a hotspot for jazz, attracting some of its biggest icons. And Central Avenue, the hub of L.A.'s Black community, served as its headquarters. Yet it's routinely overlooked. Jelly Roll Morton, encouraged by musicians he knew who had gone to L.A. as early as 1908, arrived in L.A. in 1917 for a gig. When Kid Ory's Creole Band recorded the first jazz record by a Black band in 1922, it was in L.A. Over the years, the Dunbar Hotel became the epicenter of the scene, as artists as big as Louis Armstrong himself stayed and played there.

Thomas Jefferson High School, most notably Samuel Rodney Browne, L.A. public schools' first Black music teacher who was also a musician, helped funnel talent like saxophonist Dexter Gordon, trumpeter Don Cherry, and violinist Ginger Smock into the scene. From 1945 to 1955, Black businessman Leon Hefflin Sr.'s Cavalcade of Jazz, the largest outdoor jazz festival of its kind, showcased over 125 jazz artists, including titans such as Count Basie, Lionel Hampton, and Louis Armstrong. Homegrown talent Charles Mingus was a leader of the various bebop sounds.

Bebop: More than dancing

During the 1940s, jazz began changing, and the Harlem nightclub Minton's Playhouse was at the forefront of that change. Minton's luminaries included pianist Thelonious Monk, drummers Kenny Clarke and Max Roach, guitarist Charlie Christian, trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, and saxophonists Charlie "Bird" Parker and Lester "the Prez" Young.

Out of this gathering of talent, bebop emerged. Characterized by complex polyrhythms, dissonant harmonies, and irregular phrases, bebop broke away from the more regimented style of jazz play. Typically, two horns — trumpet and saxophone — began in unison, followed by a series of improvisations before the horns concluded the song by repeating the first sequence in unison. Bebop discarded the melodies of standard pieces such as "Stomping at the Savoy" and created new melodies over the old harmonic progressions. By emphasizing technical skill, bebop demanded that audiences really listen to the music. Thelonious Monk is credited as saying, "We wanted a music that they couldn't play" (where "they" referred to white musicians).

Hard bop

Bebop gave way to hard bop, a more rhythmically driven sound associated with drummers like Art Blakely and saxophonist Cannonball Adderly. Musicians such as Miles Davis and saxophonist Sonny Rollins, who cut their teeth on bebop, also participated. Bassist Charles Mingus even developed a funkier side to hard bop by incorporating popular Black music like soul.

Avant garde, or free, jazz

Jazz continued to evolve throughout the 1960s. Saxophonists Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane were harbingers of the free jazz era. Coleman emphasized harmonic freedom, as showcased in the albums *The Shape of Jazz to Come* and *Free Jazz.* Incorporating elements of African, Arabic, and Indian music, Coltrane infused his music with a deep spirituality, captured by albums like *A Love Supreme* and *Meditation.* Pianist Charles Mingus revived the art of collective improvisation, reining in the trend of solo improvisation.

Jazz singers

As jazz progressed, skillful singers adopted a scatting technique in which the voice functioned more like an instrument. Following are some of the most prominent singers.

Billie "Lady Day" Holiday

Born to teenage parents in 1915, Billie Holiday had a challenging childhood in Baltimore. And so was the beginning of her career in New York City. Her first record, made in 1933, didn't sell well. Successful performances at Harlem's Apollo Theater in 1935, however, helped change the trajectory of Holiday's career. Touring with white jazz musician Artie Shaw introduced Holiday's distinctive voice, punctuated by unique phrasings and a heart-wrenching delivery, to a wider audience, but traveling in the South came at a high price.

Repeated performances of the anti-lynching song "Strange Fruit" at New York City's integrated Café Society in 1939, secured her legend but maybe also her early death. When the federal government via Federal Bureau of Narcotics head Henry Anslinger demanded Holiday (dubbed "Lady Day" by her trusted friend, great jazz saxophonist Lester "Prez" Young) stop singing "Strange Fruit," she refused. So, as detailed in the first chapter of Johann Hari's 2015 book, *Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs* (Bloomsbury, USA), Federal Bureau of Narcotics head Harry Anslinger targeted her, using her drug and alcohol struggles against her, even resorting to framing her for drug possession. When she died in 1959, she was handcuffed to her hospital bed.

The 2021 Lee Daniels film *The United States vs. Billie Holiday,* with singer Andra Day, explores this aspect of Holiday's life as an important civil rights milestone, which differs from the love story angle of the 1972 film Lady Sings the Blues, starring Diana Ross (who was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress), Billy Dee Williams, and Richard Pryor.

More than 80 years later, "Strange Fruit" still ranks high among protest songs. In 2013, rapper/producer Kanye West incorporated "Strange Fruit" into his 2013 hit "Blood on the Leaves," using Nina Simone's cover.

Sarah Vaughan

Newark's Sarah Vaughan, whose roots dated back to swing, was one of the few singers of the bebop era. Like bebop instrumentalists, Vaughan, along with her friend and colleague Billy Eckstine, improvised melodic lines based on the chord progressions of standard songs.

Ella Fitzgerald

One of jazz's few female bandleaders, Ella Fitzgerald (refer to Figure 16-1) rose to fame with Chick Webb's band and hit with songs such as "A-Tisket, A-Tasket." After Webb died, she changed the group's name and toured as Ella Fitzgerald and Her Famous Orchestra. In 1941, she went solo and became most noted for her *Great American Songbook* series with Verve, in which she sang Cole Porter, Duke Ellington, and Irving Berlin standards.

Betty Carter

Known for her innovative scatting and a voice more akin to a physical instrument, Betty Carter carved out a lane all her own. She began her career in her teens in Detroit, where she was raised. Joining the Lionel Hampton Orchestra in 1948 was her first big break. Teaming up with Ray Charles for the 1961 album *Ray Charles and Betty Carter,* featuring their celebrated version of "Baby, It's Cold Outside," was her second.

Taking her career in her own hands in 1969, Carter started releasing her own records through her own Bet-Car Productions. In 1988, she began a fruitful relationship with Verve Records, resulting in her Grammy-winning 1994 album, *Look What I Got!*

Prior to her death in 1998, Carter became a bridge to the genre's next generation through her *Jazz Ahead* series, which began with the Brooklyn Academy of Music and became an important residency program at the Kennedy Center in D.C. Talent Carter is credited for nurturing throughout her career include double bassist Curtis Lundy, pianist Cyrus Chestnut, and drummer Kenny Washington.

Great jazz instrumentalists

The following jazz artists did more than excel individually. They either nurtured the genre in its formative stages or took it to greater heights:

- **Charles "Buddy" Bolden:** Bolden is acknowledged as the first New Orleans cornetist and bandleader to play jazz music. By 1901, he was the most well-known musician in New Orleans. He predated jazz recordings, but his music still fueled future New Orleans legends like Joseph "King" Oliver and Louis Armstrong. Bolden, who died in 1931, is known for the songs "Buddy Bolden's Blues" and "Make Me a Pallet on the Floor."
- **James Reese Europe:** Credited with prepping Europe for jazz, the appropriately named James Reese Europe gave World War I soldiers a lift with his Harlem Hellfighters band, drawn from New York's all-Black 369th Infantry. Europe's recordings demonstrated the transition from ragtime and blues to jazz. By the time of his death (he was stabbed by a band member), he was the most prominent Black American bandleader.
- **Louis Armstrong:** "Satchmo," as many knew him, was one of jazz's first stars. Before mastering the trumpet, Armstrong began his musical career singing for pennies as a boy. At the Colored Waifs' Home for Boys, he learned to play several instruments and eventually led the home's brass band. After leaving the home, he got various gigs in New Orleans nightclubs and bars before moving on to Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City. He put his trumpet and voice to good use in the 1967 classic "What a Wonderful World."
- **Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington:** Known for his smartly dressed orchestra of precise musicians who performed in perfect unison, Ellington, born in Washington, D.C. in 1899, was one of the nation's greatest composers, leaving a catalog of more than 2,000 compositions when he died in 1974. He and frequent collaborator Billy Strayhorn, with whom he composed the classic "Take the A Train," were so in sync they often didn't know who had contributed what.
- **Charlie "Bird" Parker:** Noted as bebop's coarchitect (along with Dizzy Gillespie), Charlie Parker, born in 1920, came from Kansas City's entrenched jazz tradition. A master of the saxophone, he took many musical risks, such as recording with strings, which resulted in the best-selling album *Charlie Parker with Strings.* Unfortunately, drugs cut his genius short in 1955.
- **Miles Davis:** A key member of Charlie Parker's quintet (see the earlier section "Bebop: More than dancing"), Davis led his own group of nine musicians by 1948. Using unconventional instrumentation such as the French horn and tuba, Davis charted new territory. He followed his well-received 1957 album *Birth of the Cool* with the platinum-selling *Kind of Blue* two years later. Over his long career, Davis infused jazz, soul, rock, and rhythm and blues in his music, a spirit he captured in his highly regarded 1970 album *Bitches Brew.* Davis, who won a Grammy in 1987, remained a respected jazz innovator until his death in 1991.

Although men have dominated much of jazz's early history, women instrumentalists weren't uncommon: Pianist Lil Hardin Armstrong, wife of Louis Armstrong, played with King Oliver. Mary Lou Williams, another pianist, contributed swing

band scores to Benny Goodman and Earl Hines. Louis Armstrong tagged Valaida Snow as the best trumpeter after himself. Pianist and songwriter Irene Higginbotham co-wrote Billie Holiday's "Good Morning Heartache," and the Grammy Award–winning Shirley Horn frequently accompanied herself on the piano.

International Sweethearts of Rhythm, touted as the first interracial all-woman band in the nation, was dominated by Black musicians and, at various times, included trombonist Helen Jones Woods, guitarist and vocalist Carline Ray, drummer Pauline Braddy, saxophonist and bandleader Violet May "Vi" Burnside, trumpeters Ernestine "Tiny" Davis, Cora Bryant, and more. There were also all-Black female bands like the Harlem Playgirls, in which Burnside and Davis played; Myrtle Young and Her Rays, with drummer Hetty (sometimes Hettie) Smith; Darlings of Rhythm, formed by baritone and tenor saxophonist Lorraine Brown; and Tiny Davis Hell Divers, among others.

Violinist Ginger Smock was a West Coast pioneer, especially in L.A.'s important Central Avenue jazz scene, even leading the first Black band to host a TV program in 1951. Seattle pianist, composer, and singer Patti Brown played with Billy Eckstine, toured Europe with Quincy Jones, recorded with Aretha Franklin and James Brown, plus served as musical director for bands accompanying Dinah Washington and Sarah Vaughan.

Some challenges early women jazz instrumentalists faced included pressures to sing in addition to or in lieu of playing their instruments as well as be attractive and/or sexy and economic exploitation. Later female jazz instrumentalists include pianists Patrice Rushen and Geri Allen, flautist Bobbi Humphrey, violinist Regina Carter, and drummer Terri Lyne Carrington. Superstar singer Beyoncé kept the spirit of female instrumentalists alive with her all-female band, the Suga Mamas (also the Suga Mama Band) for her 2007 tour, *The Beyoncé Experience* in support of her second studio album *B'Day* (2006). Members included saxophonist Tia Fuller; keyboardist Brittani Washington; drummers Kimberly Thompson, Nikki Glaspie, and Venzella Joy; guitarists Bibi McGill and Kat Rodriguez; and bassist Divinity Roxx, among others.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"When I was younger, I wish I had more females who played instruments to look up to. I played piano for like a second but then I stopped," Beyoncé told BlogHer. "I just wanted to do something which would inspire other young females to get involved in music, so I put together an all-woman band."

Keeping the tradition alive

In the 1970s, jazz continued to be a free-for-all stylistically, but pianists including McCoy Tyner, Ramsey Lewis, and Keith Jarrett led the field. Pianist Herbie Hancock pioneered the use of synthesized instruments and absorbed funk

elements into jazz. New Orleans–born, Julliard-trained trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, who emerged in the 1980s, objected to these deviations and called for a reinstatement of "classic" jazz style. To that end, Marsalis supplemented his recordings alongside his work with Jazz at Lincoln Center, which elevated jazz to American classical music.

Traditional or not, jazz artists such as singers Nancy Wilson, Abbey Lincoln, Cassandra Wilson, and Dianne Reeves; musicians such as pianist Marcus Roberts; trumpeters Terence Blanchard, Roy Hargrove, Russell Gunn, Nicolas Payton, Christian Scott, and Tunde Adjuah; and saxophonists Branford Marsalis, Henry Threadgill, and Joshua Redmon pushed the genre forward. Twenty-first century jazz artists pushing the genre to younger audiences include Robert Glasper, Esperanza Spalding, Ambrose Akinmusire, Trombone Shorty, Gregory Porter, Kamasi Washington, and James Francies.

Spreading the Gospel

Thomas Andrew Dorsey, a pianist for Ma Rainey known as Georgia Tom in the world of blues and jazz, changed religious music for Black Americans beginning in the 1930s, when he championed meshing elements of blues and jazz with Black sacred music, which is the base of contemporary gospel music. Inspired by early innovator Rev. Dr. Charles Tindley — an influential Methodist minister and composer out of Philadelphia whose compositions really picked up steam in the early 1900s — Dorsey, who later served as musical director of Chicago's Pilgrim Baptist Church for decades, didn't just create music in Tindley's style; he was also instrumental in spreading this new sound to Black churches.

In 1933, the longtime Chicago resident also tapped Sallie Martin, a gospel pioneer in her own right, among others, to organize the very first gathering of the National Convention of Gospel Choirs and Choruses (NCGCC), which he had founded the year before. Singer Willie Mae Ford Smith, who founded the NCGCC's Soloist (Council) Bureau, was also a big aid to Dorsey's efforts in popularizing this brand of gospel music. Michael W. Harris's 1992 book *The Rise of Gospel Blues: The Music of Thomas Andrew Dorsey in the Urban Church* (Oxford University Press) offers insight into Dorsey's journey and achievements, which includes NCGCC's enduring legacy nearly 100 years later.



A prolific songwriter, Dorsey, who established his own gospel music publishing house, wrote over 1,000 gospel songs in his lifetime. To cope with the grief of losing his wife and son in childbirth, Dorsey wrote "Precious Lord" in 1932. In 1937, he penned "Peace in the Valley" for Mahalia Jackson, who would, at one point, become the world's most famous gospel singer. Elvis Presley also covered the song in 1957.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

MAHALIA JACKSON

New Orleans–born Mahalia Jackson moved to Chicago in 1927, to join the Johnson Brothers but pursued a solo career when they broke up. "Move On Up a Little Higher," released in 1948, catapulted her to international stardom, making her the world's most recognizable gospel star. By 1954, she had her own CBS radio series. A great friend and supporter of Martin Luther King Jr., Jackson sang at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, where she encouraged him to go off script and share his "dream" in 1963. She also sang at his funeral in 1968.

Jackson, who was born in 1911, died in Chicago in 1972. In 2021, ABC's *GMA (Good Morning America)* anchor Robin Roberts produced the 2021 Lifetime biopic *The Mahalia Jackson Story* starring Tony nominee and Grammy winner Danielle Brooks of *Orange Is the New Black*.

Gospel music has many pioneers, several of them unsung. Following are just a few individuals and groups who made significant contributions to the evolution of gospel music:

- **Sister Rosetta Tharpe:** As both a guitarist and singer, Tharpe mixed the sacred with the secular. She appeared on the pop charts with "This Train," played the Apollo Theater, and enjoyed success with hit songs such as "Up Above My Head."
- **Clara Ward:** A great influence on Aretha Franklin, Ward's group, the Famous Ward Singers, pushed the boundaries of gospel artists even further. From the 1940s into the 1960s, they appeared at the Newport Jazz Festival and sang at Radio City Music Hall. They also injected glamour into gospel with their jewelry and more-contemporary clothing.
- **Willie Mae Ford Smith:** A gospel purist, Smith emphasized the ministerial role of gospel singing and introduced the style of *song and sermonette,* singing coupled with testimony.
- **Reverend James Cleveland:** The man behind the modern gospel sound, James Cleveland paired jazz and pop influences with complex arrangements to create intricate harmonies specifically for the mass choir. To teach this new style, he created the Gospel Singers Workshop Convention (GSWC) within the Gospel Workshop of America, which he founded with mentor Albertina Walker. Kirk Franklin and John P. Kee are just two GSWC alums.
- **The Soul Stirrers:** Sam Cooke's former group set the standard of the lead singer supported by four-part harmony.

- **Dr. Mattie Moss Clark:** Although more widely known as the mother of gospel legends The Clark Sisters (which began with Karen, Dorinda, Jacky, Twinkie, and Denise or Niecy), Mattie Moss Clark was a legendary trailblazer in her own right. As the longest-serving International Minister of Music for the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), she helped shape gospel choir music for generations. By swapping out the traditional two-part textures that characterized earlier gospel choir music in favor of three-part musical settings for soprano, alto, and tenor, the Detroit transplant from Selma innovated gospel choir music.

  A composer and songwriter, in addition to a choir leader and musician, she created more than 100 songs, including the eventual standards "Salvation Is Free" and "Save Hallelujah." She recorded more than 50 albums, three of which went gold, selling more than 500,000 copies each.

  Her daughter Elbernita "Twinkie" Clark followed in her footsteps musically, creating the signature sound of The Clark Sisters as well as penning their most well-known hits like "Is My Living in Vain" (1980), earning her the title of "Mother of Contemporary Gospel Music." The 2020 Lifetime film *The Clark Sisters: First Ladies of Gospel,* with actress Aunjanue Ellis portraying Dr. Mattie Moss Clark, captured their struggles and triumphs.

- **The Winans:** Originally, the Winans were brothers Marvin, Carvin, Michael, and Ronald. The Detroit family of ten, however, has also contributed duo BeBe and CeCe Winans (who both went on to successful solo careers), younger sisters Angie and Debbie Winans, and Marvin's former wife, Vickie Winans.

Kirk Franklin and the new gospel sound

As artists like Shirley Caesar, The Blind Boys of Alabama, Andraé Crouch, Dottie Peoples, the Anointed Pace Sisters, and Albertina Walker continued a more traditional style of gospel, others rumbled for change. Injecting secular music back into gospel wasn't a new concept. Crossover successes included The Clark Sisters' "You Brought the Sunshine (To My Life)" (1981), incorporating Stevie Wonder's 1980 hit "Master Blaster (Jammin)"; "Lost Without You" (1988), from brother-and-sister duo BeBe and CeCe Winans, and Donnie McClurkins' "Stand" (1996); the smooth R&B stylings of Commissioned with recordings like "I Am Here" (1990) and of Yolanda Adams with "Open My Heart" (1999), showcasing her powerhouse vocals; and the jazzy vibes of Kim Burrell with hits such as "Everlasting Life" (1998).

Embracing hip hop, however, was a much bolder move, especially in the 1990s, when the gospel and Black church community at large universally shunned it. Yet Kirk Franklin found overwhelming success when he began infusing his music with hip hop sensibilities. His 1997 hit "Stomp" propelled *God's Property from Kirk Franklin's Nu Nation,* his fourth album, to the top of the R&B/Hip hop Albums

charts as well as a number-three debut on the Billboard 200, a first for a gospel album. The song featured a new jack swing beat fashioned from the Funkadelic hit "One Nation Under a Groove" (1978), a verse from iconic female rapper Salt of Salt-N-Pepa for the remix, and background vocals from his own youth choir known as God's Property.

Although the Dallas native would later abandon the mass choir format, which at one time included The Family and One Nation Crew (1NC), along with God's Property, he continued meshing hip hop and other secular sounds in his music. That formula consistently placed him at the top of the charts. With nearly 20 Grammy Awards to his credit, Franklin is, without question, the most pivotal contemporary gospel figure to emerge in the decades spanning from the 1990s into the 2020s.

Franklin's success rippled throughout the genre, ushering in many other performers, including sister duo Mary Mary, who hit big with their 2000 hit "Shackles (Praise You)." In 2004, secular rapper Kanye West, assisted by songwriter Rhymefest, certainly showed the possibilities of combining gospel music and hip hop with his mammoth hit "Jesus Walks," which won a Grammy for Best Rap Song. As the genre continued to expand, gospel artists with a variety of styles, including rappers, emerged. Notable gospel artists throughout the 2000s include Tamela Mann, Tasha Cobbs Leonard, Smokie Norful, Israel & New Breed, rappers Lecrae and Canton Jones, Jekalyn Carr, Le'Andria Johnson, Kierra "Kiki" Sheard, Koryn Hawthorne, and Tye Tribbett, along with mainstays such as Marvin Sapp, Fred Hammond, Hezekiah Walker, and sisters Dorinda Clark Cole and Karen Clark Sheard. Although not officially a gospel artist, Chance the Rapper brought positive attention to the genre through his music when he began releasing music in the early 2010s. Kanye West's 2019 album, *Jesus Is King*, which won for both top Christian and Gospel albums at the 2020 *Billboard* Music Awards, the first album to ever to do so, further extended that reach.

Mainstreaming Black Music

New genres of Black music emerged in the mid–20th century, taking Black music to even greater heights. Race music gave way to rhythm and blues (R&B). Not much later, R&B led to the creation of rock and roll. As rock and roll began to exclude Black Americans, soul music took over.

R&B

Drawing heavily from blues and gospel, R&B meshed rhythm with blues. Consistent with other forms of Black American music, early R&B incorporated the call-

and-response pattern and improvisation into its performance style. Black pop quartets, such as the jazz group Ink Spots and the Mills Brothers, which started as a barbershop quartet, also played a role in R&B's early development. Their mainstream sound, as well as that of singers Nat King Cole and Billy Eckstine, lost its appeal with many Black Americans, however. Eventually R&B became the bridge between that sound and soul.


TECHNICAL STUFF

Although largely forgotten today, Louis Jordan, known for hits such as "Is You Is or Is You Ain't My Baby" and "Caldonia," was one of the first artists to demonstrate the crossover appeal that early R&B could have without adjusting it for white audiences. In 1943, Jordan, whose music later inspired the 1992 Broadway hit *Five Guys Named Moe,* topped both the Black and white charts with "Ration Blues." Jordan's early experimentation with *soundies,* American musical films about three minutes in length produced between 1940 and 1947, anticipated the music video.

Rocking and rolling

Early rock and roll has Black roots, a fact that surprises some people. Ike Turner's 1951 recording "Rocket 88," the first boasting a distorted guitar, contained the driving backbeat and electric guitar that became commonplace in rock and roll. "Sh-boom," the first acknowledged rock and roll song, was recorded by the R&B group The Chords. Other Black artists contributed to the genre in its early stages.

Despite rock's early ties to Black musicians, covers by white artists of early rock and roll songs from Black Americans topped the charts: The Crew Cuts, a white group from Canada, took "Sh-boom" straight to number one on the Billboard charts in 1954; Bill Haley and the Comets scored with Joe Turner's "Shake, Rattle, and Roll"; and Pat Boone covered Fats Domino's "Ain't That a Shame" and Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti."


REMEMBER

Historian Carl Belz, who wrote *The Story of Rock* (1969), observed white audiences felt more comfortable with how white artists softened the new, exotic sound of rock and roll. As landmark decisions dismantling segregation became more common, white America's racial gatekeepers didn't overlook rock and roll's Black origins. Taunts of "white nigger" directed toward Elvis, who recorded at Sun Studios in Memphis, the first home for many Black artists, were prompted by rock and roll's Black roots.

Some Black artists broke through the racial matrix, however. Guitarist Chuck Berry had a hit with "Maybelline," blues pianist Fats Domino scored big with "Blueberry Hill," and Little Richard had "Good Golly, Miss Molly." British groups like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones had no problems commending Black artists

for their talents, particularly Muddy Waters and Bo Diddley, who are often cited as a key figures in the transition of R&B to rock and roll. T-Bone Walker, who fits into blues and R&B, pioneered the electric guitar sound. Although classified as R&B during the 1960s and 1970s, Ike and Tina Turner's style, in retrospect, was more rock-oriented, as evidenced on "Proud Mary. Jimi Hendrix wasn't only accepted; he was exalted.

Sly Stone, along with his brother and two sisters, exerted considerable influence with his group Sly and the Family Stone. From 1967 to 1975, the rock group, whose members were predominantly Black, created the hits "Everyday People," "Hot Fun in the Summertime," and "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)." Mixing funk, soul, and the psychedelic culture of Bay Area hippies, Sly and the Family Stone created a rock sound and look that still distinguishes them. Black rock groups Living Colour, Fishbone and Bad Brains, Tina Turner in her solo turn, and singer/songwriter/guitarist Darius Rucker of Hootie and the Blowfish actively continued that rock and roll legacy into the 1980s and 1990s especially.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

JIMI HENDRIX

Widely considered the greatest guitarist ever, Seattle native Jimi Hendrix grew up in great struggle, personally and financially. A self-taught musician, he didn't get a guitar until his teens. Playing in and around Seattle in bands he formed or joined didn't keep him out of trouble. To avoid jail, he joined the Army just before he turned 19. There he met fellow musician Billy Cox, and after the Army, they began gigging around Tennessee. After playing on the Black club circuit popularly known as the chitlin circuit, he made his way to New York City and ended up playing with The Isley Brothers, even recording with them and later Little Richard, with whom he also played.

A move to the Village in New York City contributed to Hendrix further developing his rock style. Eventually, that led him to London, where he began recording with his own band, the Jimi Hendrix Experience, whose third and final studio album, *Electric Ladyland* (1968), is among the best ever.

Back in the United States, Hendrix, who is also known for his hits "Purple Haze" and "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)," began cultivating his legend on the festival circuit, particularly with his 1969 appearance at Woodstock, where he and his Band of Gypsys played a mind-blowing rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Drug use was a feature of rock and roll, and Hendrix was known to indulge. Already a rock legend and arguably the highest paid musician of his time, Hendrix, whose reputation on the guitar is akin to that of bluesman Robert Johnson, shot to cult status after his sudden death in London in 1970 at age 27. More than a half century later, Hendrix's legend lives on.

Other notable rockers include Mother's Finest, particularly vocalist Joyce Kennedy; Rage Against the Machine co-founder Tom Morello; guitarist Slash of Guns N' Roses; and singer Lajon Witherspoon of Sevendust fame. Prince, who created a lane all his own, and undisputed rocker Lenny Kravitz became undeniable superstars. 2000s-era rockers include William DuVall, best known as a vocalist for Alice In Chains; singer/songwriter Tommy Vext, known for Vext, Divine Heresy, Westfield Massacre, and Bad Wolves; and the group TV on the Radio.

Motown

As rock and roll took hold in the 1950s, Berry Gordy, songwriter and record shop owner, created a winning formula that combined the best of R&B, pop, gospel, and big band. Within a year of its launch, Gordy's label, popularly known as Motown, produced the top R&B single "Shop Around" from Smokey Robinson and the Miracles. Black-owned record labels such as Chicago-based Vee-Jay Records, home of the Dells, Impressions, and solo artists Jerry Butler and Gene Chandler, also existed, but Motown truly earned its "Hitsville, U.S.A." label.

The hits kept coming: 1961 to 1963 brought the Marvelettes' "Please, Mr. Postman," the Contours' "Do You Love Me," the teenaged Stevie Wonder's "Fingertips," and Martha and the Vandellas' "(Love Is Like a) Heat Wave." In 1964, the Supremes began their historic journey at the top of the charts. In its heyday, Motown was packed with some of music's biggest stars, including Marvin Gaye, the Four Tops, and the Temptations. Gladys Knight and the Pips even recorded with Motown.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

THE SUPREMES

Launched as the Primettes, Diana Ross, Mary Wilson, and Florence Ballard, who became the Supremes, weren't hitmakers at first. They finally topped the charts in 1964 with "Where Did Our Love Go." Berry Gordy's controversial decision to replace the more soulful Ballard with the more crossover-friendly voice and look of Diana Ross (a move common to girl groups loosely chronicled in the hit Broadway musical *Dreamgirls*, which would later be made into a film) was a difference-maker. With their 1966 album *Supremes A' Go-Go,* the Supremes became the first female group in history to have a number one album. Fully accepted by white audiences, the Supremes were among the first Black artists to appear on such iconic programs as *The Ed Sullivan Show.* The Supremes also topped international charts. Their success opened the doors for many artists, not just their Motown peers.

THE GODFATHER AND QUEEN OF SOUL: JAMES BROWN AND ARETHA FRANKLIN

Despite their very different backgrounds — she had the gospel background befitting soul royalty, and he was born poor and spent time in prison — Aretha Franklin and James Brown were soul music's biggest stars.

- **James Brown:** Born extremely poor in South Carolina during the Great Depression, abandoned by his parents, and raised by an aunt in Augusta, Georgia, James Brown overcame huge obstacles. He achieved some early success with his group James Brown and the Famous Flames (formed with Bobby Byrd, whom he met in prison) when their song "Please, Please, Please" secured the group a record deal and reached number five on the Billboard charts. The group had other hits, including the number one "Try Me" in the late 1950s.

  Brown, known for his live performance antics, eventually dropped the Flames, and using his own money, recorded *Live at the Apollo* in October 1962, over his record label's objections. The album's success (it hit number two on Billboard*)* demonstrated the general viability of the soul album. (Previously, many black artists cut only singles.) Ultimately, James Brown's emphasis on rhythm meshed with the rebellious tension of the times, providing the soundtrack to Black America's transition from the civil rights movement to the Black power movement. His 1968 hit "Say It Loud — I'm Black and I'm Proud" served as the perfect anthem. Brown's hits slowed around 1976, but he resurfaced in the 1980s, when hip hop artists used his sounds to spark another Black music revolution.

- **Aretha Franklin:** The daughter of noted preacher C.L. Franklin, who recorded his sermons with the Chicago-based Chess (the label behind Muddy Waters and Chuck Berry), Aretha Franklin released a gospel album and recorded with Columbia Records as a teenager. Despite these successes, she truly came into her own when she signed with Atlantic Records, where she was encouraged to be herself and exert the full power of her voice. When her album *I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You* hit in 1967, Franklin instantly became the Queen of Soul as her songs topped both the R&B and pop charts. Between 1967 and 1992, Franklin had 89 Top 40 entries, 17 of which hit number one.

  Although shy and soft-spoken, Franklin never wavered in her support for the civil rights movement, lending her voice whenever needed. Interestingly, her "soul sister" status within the Black community bolstered her popularity among white music lovers. Her funeral services, held on August 31, 2018, in her native Detroit at Greater Grace Temple (where services for Rosa Parks and Aretha's father, the Reverend C.L. Franklin, were also held in 2005 and 1984, respectively) were an epic affair that lasted for eight hours. Participants included Jesse Jackson, Chaka Khan, former President Bill Clinton, Ariana Grande, The Clark Sisters (including Twinkie

Clark), lifelong friend Smokey Robinson, Jennifer Hudson (star of the 2021 Aretha Franklin biopic *Respect*), Fantasia, Ronald Isley, Faith Hill, and Stevie Wonder, among many others. In March 2021, the cable network Nat Geo released the third installment of its Genius series with British actress Cynthia Erivo playing Franklin in the Suzan-Lori Parks-penned *Genius: Aretha* in eight episodes.

More than just a label, Motown had its own finishing school and insisted that most of its artists present a refined and sophisticated image. Later in the 1960s, as the civil rights movement gave way to the Black power movement (refer to Chapters 9 and 10), Motown's controlled image was not aggressive enough for many Black Americans. Consequently, the grittier sound of soul music became more alluring.

Giving America soul

By today's standards, Ray Charles's 1955 number one hit "I Got a Woman" is tame. At that time, however, adapting a gospel song or sound for secular purposes — the basis of soul music — was controversial, especially within the gospel community. Charles continued to convert gospel songs to secular subject matter. "This Little Girl of Mine" and "Hallelujah, I Love Her So," among others, also became hits.

Charles's success encouraged Sam Cooke, a member of the legendary Soul Stirrers and one of gospel's brightest stars, to record secular records in 1957. Cooke became one of the biggest gospel stars to crossover to both the R&B and pop charts. The business-minded Cooke, who produced and wrote songs, also co-owned record label SAR. Following his untimely death in 1964, Cooke hit with the posthumous release of "A Change Is Gonna Come," an instant classic addressing the turbulent 1960s.

Solomon Burke's vocal techniques, such as rhythmically stuttering words, influenced the style of many subsequent soul singers, but Stax Records, an independent, Memphis-based label, gave soul music its biggest boost. Artists such as Otis Redding, Rufus Thomas, and Thomas's daughter Carla firmly established Stax and soul music. Otis Redding put a smooth spin on soul: His hits like "Try a Little Tenderness" and "I've Been Loving You Too Long (To Stop Now)," though secular, are reminiscent of gospel songs in feeling, if not content. Stax also had Sam & Dave, known for the hits "Soul Man" and "Hold On, I'm Comin'," co-written with Isaac Hayes.

Other influential soul artists included Wilson Pickett, best known for "In the Midnight Hour"; Percy Sledge, of "When a Man Loves a Woman" fame; and Etta James, who hit it big with "At Last." James Brown, dubbed "soul brother number one," and Aretha Franklin, the Queen of Soul, became some of soul music's biggest stars.

Post-soul Black music

Black music underwent more changes in the 1970s, as artists began to move beyond the Motown sound, which favored material concerned with relationships, to include social issues like war and poverty. *What's Going On,* Marvin Gaye's 1971 album addressing the Vietnam War, became his most successful album to date. *Let's Get It On,* his sexy follow-up, was also a major success. Gaye resurfaced in the 1980s with the hit single "Sexual Healing" before his tragic death at the hands of his father in 1984. Stevie Wonder hit big with "Superstition" and "Living for the City" and eventually won several Grammy awards, especially for his 1976 double album *Songs in the Key of Life.*

But Wonder and Gaye weren't the only soul artists from the 1960s flexing their expanded creative visions in the 1970s. More than anyone, Curtis Mayfield, the former member of the Impressions who penned the memorable civil rights songs "Keep On Pushin'" and "People Get Ready," literally created the soundtrack for so-called "ghetto life." *Superfly,* which accompanied the film of the same name in 1972, included "Freddie's Dead" and "Pusherman," songs that spoke to drug use and trafficking in urban communities. He duplicated that magic for the films *Claudine* (1974) and *Sparkle* (1975), which yielded the Aretha Franklin hit "Something He Can Feel."

Getting funky and popping off

Rhythm-heavy and instrumentally driven, *funk,* an offshoot of R&B and soul, came into its own during the 1970s, aided by the George Clinton Parliament Funkadelic movement, which included brothers Bootsy and Catfish Collins. George Clinton's brand of funk hit its stride in 1978, with *One Nation Under a Groove.* Clinton began recording in the 1980s as George Clinton and the P-Funk All-Stars. Other pivotal funk groups included the Ohio Players, Graham Central Station, and the Bar-Kays.

Overall, bands were hugely popular in the 1970s and the early 1980s. The most well-known include Earth, Wind & Fire; Rufus featuring Chaka Khan; the Commodores; Morris Day and the Time; and Cameo. Each of these groups mixed elements of R&B and soul with funk and incorporated their own signature styles into their recordings. Zapp, which included four brothers, most notably Roger Troutman, who went on to a solo career, was a bridge between disco and funk in the 1980s. Troutman pioneered the "talk box," synthesized vocals resembling a robot.

The 1970s hits "ABC," "I'll Be There," and "Never Can Say Goodbye" set the Jackson Five, comprised of brothers Tito, Marlon, Jermaine, Jackie, and Michael Jackson, up for global pop success. Selling more than 20 million records worldwide, *Off the Wall,* with the hit "Rock with You," helped set Michael Jackson on

pace for solo superstardom. It also marked Jackson's first collaboration with renowned trumpeter, producer, and composer Quincy Jones. Their 1983 collaboration, *Thriller,* sold a then-unprecedented 51 million copies worldwide; spawned seven hit singles, including "Billie Jean," which became MTV's first video by a Black artist; and won seven Grammys.

More importantly, Jackson's movie-like video for "Thriller" changed the music video format, instantly elevating it. Black America's first undisputed international pop superstar, Michael Jackson, like James Brown and others before him, arguably opened the door to global success for others like his sister Janet, Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, Alicia Keys, and Beyoncé. Michael Jackson contemporary, Minneapolis's own Prince also achieved trailblazing success. His, however, struck a unique balance between musicianship and showmanship, especially with his 1984 album and film *Purple Rain*, which also earned him two Oscars.

The hip-hop age of R&B

R&B music, especially tinged with hip hop, seemed to fare well with Yonkers, New York's Mary J. Blige, Atlanta's Usher, and Chicago's R. Kelly leading the charge from the 1990s well into the 2000s, and later joined by Chris Brown. New Edition, the 1980s singing group, comprised of Boston natives Ralph Tresvant, Bobby Brown, Michael Bivins, Ronnie Devoe, and Ricky Bell (later joined by Johnny Gill) who were modeled off the legendary Temptations, had already begun to explore that connection. Their spinoff group Bell Biv Devoe, made up of Ricky Bell, Michael Bivins, and Ronnie Devoe, found great success with such songs as the 1990 hits "Poison" and "Do Me."

Mary J. Blige's debut album *What's the 411?,* powered by Uptown Records led by former rapper Andre Harrell and guided by rising music impresario Sean "Puff Daddy/Puffy" Combs, in 1992, put an exclamation point on it, immediately establishing her as a star. Subsequently dubbed the "Queen of Hip Hop Soul," Blige was heralded as a voice for young urban women and a bridge between hip hop and R&B, which was in great contrast to singer Whitney Houston whose hard-edged Newark roots were largely disguised. Blige's many hits include the 1995 duet "I'll Be There for You/You're All I Need to Get By," with the latter part of the title reworking the 1968 Marvin Gaye/Tammi Terrell classic, with Method Man and "Not Gon Cry" from the soundtrack of the 1996 film *Waiting To Exhale* ironically starring Houston.

Neo-soul, a term coined by music executive Kedar Massenburg to describe the sound of late 1990s artists like Erykah Badu, D'Angelo, Musiq Soulchild, India Arie, and Jill Scott that recalled the essence of soul music only filtered through an era ruled by hip hop, never took full flight. More urban-edged R&B continued to take off. Teen singers Brandy in L.A. and Monica in Atlanta illustrated this with the respective hit songs like the 1994 "I Wanna Be Down" remix featuring female

rappers Queen Latifah, Yo-Yo, and MC Lyte and the 2003 hit "So Gone" with rapper/producer/songwriter Missy Elliott. Although the two found success with their far more pop-leaning 1998 single "The Boy Is Mine," the majority of their records were more reflective of the harder urban/hip hop–edged R&B sound that continued to dominate. The 1990s girl group En Vogue, who fell more in line with the Supremes, were a notable exception but that sound wasn't largely duplicated. Hip hop, as Teddy Riley demonstrated with the creation of the sound known as *new jack swing* in the late 1980s with the group Guy, singer Bobby Brown of New Edition fame and Keith Sweat, continued to lead the way.

Singer Aaliyah was able to establish herself on her own terms through the Southern hip hop–tinged sound of Timbaland and Missy Elliott for her 1996 sophomore album *One in a Million* with hits like the title track and "If Your Girl Only Knew." Further proving hip hop's driving power, Atlanta-based singer Usher, whose many hits range from "You Make Me Wanna. . ." (1997) to "Confessions Part II" (2004), released his diamond-seller *Confessions* in 2004. Executive produced by longtime mentor Jermaine Dupri, who introduced teen hip hop sensations Kris Kross back in 1992, *Confessions* went platinum its first week of release at a time when album sales were very low.

As popular as Usher, who was also known for his dancing, was, R. Kelly was the undeniable "King of R&B," churning out hits as both a singer and songwriter that include "Bump n Grind" (1994), "I Believe I Can Fly" (1996) from the *Space Jam* soundtrack, "Step in the Name of Love (Remix)" (2003), and his highly regarded multiplatinum albums *12 Play* (1993) and *The Chocolate Factory* (2003), along with the 2002 joint album *The Best of Both Worlds* with Jay-Z. He also penned songs like "You Are Not Alone" (1996) for Michael Jackson. But there was a dark side to Kelly's success. Inappropriate relationships with underage girls dogged the Chicago native throughout his career, especially after a marriage license to his 15-year-old protégé Aaliyah when he was 27 surfaced in 1994, on the heels of her debut album, *Age Ain't Nothing But a Number*. In 2008, Kelly was acquitted in a trial where he faced several counts of child pornography stemming from a 2002 sex tape allegedly of him with a minor teenage girl he urinated on. Allegations of sexual exploitation of young girls and grown women, long reported by music journalist and critic Jim DeRogatis, exposed in the 2019 Lifetime docuseries *Surviving R. Kelly*, coupled with the Mute R. Kelly movement ended his music career and landed him behind bars.

Chris Brown, who hit with his 2005 single "Run It" and self-titled debut album, was poised for global superstardom. His violent reaction to an argument with girlfriend and star Rihanna in 2009 resulted in her canceling her Grammy Awards show appearance due to her bruised face, killed his mainstream momentum. However he continued to elevate in the R&B/urban music genre, scoring continuous hits with many successful albums including *F.A.M.E.* (2011) and *Heartbreak on a Full Moon*

(2017), and such singles as "New Flame" (2014) with Usher and rapper Rick Ross, "No Guidance" (2019) with Drake, and "Go Crazy" (2020) with rapper Young Thug.

With his many hip hop–assisted hits including "Say Aah" (2010) with rapper Fabolous, Virginia native Trey Songz contributed to this sound while singer/songwriter Ne-Yo, who first scored with his 2006 hit "So Sick," straddled the line between traditional and urban R&B. North Carolina soulsters Fantasia and Anthony Hamilton, preceded by the R&B group Jodeci, also from Virginia, fell into similar territory. Midwesterner and Ivy League–educated John Legend, who emerged through rap superstar Kanye West in the early 2000s, created his own lane reminiscent of Marvin Gaye but also in keeping with the era, even scoring Grammy and Oscar wins for the song "Glory" for the 2014 Ava DuVernay-directed film *Selma* with rapper Common.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

KENNETH GAMBLE AND LEON HUFF

As the home of soul singer Solomon Burke, classical vocalist Marian Anderson, and rock and roll pioneer Chubby Checker, not to mention an early incubator for jazz greats John Coltrane and Dizzy Gillespie, Philadelphia had long established itself as a music hub by 1971. Remarkably, with the formation of Philadelphia International Records that year, songwriters and producers Kenneth Gamble and Leon Huff were able to add to the city's already substantial music legacy. Songs such as Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes' "If You Don't Know Me by Now," the O'Jays' "Back Stabbers," and the Grammy winner "Me and Mrs. Jones" by Billy Paul injected a new sound into Black music that some dub "The Sound of Philadelphia" (which was also a 1973 hit by MFSB for the label).

Distinctively, Philadelphia International matched its male artists' strong, masculine voices with thumping bass lines and other new music techniques. Those featured bass lines, also found in funk and hip hop, later resurfaced in a new genre called disco. In the late 1970s and 1980s, Gamble and Huff collaborated to produce the classics "Close the Door" and "Somebody Loves You Back" for Teddy Pendergrass as well as Patti LaBelle's classic 1983 album *I'm in Love Again,* with the hits "Love, Need, and Want You" and "If Only You Knew." Gamble also played a pivotal role in President Jimmy Carter's designating June as Black Music Month in 1979.

In the 2000s, the City of Brotherly Love experienced a musical resurgence largely led by the neo-soul musical stylings from natives Musiq Soulchild, Jill Scott, and Bilal; British transplants Floetry; and outsiders like John Legend and Erykah Badu, coupled with a little edge from the hip hop band The Roots. Reminiscent of many of the Philadelphia International sound, this musical development was living proof of Gamble and Huff's enduring legacy.

Taking the Rap

In the mid-1970s, *hip hop,* a brash mixture of rhythm and boastful talking, took hold in New York City. The Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," rhymed over CHIC's "Good Times" and cut in 1979, became a commercial hit on the R&B, pop, and U.K. charts. By the early 1980s, hip hop pioneers such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, Kurtis Blow (the first rapper signed to a major label, Mercury Records), the Funky Four Plus One, and Run-D.M.C. were changing the music scene. Run-D.M.C.'s 1986 album *Raising Hell,* which became the first rap album on the Billboard Top 10, along with their rock collaboration with white rock band Aerosmith on "Walk This Way," paved the way for hip hop's subsequent dominance.

In the 1990s, rap opened up to include various genres and various areas. Rappers who kept the genre moving forward in the 1990s include New Yorkers Nas, Jay-Z, Busta Rhymes, the Wu-Tang Clan, and DMX from Ruff Ryders. Rappers with platinum albums in the 1990s and early 2000s, include Texas's the Geto Boys, Scarface, and UGK; Atlanta's OutKast, Goodie Mob, Lil Jon (who became known for crunk music), Ludacris, and T.I.; New Orleans's Master P (with his No Limit Soldiers) and the Cash Money Millionaires; Memphis's 8Ball & MJG and Three 6 Mafia; Miami's Trick Daddy and Rick Ross; Chicago's Common and Kanye West; St. Louis's Nelly; Compton's The Game; and New York City's Ja Rule, Fabolous, and 50 Cent.

Hip hop matures

Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five had shown rap's political potential with 1982's "The Message" (which detailed the horrendous conditions of ghetto life), but Public Enemy completely embodied it. Signed to Def Jam Records, Public Enemy, marked by lead rapper Chuck D's preacher-like presentation, directly politicized rap in the late 1980s and beyond with hits like "Fight the Power," created for Spike Lee's 1989 film *Do the Right Thing.*

Hip hop also came into its own artistically. The Bomb Squad, Public Enemy's producers, took hip hop production to another level with multitextured layering and customized beats. Artists such as Rakim from Eric B. & Rakim and KRS-One placed a greater emphasis on lyricism, as metaphors became a hip hop staple. Others such as X-Clan, the Jungle Brothers, and A Tribe Called Quest comfortably flexed their Afrocentric views. During the late 1980s into the early 1990s, a variety of styles flourished. Def Jam's first artist, LL Cool J, and Big Daddy Kane also emerged as rap music's first sex symbols.

The West Coast opens up rap

The West Coast was the first area to expand hip hop beyond the East Coast in a substantial way. Initially, Too Short, Ice T, and N.W.A. were the artists who shone the brightest. Too Short injected the pimp game into rap lyrics, and Ice T incorporated themes of pimping and hustling into his rhymes. N.W.A., however, would have the biggest mainstream impact.

Original members of N.W.A. (Niggaz Wit Attitudes), which originated out of Compton, California in the Los Angeles metro area, include Eric "Eazy-E" Wright, Andre "Dr. Dre" Young, O'Shea "Ice Cube" Jackson, Lorenzo "MC Ren" Patterson, Kim "Arabian Prince" Nazel, and Antoine "DJ Yella" Carraby. In 1987, Ruthless Records, owned by Wright, released its first hit, "Boyz-n-the-Hood," a collaborative effort involving all of N.W.A., as an Eazy-E record.

On the heels of that record's buzz, N.W.A. later released its signature album, *Straight Outta Compton,* in 1988. Guns, women, liquor, and other aspects of urban life weren't new to hip hop, but those things viewed from the perspective of a gangster were. Ironically, N.W.A. uncovered both the hopelessness and the resiliency born out of oppressed conditions. "F@!# tha Police," a response to police brutality, placed N.W.A. on the FBI's official radar, which labeled hip hop "gangsta rap" specifically America's public enemy number one, suggesting that violence in Black communities emanated from rap music.

After leaving N.W.A., Ice Cube successfully established a solo career as a lyricist from the West Coast with his 1990 debut, *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted.* Meanwhile, Dr. Dre's 1992 multiplatinum solo debut, *The Chronic,* officially ended the East Coast's rap dominance. It also formalized a new sound, G-Funk, inspired by the music of funkateers Roger Troutman (and Zapp) and George Clinton, and established Snoop Doggy Dogg as a star; Snoop's 1993 debut *Doggystyle* entered the charts at number one. Heavily influenced by his family's Mississippi roots, Snoop's rap style arguably made the Southern drawl more acceptable to the rap audience at large. The platinum success of Cleveland group Bone Thugs-N-Harmony (whom Eazy-E signed to his Ruthless Records prior to his 1995 death) helped to open up hip hop more widely beyond New York and L.A. Their 1996 number one hit, "Tha Crossroads," won a Grammy.

Personal arguments and misunderstandings between the West and East Coast rap communities, most notably label owners Suge Knight of Death Row Records and Sean Combs (then better known as Puff Daddy or Puffy) of Bad Boys Records and their rappers 2Pac or Tupac Shakur and the Notorious B.I.G. (also Biggie), culminated in the violent, unsolved murders of Tupac in 1996 and Biggie in 1997. Stunned by the tragic loss of two hip hop titans, the rap community took steps to mend the rift between the coasts. Violence, however, remained an issue. Run-D.M.C.'s Jam Master Jay became another victim of violence in 2002, and in 2019 the murder of L.A. rapper Nipsey Hussle, who advocated for economic empowerment, especially in his

Crenshaw neighborhood, was another huge blow. Equally frustrating to the hip hop community has been the police's inability to make arrests in many of these murders.

Women take the mic

Rap has continually battled allegations of misrepresenting women. Miami-based 2 Live Crew and its more well-known Luther Campbell fueled those objections with its signature Miami Bass music, featuring pulsating rhythms and sexually explicit lyrics such as those in the 1989 hit "Me So Horny," from the *As Nasty As They Wanna Be* album. The mostly naked women featured on the group's album covers and in its videos generated more outrage.

Some women grabbed the mic to represent themselves. Rap's most visible female pioneers have been the New York City-based Roxanne Shanté, Salt-N-Pepa (Cheryl "Salt" James and Sandra "Pepa" Denton), MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, and Yo-Yo on the West Coast. Guided by Atlanta-based hip hop producer Jermaine Dupri, Chicago native Da Brat became the first female solo rapper to go platinum with 1994's *Funkdafied.* Beginning in the mid-1990s, Lauryn Hill made a big splash, first as a member of the Fugees and then as a solo artist with her hip hop infused 1998 album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*, winning five Grammys.

TUPAC'S LEGACY

An international cult figure, Tupac Amaru Shakur has remained influential with no less than five released albums since his death on September 13, 1996, at age 25. Some of the nation's top universities designed courses examining his philosophy of THUG LIFE, an acronym for "The Hate U Give Little Infants F@#! Everybody." Academics such as Michael Eric Dyson and Jamal Joseph wrote books addressing his legacy. Shakur's post-humous documentary *Tupac: Resurrection* (2003), narrated by him through his many interviews, even received an Oscar nomination. Young Adult author Angie Thomas's 2017 *New York Times* bestseller *The Hate U Give* (Balzer + Bray, inspired by Tupac and THUG LIFE, was also adapted into the 2018 film of the same name.

His impact remained so strong some rappers still cited him as an influence two decades following his death. As an actor, he memorably starred in the 1992 film *Juice* and the 1993 film *Poetic Justice,* directed by John Singleton and co-starring Janet Jackson. To keep his memory alive and expand his vision, his mother, one-time Black Panther Afeni Shakur, established the Tupac Amaru Shakur Center for the Arts in Stone Mountain, Georgia, in the Atlanta metro area in 2005. "Dear Mama," the song dedicated to his mother on his multiplatinum 1995 album *Me Against the World,* is a classic that is played every single Mother's Day. The biopic *All Eyez on Me* was released in 2017, the same year Shakur became the first solo rapper inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Lil' Kim, Foxy Brown, Mia X, Missy Elliott, Eve, and Trina created a second wave of female rappers, with all but Missy Elliott, Mia X, and Eve adopting highly sexualized imagery and lyrics. Mary J. Blige, known as the queen of hip hop soul, mastered the fusion of hip hop with R&B, especially with her 1992 debut *What's the 411?* to give the everyday young urban woman a voice within the hard-edged genre.

Nicki Minaj, who was born in Trinidad and raised in New York City, also had a game-changing impact. By the 2010s, she wasn't just the most successful female rapper in the music industry but also one of the most successful rappers overall. (Prior to Minaj, Remy Ma, whose legal troubles and incarceration in the late 2000s hindered her career, was among the most well-known female rappers from New York. She, however, never reached Minaj's heights.)

Beginning with Minaj's 2010 debut album, *Pink Friday,* which entered the Billboard 200 at number two, Minaj became arguably the most dominant female rapper of all time. That dominance opened the doors for other female rappers, including Bronx Afro-Latina rapper and one-time reality TV personality Cardi B, who scored big with her 2017 single "Bodak Yellow (Money Moves)." That single became just the second solo effort from a female rapper to hit number one since Lauryn Hill did with "Doo Wop (That Thing)" in 1998.

In 2019, Houston rapper Megan Thee Stallion further upgraded the status of female rappers when she began dominating the charts with hits such as "Big Ole Freak" and "Hot Girl Summer," featuring Nicki Minaj. In 2020, "Savage," featuring fellow Houstonian Beyoncé, became Megan Thee Stallion's first number one single.

Cardi B's sex-positive and sexually explicit single "WAP," featuring Megan Thee Stallion, debuted at number one on the Billboard Hot 100. Doja Cat also reached number one with her "Say So" remix featuring Nicki Minaj. City Girls, Rapsody, Saweetie, and Chika are among the many other notable female rappers who began impacting the music industry in the late 2010s into the 2020s.

Trap music emerges

Throughout the 2000s, Atlanta began to dominate hip hop music specifically and the music industry at large with the genre known as *trap music,* named for the house that drugs were often dealt from or for drug dealing itself. In addition to T.I., who is credited with coining the genre's name through his 2003 platinum-selling album *Trap Muzik,* rappers Young Jeezy (later Jeezy), Gucci Mane, 2 Chainz, Waka Flocka Flame, Future, Young Thug, 21 Savage, Lil Baby, and Migos (the platinum-selling rap trio who further helped elevate Atlanta musically), gave the genre longevity. This was achieved through producers such as DJ Toomp, Shawty Redd, Zaytoven, Metro Boomin, and Sonny Digital.

Lyrical emcees return

One development of the 2010s was the return of lyrical emcees. With his 2006 album, Nas declared *Hip Hop Is Dead*. Until the 2010s, highly regarded emcees like Nas, Jay-Z, white rapper Eminem, Method Man, Busta Rhymes, Redman, and more had actually broken through in the 1990s.

Other emcees who emerged during the 2010s into the 2020s or came on stronger, lyrical or not, include Big Sean, Future, Wiz Khalifa, Travis Scott, Meek Mill, Migos, 21 Savage, Lil Baby, DaBaby, Roddie Rich, Kodak Black, Tyler, the Creator, Chance the Rapper, G Herbo and YG. Nas, Jay Z, Kanye West, Lil Wayne, 2 Chainz, Jeezy, Yo Gotti, TI, Gucci Mane, and Rick Ross were among the artists who proved to have staying power.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

DRAKE MAKES RAP TRULY GLOBAL

Prior to becoming a rapper, Toronto native Aubrey Drake Graham was better known for his role as Jimmy Brooks, a basketball player who becomes paralyzed, in the Canadian teen drama *Degrassi: The Next Generation* from 2001 to 2009. Some critics credited that charisma to his musical success. His musical domination provided rap music with its first true global superstar, opening the door for not just crossover from non-U.S. rappers but also the incorporation of more global musical sounds. In short, Drake's success created an interactive conversation between rap birthed in the US and the rest of the world.

Drake, the son of a white Jewish mother from Canada and a Black father from Memphis, has a true musical pedigree. His father, Dennis Graham, was a drummer for Jerry Lee Lewis. Drake's uncles Teenie Hodges played and cowrote with Al Green and Larry Graham played with Sly and the Family Stone, fronted his own band Graham Central Station, and collaborated with Prince.

Drake dominated musically throughout the 2010s, beginning with his 2010 official album debut *Thank Me Later*, which entered the Billboard 200 at number one. Drake became one of the bestselling artists, not just rappers, of all time.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Tracking the genesis of the Black film genre
- Following the rise of popular Black actors
- Connecting with audiences through comedy
- Building Black film and TV empires

Chapter 17

Black Hollywood: Film and Comedy

Just as early minstrel shows conspired to keep Black Americans in their place (refer to Chapter 15), so did early Hollywood, which relegated Black actors to playing mammies, maids, and butlers. Some early Black actors actually got their big break working as servants to Hollywood's white stars and industry brass. Film historian Donald Bogle explores this history in his classic book *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (Bloomsbury Academic), first published in 1973. A great deal has changed since those early days.

This chapter explores Black Americans' humble beginnings in early Hollywood, with a nod to comedy, touching on race movies as well as Black American contributions behind the camera; this skill and talent prompted the creation of the NAACP Image Awards in 1969. It also notes the impact of Black directors, from early film pioneers Oscar Micheaux and Spencer Williams to Gordon Parks, Michael Schultz, Spike Lee, John Singleton, Ava DuVernay, Ryan Coogler, Jordan Peele, and Barry Jenkins.

Making Movies Black

The Birth of a Nation (1915), originally titled *The Clansman,* was the movie industry's first feature-length blockbuster film. Director D.W. Griffith's creation was such a national hit that President Woodrow Wilson privately screened it at the White House. It had been adapted by Thomas Dixon from his novel *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan,* which centered revisionist post-Reconstruction history painting Black people as threats to white people. Most of the Black characters were portrayed by white actors in blackface, with the notable exception of Madame Sul-Te-Wan, who appeared in an uncredited role and went on to have a long career in largely subservient roles on the big screen. The movie was so anti-Black and pro-segregation that activist William Monroe Trotter and the NAACP protested it, officially launching Black Americans' battle with Hollywood over its distortion of Black people. (That protest is captured in the 2017 PBS documentary *Birth of a Movement*.)

The concept of the 1918 film *The Birth of a Race* was to refute *The Birth of a Nation* by presenting the history and achievement of Black people. Emmett J. Scott, who was a close adviser to Booker T. Washington (see Chapters 7 and 13), spearheaded the project. According to a *Variety* review of the film, the white-owned Selig Polyscope Company, the film's most influential producer, undermined the project. "A large quantity of film, depicting certain phases of the advancement of the Negro race, was dropped," it reported. Instead of celebrating Black Americans, the film shifted its focus to white people.

The 1920 Oscar Micheaux film, *Within Our Gates,* starring Evelyn Preer, known to Black audiences as "The First Lady of the Screen" fares much better. The story shows both racial terrorism via lynching and racial uplift through education.

Evidence suggests films prior to *The Birth of a Nation* with actual Black actors. In 2018, the 1898 short film *Something Good — Negro Kiss* from Selig Polyscope (the same company that sabotaged *The Birth of a Race*) was rediscovered. Roughly 30 seconds long, the film starring Saint Suttle and popular vaudeville performer Gertie Brown is a twist on the 1896 film *The Kiss* and is noteworthy for showing Black love and romance.

Other films starring Black actors prior to 1915 include *A Fool and His Money* (1912), whose director Alice Guy, a white French woman, is considered the industry's first female director; *The Railroad Porter* (1912, sometimes 1913), starring Black vaudeville superstar Bert Williams and directed by William Foster, believed to be the first film by a Black director; and *Lime Kiln Club Field Day* (1913), also starring Williams. *Aladdin Jones* and *Two Knights of Vaudeville* were both released in 1915. Some of these movies, like *Two Knights of Vaudeville,* also presented problematic imagery.

Race movies: Introducing all-Black casts

In theory, *race movies,* films with all-Black casts, should have offset the negative depictions of Black Americans in *The Birth of a Nation*. Only a handful of the companies that produced them, however, had Black talent in key behind-the-scenes roles, especially as directors, producers, and writers. Good and bad, race movies expanded the roles of Black actors (many of whom were seasoned vaudeville performers) beyond maids, butlers, and other stereotypical roles that had been present since film began. More than 500 race movies were produced from 1910 to 1950.


REMEMBER

While combating the negative stereotypes in mainstream films, race movies created some of their own. In many race movies, leading men and women with lighter complexions were often shown as good and beautiful, whereas the characters played by actors with darker complexions were presented as bad and unattractive. In addition, critics accused race movies of focusing too much attention on crime.

Mostly white-owned companies

Chicago-based Ebony Film Corporation was one of the most prominent examples of the many white-owned companies that made race films from screenplays primarily written by white writers. In a reorganization, the company absorbed the Historical Feature Film Company, makers of *Two Knights of Vaudeville*. Ads for its Ebony Comedies such as *A Reckless Rover* and *Spying the Spy* from 1918, also welcomed white audiences by employing stereotypes like "the race of music and laughter," despite having Luther J. Pollard (brother to sports pioneer Fritz Pollard), the company's only Black employee, as president. Prior to Ebony Film Corporation folding in 1919, *The Chicago Defender* observed that the stereotypical content of its films caused "respectable ladies and gentleman to blush with shame and humiliation."

Other companies, like the mostly white-owned Philadelphia-based The Colored Players Film Corporation — cofounded by Sherman H. Dudley (also S.H. Dudley), who had success in minstrel shows and had created his own theater circuit — fared better. In 1926, it released the highly regarded *Scar of Shame,* which explored intraracial class tensions. *Scar of Shame* starred respected stage actor Charles Gilpin, who played the title role in Eugene O'Neill's hit play *The Emperor Jones* in 1920.

Reol Productions was founded in New York City by Robert Levy, a white British-born booking agent who mounted more than 100 high-quality all-Black cast plays. It set a high bar in 1921 with its model of primarily adapting works by Black writers, like Paul Laurence Dunbar's *Sport of the Gods,* which was the company's first film. In addition, Reol Productions worked with a roster of talented Black actors, including Edna Morton (dubbed the "colored Mary Pickford" to indicate her star status in the Black community), Clarence Muse, Lawrence Chenault, and Inez Clough. Other hit Reol films include *The Burden of Race* (1921), *The Call of His People* (1922), *Easy Money* (1922), and *Spitfire* (1922). Despite having high artistic standards and generating great critical acclaim, Reol Productions folded in 1924.

Over the years, various other companies produced race films. The Newark-based Frederick Douglass Film Company, which adapted Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Scapegoat* to the screen, is one example. Another was the Booker T. Film Company of Los Angeles, whose only production, the western *The Ten Thousand Dollar Trail* (1921), starred its founder and lead actor Sidney P. Dones.

Expanded roles for women

There is no record of Black women owning any of these film companies, but some women found opportunities not readily available to them. They included Dora Mitchell, who wrote *The Ten Thousand Trail,* and Theresa "Tressie" Souders, a domestic for much of her life, whose 1922 film *A Women's Error* is believed to be the first to be directed by a Black woman. On screen, Black women had an early presence primarily through Bertha Regustus, who played a dental patient in the 1907 film *Laughing Gas,* as well as maids in the 1903 film *What Happened in the Tunnel* and 1905's *The Servant Girl Problem.*

Though film was male-dominated, Madame E. Toussaint Welcome (also known as Jennie Louise Van der Zee, sister to famed Harlem Renaissance photographer James Van der Zee) co-founded the Toussaint Motion Picture Exchange in Harlem with her husband Ernest Toussaint Welcome. She directed the documentary film *Doing Their Bit,* about Black soldiers returning from Europe between 1919 and 1922; the film is now lost.

Working with her husband James Gist, an evangelist, Eloyce Gist, co-directed three films, arguably precursors to faith-based entertainment, in the 1930s, including *Verdict: Not Guilty.* Popular with the NAACP, its story revolves around Satan putting the soul of a woman who dies in childbirth on trial.

Celebrated writer Zora Neale Hurston is rarely lauded for the documentary film work done in her work as an anthropologist, such as the 1928 and 1929 films *Children's Games* and *Baptism,* probably due to their lack of commercial liability. But it's believed that Hurston, who worked as a personal assistant from 1925 to 1926 to Fannie Hurst, greatly influenced the author's most famous book, *Imitation of Life,* which was adapted into film in both 1934 and 1959, by giving her a glimpse into Black life and culture. Hurston also worked as a staff screenwriter at Paramount in 1941, but her Hollywood career, like that of so many Black women, just never took off.

Black men making race movies

The more noteworthy of the noticeably male Black-owned or Black-partnered film entities that made measurable and significant contributions include



- **Foster Photoplay Company:** Founded by former vaudeville publicity and booking agent William Foster in 1910, the Foster Photoplay Company produced several well-received comical shorts like *The Railroad Porter* (1912, sometimes 1913) that white audiences also saw. The company folded in 1916.

  Theatres catering to white audiences showed race movies during matinee or *midnight ramble* hours, the term used for segregation-era midnight showings for Black audiences.

- **Lincoln Motion Picture Company:** Founded by brothers Noble (an actor) and George Johnson (the U.S. Post Office's first Black employee), the Lincoln Motion Picture Company was one of the most prominent independent Black film companies, known for *The Realization of a Negro's Ambition* (1916) and *The Trooper of Troop K* (1917). Actors Clarence Brooks and Beulah Hall played key roles. The ride came to an end in 1923, not long after Universal Pictures, for which Noble Johnson was contracted, forced him to resign from his own company and demanded the company not use his likeness even though he starred in all its films.

- **Micheaux Film Corporation:** The Lincoln Motion Picture Company got Midwestern writer and homesteader Oscar Micheaux in the film business. When they approached Micheaux to adapt his novel *The Homesteader* into a film, their failure to come to terms prompted Micheaux to make his first film titled *The Homesteader* in 1919, followed by *Within Our Gates* in 1920. Micheaux's topical films tackled everything from residential segregation to separatism versus assimilation, from interracial marriage to crooked preachers — one such film, *Body and Soul* (1925), served as Paul Robeson's film debut.

  Initially, Black audiences applauded Micheaux's work. After several years, however, they expected more, and some Black newspapers even took Micheaux to task for dedicating too much attention to gambling and other seedy elements. Still, Micheaux, who wrote, produced, directed, and distributed more than 40 films, is the most consistent and prolific of early Black filmmakers and many filmmakers overall.

  His second wife, Alice B. Russell Micheaux (also credited as A. Burton Russell), greatly aided him in his trailblazing cinematic pursuits. She appeared in nearly a dozen films, produced four to six films (including *Murder in Harlem*, starring Clarence Brooks, in which she also appeared), helped administer the Micheaux Film Company, and more.

- **Million Dollar Productions:** Ralph Cooper, better known as founder of the Apollo Theater's world-famous Amateur Night, partnered with the white Popkin brothers in 1937, to form Million Dollar Productions. Months prior to Million Dollar Productions, Cooper owned the production company Cooper-Randol Productions with fellow Black actor George Randol, and together they produced just one film, the popular *Dark Manhattan.*



REMEMBER

Dubbed the "Dark Gable," Cooper, who often starred in the company's productions, contributed entertaining if not groundbreaking films to the mix. One of Cooper's greatest contributions was the casting of a then-unknown Lena Horne in 1938's *The Duke Is Tops,* rereleased as *The Bronze Venus* in 1943. The movie business proved too taxing for Cooper, who left it altogether. Million Dollar Productions folded in 1940.

- **Herb Jeffries, various projects:** Detroit native Herb Jeffries (sometimes Jeffrey) wanted to make movies and persuaded white producer Jed Buell to take a chance on him. The two created *Harlem on the Prairie* (1937), starring the fair-skinned, wavy-haired Jeffries as a singing cowboy. Encouraged by the film's success and favorable reviews, another independent producer, Richard Khan, tapped Jeffries to star in additional films such as *Harlem Rides the Range* (1939).

- **Spencer Williams, various projects, Amnegro Films:** Best known as Andy from the oft-criticized 1950s comedy *Amos 'n' Andy,* Spencer Williams began his entertainment odyssey when he came to New York City as a teenager. There, he worked as a stagehand for Oscar Hammerstein and was mentored by vaudeville star Bert Williams. By the time he arrived in Hollywood in 1923, he had attended college and served in the U.S. Army during World War I, traveling to various countries.

  Working behind the scenes as a sound tech and writing dialogue for Black characters as well as acting, Williams was involved in important films like *The Melancholy Dame* (1929), starring Evelyn Preer, which he co-wrote and touted as the first Black talkie. He wrote many films, including *Harlem Rides the Range* (1939) and the celebrated *Son of Ingagi* (1940), considered the first all-Black cast sci-fi horror film. Williams's biggest contribution came from making films for his own Amnegro Films, including his 1941 classic *The Blood of Jesus*.

Early Black roles in major studio films

By 1929, Hollywood studios such as MGM were making films with Black casts. Despite having Black casts and greater resources, many of these major studio films still perpetuated harmful stereotypes and cast Black actors in stereotypical roles.

Starting as servants: Clarence Muse and Hattie McDaniel

Many Black actors portrayed servants. Of these, the two best known are the multitalented Clarence Muse and Hattie McDaniel. Baltimore native Muse was a lawyer, director, writer, and composer, as well as an actor who appeared in more

than 150 films, dating from his debut in 1921 in *The Custard Nine* to his last film *The Black Stallion,* released just around his death in 1979. Muse played Cudjo in *Buck and the Preacher* (1972) and Snapper in *Car Wash* (1976).

The Denver-raised McDaniel became the first Black American to win a Best Supporting Actress Academy Award (or any Academy Award, for that matter) for her role of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* in 1940. Although defined by her stereotypical maid roles to the larger society, McDaniel's Black fans saw her many talents. One of 13 children born in 1893 to formerly enslaved parents, McDaniel began her career performing on the minstrel circuit with her siblings, most notably in the all-female *The McDaniel Sisters' Company* with her sister Etta Goff from 1914 until roughly 1916. In the 1920s, McDaniel leaned into music, singing on the radio as well as recording for Okeh and Paramount Records from 1926 to 1929.

In her early on-screen Hollywood career, which began roughly around 1932 with mostly uncredited roles as maids until 1936, she would even work as a maid off screen to make ends meet. That changed after *Gone with the Wind* (where Butterfly McQueen also played Prissy). Until 1949, she appeared regularly in films, even amid heavy criticism from the NAACP and the Black community at large.

In 1947, she began voicing the lead of the controversial radio show *Beulah,* about a Black maid caring for a white suburban family; the show's roots went back to 1939, when a white man voiced the character. By 1951, she was playing the lead on television after Ethel Waters left the title role. In 1952, McDaniel, at age 59, lost her battle with breast cancer. She has the distinction of having two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame — one for radio and one for motion pictures.

Reinforcing and escaping stereotypes

Other common stereotypes were *Sambo* roles, portraying Black people as lazy and shiftless. The key characters Gummy and Zeke in the films *Hearts in Dixie* (1929) and *Hallelujah!* (1929), starring Stepin Fetchit and Daniel L. Haynes, reinforced the stereotype of the lazy Black man, avidly avoiding work. *Hearts in Dixie,* which marked Clarence Muse's studio debut, was a major film for Fetchit (see the sidebar for more information about him).

Dramatic films offered some hope. These included *Imitation of Life* (1934), with its strong performance from Black co-star Louise Beavers as stereotypically loyal employee Delilah and the side story of her daughter Peola, a young Black girl who could pass for white, played with gravitas by Fredi Washington. A non-Black actress plays the role in the 1959 remake. Another standout was the film version of Eugene O'Neill's 1920 play *The Emperor Jones* (1933), starring Paul Robeson as a nefarious character who ends up leading a small Caribbean island.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

STEPIN FETCHIT

Stepin Fetchit's many comedic appearances in mainstream films like *Judge Priest* (1934) and all-Black films like *Miracle in Harlem* (1948) opened doors for other Black actors. Because he played Sambo roles, however, he was vilified as the poster child for Hollywood's Black stereotypes (although these were largely the only roles available to Black actors of his day).

Born Lincoln Theodore Monroe Andrew Perry in Key West, Florida to Caribbean immigrants, Stepin Fetchit ("step and fetch it," a name he earned on the vaudeville circuit) willingly submitted to Hollywood's malicious portrayals of Black men. Despite a decent education and an interest in classical music, he allowed the studio machine to paint him as an authentic "darky." By pretending to be illiterate, he reinforced white studio executives' stereotypes and ignorance of Black people. Consequently, he became one of the first Black movie stars, appearing in more than 50 films.

Although he was the first Black actor to earn more than $1 million in film, his lavish lifestyle plunged him into bankruptcy. Eventually, protests by civil rights organizations against Black stereotypes in films sank his career in the early 1950s.

Escaping stereotypical roles was difficult for those who wanted to work in an industry pervaded by racism. Even when the studios adapted Broadway hits that contained more subtle stereotypes, film magnified them. Because theater was a more intimate affair that gave actors a greater degree of flexibility, a skillful actor could sometimes diffuse a stereotypical character. In film, even talented actors like Paul Robeson found it difficult to make a bad character better. For example, Black critics lauded Robeson's acting and singing as Joe, the shiftless Black male character in the Universal Pictures 1936 film *Show Boat*, but still found the character itself stereotypical. That was also true of *The Green Pastures*, an award-winning play that reenacted stories from the Old Testament with a Black cast speaking in Black American vernacular.



REMEMBER

Although mainstream Hollywood slowly embraced Black actors, top Black entertainers, known as *specialty acts*, were frequently included in top white films in the 1940s, usually in nightclub settings. Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Hazel Scott, and others appeared in films like *Stage Door Canteen* (1943), *Atlantic City* (1944), *Reveille with Beverly* (1943), *Hit Parade of 1943* (1943), and *Rhapsody in Blue* (1945). Black dancers such as Katherine Dunham and the famed Nicholas brothers, Fayard and Harold, also scored screen time. Vaudeville veterans Buck and Bubbles shined on screen with their humor-infused tap dance, song and piano-playing routines in numerous films, including *Varsity Show* (1937) and *A Song Is Born* (1948). At various points before the 1960s, Hollywood got behind several all-Black musicals, including *Cabin in the Sky* (1943), *Stormy Weather* (1943), *Carmen Jones* (1954), *St. Louis Blues* (1958), and *Porgy and Bess* (1959).

1940s–1960s: Exploring new themes

Responding to protests from the NAACP and other civil rights groups, in addition to the nation's ongoing changes in race relations, Hollywood began including Black characters, usually one or two, in nontraditional roles. For example, war movies, beginning in 1949, with the groundbreaking casting of James Edwards in *Home of the Brave*, began prominently featuring at least one Black soldier, a move cultural critic Gerald Early suggested was prompted by President Truman integrating the military in 1948. Following are themes that some films of this era began to explore:

- **Racism:** Racism became a driving theme. Edwards's character in *Home of the Brave* was one of Hollywood's early attempts to communicate to white Americans how racism impacted Black Americans. In *No Way Out* (1950), a racist white man blames a Black prison doctor for his brother's death. Playing Dr. Luther Brooks is Sidney Poitier, the most famous actor from this period.
- **"Passing":** Although early Hollywood films addressed the theme of "passing for white," films such as *Show Boat* (in which a "white" character's true Black heritage is discovered), *Lost Boundaries* (1949), *Pinky* (1949), and the remake of *Imitation of Life* (1959) are the most famous of this later era. The 2021 film *Passing,* adapted from Nella Larsen's 1929 novel of the same name, revisited this theme.
- **Interracial relationships:** Although *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967), starring Sidney Poitier and Katherine Hepburn, is the more famous film, *One Potato, Two Potato* (1964), starring the lesser known Bernie Hamilton, took a more serious look at societal restrictions against interracial relationships. Poitier's 1965 film *A Patch of Blue,* in which he and a blind white woman fall in love, actively reminded audiences that love is blind.
- **Love stories involving Black protagonists:** Although Black screen couples were rare in general, especially in serious Hollywood films, two films in particular are outstanding exceptions. Romance isn't the main story in *Bright Road* (1953), about a dedicated schoolteacher (played by Dorothy Dandridge) trying to reach one of her students, but Harry Belafonte's character doesn't hide his tender feelings for the schoolteacher. Directed by Michael Roemer and starring Ivan Dixon and Abbey Lincoln, *Nothing But a Man* is distinctive for its more realistic portrayal of a Black couple's trials and tribulations in the Jim Crow South, with the civil rights movement serving as a backdrop.
- **Racist taboos:** Films such as *Intruder in the Dust* (1949), adapted from William Faulkner's best-selling novel, and *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1962), based on Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize–winning novel, were courtroom dramas about innocent Black men facing death because of racist taboos. Although Black characters didn't dominate screen time, films such as these attempted to analyze racism from a moral perspective.



In some ways, films like *To Kill a Mockingbird* are the precursors to Hollywood films known as "white savior movies," where white characters save Black characters from social ills. Two more recent examples from the 2010s include Best Picture Oscar nominee *The Help* (2011) and Best Picture Oscar winner *Green Book* (2018). *The Help,* about Black maids, is told through the eyes of a young white woman; the film included breakout roles for Octavia Spencer, who won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar playing Minny Jackson, and Viola Davis, who received a Best Actress Oscar nomination for playing Aibileen Clark. *Green Book,* for which Mahershala Ali won the Best Supporting Actor Oscar for playing real-life classical and jazz pianist Don Shirley, focuses on the white man Frank "Tony Lip" Vallelonga. Vallelonga chauffeured Shirley during a Southern tour using *The Negro Motorist Green Book,* published by Victor Hugo Green, as a guide of safe places Black travelers could stay and dine during Jim Crow.

1960s–1970s: Blaxploitation films

By the 1960s, Black Americans were just 15 percent of the national population but accounted for 30 percent of moviegoers. During this time, Black characters in mainstream films became increasingly more aggressive, a marked difference from early servant roles and Poitier's many model minorities (discussed in the later section "Sidney Poitier"). With several movie roles, particularly in the films *The Dirty Dozen* (1967), *The Split* (1968), and *100 Rifles* (1969), retired NFL player Jim Brown contributed to the depiction of this newly aggressive Black male that also coincided with the rising Black Power movement. Although many Black movie characters died following outbursts against "the man" (a reference to the white power structure), Black audiences still applauded.

Melvin Van Peebles's 1971 film *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971) marked the official birth of *blaxploitation*, a genre of Black cast films they were largely white-financed and produced that, according to Black Panther activist Afeni Shakur, was impacted by the Black Power movement. In this film, the Black male protagonist, an embodiment of several stereotypes including the "sexual Mandingo" and the "buck," becomes the hero. Made on a shoestring budget, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* grossed more than $10 million. Equally impressive box office receipts from *Shaft* (1971), starring Richard Roundtree as a Black detective who battles the community's bad guys, solidified the movement.

The combined success of *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* and *Shaft* opened a floodgate for a barrage of titles to emerge during the 1970s. *Superfly* (1972), *The Mack* (1973), *Blacula* (1972), *Three the Hard Way* (1974), *Black Caesar* (1973), and *Truck Turner* (1974) are a few of the standouts.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

PAM GRIER

One of the very few women to reach iconic status during the blaxploitation film period, Pam Grier starred in the cult classics *Foxy Brown* (1974), *Coffy* (1973), and *Sheba Baby* (1975). The North Carolina–born beauty got her big break while working as a receptionist for a film company when film producer Roger Corman noticed her and cast her in *The Big Dollhouse* (1971). Her unique beauty and imposing physique struck a chord with moviegoers.

Grier continued to act when blaxploitation's heyday ended but remained in the shadows until she starred in Quentin Tarantino's *Jackie Brown* (1997), which paid homage to blaxploitation films. In *Jackie Brown,* Grier stars as a flight attendant coerced into bringing down an arms dealer. Of her subsequent television appearances, her roles as Eleanor Winthrop and Kate "Kit" Porter on Showtime's political comedy *Linc's* (1998–2000) and its groundbreaking lesbian-centered series *The L Word* stand out most.



REMEMBER

America's urban ghettos, as they were known, were the main settings for blaxploitation films, with pimps and gangsters serving as major characters. Sex, violence, and opposition to the white power structure were also constant elements in the films. Some people argue that blaxploitation films, many of them financed, produced, and even directed by white talent, only reinforced negative stereotypes that justified the casting of Black actors as prostitutes, pimps, and other criminals in mainstream films. Others defend them, arguing that the genre served as escapist fare for Black audiences frustrated by racism that subtly undermined those stereotypes. That flipping of stereotypes attracted Black audiences, but was often so subtle that it drew lots of criticism as well as confusion.

During this same period, other films emerged that many Black audiences embraced. *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972), a Billie Holiday biopic, and *Mahogany* (1975), about a Black woman from urban Chicago striving to become a top fashion designer, are particularly notable for their romantic pairing of Billy Dee Williams and Diana Ross, which serves as one of the first high-profile symbols of #BlackLove. *Cooley High* (1975), helmed by Black director Michael Shultz, who also directed *Car Wash* (1976), is one of the most beloved urban coming-of-age stories of all time. Musical films such as *Sparkle* (1976), about three sisters trying to make it in the music industry, and *The Wiz* (1978), an urban version of *The Wizard of Oz* starring Diana Ross and Michael Jackson, stood out if only for the music and several endearing performances.

Spike Lee and a Black film renaissance

Several Black directors like *Cooley High*'s Michael Schultz and Sidney Poitier, with his popular *Uptown Saturday Night*, *Let's Do It Again,* and *A Piece of the Action* films,

stepped forward during the 1970s, but they, in the context of the 1990s and beyond, had a more subtle approach in addressing Hollywood's discriminatory history. They also stayed away from many controversial issues within the Black community. That changed when Spike Lee, proud alum of historically Black Morehouse College, came on the scene. Prior to Lee's emergence, successful Black-oriented films of the 1980s were largely music-driven, such as the semiautobiographical *Purple Rain* (1984) starring Prince. Lee, however, almost single-handedly innovated Black film, inspiring a bold new Black film movement.

Lee's first feature film was *She's Gotta Have It* (1986), about a woman juggling three lovers. The film's success (made on a shoestring budget, it grossed about $7 million) gave Lee a national platform. Never one to shy away from controversy, Lee used his early work in particular to address issues such as *colorism* (a preference for lighter skin over dark skin within the Black community) and Black fraternities and sororities on Black college campuses in *School Daze* (1988). In *Do the Right Thing* (1989), Lee examined the tenuous nature of race relations between Italians (and by proxy white people in general) and Black Americans in Brooklyn. The 1992 film *Malcolm X,* starring Denzel Washington, was an epic triumph for Lee who was able to bring the iconic leader's life to the big screen, with Washington receiving his first Oscar nomination for Best Actor.



Lee's films with primarily Black casts served as platforms for next level or breakout performances by many Black actors, including Wesley Snipes and Denzel Washington in *Mo' Better Blues* (1990), Samuel L. Jackson in *Jungle Fever* (1991), Delroy Lindo in *Crooklyn* (1994), and Mekhi Phifer in *Clockers* (1995). Although Washington, in particular, had earned two Oscar nominations and a win prior to his film debut with Lee, his work with the director helped solidify him as a bankable leading man. You can read more about Spike Lee's work in the later section on Black directors.

Hood films

In the early 1990s, USC film graduate John Singleton, inspired by Spike Lee, looked to his native Los Angeles to enhance his craft. His debut film, *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), garnered him an Academy Award nomination for Best Director, a first for any Black director. Whereas Lee's films posed theoretical questions about Black Americans and race in the U.S., Singleton's debut grappled with the contemporary issues of single-parent homes and escalating gang violence against young Black males in inner-city communities.

Violence is also a potent theme in *New Jack City* (1991), set in Harlem. Directed by Mario Van Peebles (whose father Melvin Van Peebles helmed *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*), *New Jack City* explored the Black drug empire in a manner never before seen on the big screen. Films like *Boyz* and *New Jack City* brought the

realities of the drug world into the Black urban sphere, with much of the action on screen centered in individual neighborhoods. At the same time, brothers Reginald and Warrington Hudlin began exploring a lighter side of urban neighborhoods by directing and producing the *House Party* franchise, which began in 1990.



REMEMBER

Both *Boyz N the Hood* and *New Jack City* attempted a creative translation of the realities of contemporary urban life to screen and paved the way for a colossal wave of *hood films.* With the exception of a few films, however, including *Menace II Society* (1993), directed by the Hughes Brothers, and the F. Gary Gray–helmed *Set It Off* (1996), about four young Black women trying to escape the hood through bank robberies, hood films became stagnant and clichéd. Over the years, Black audiences embraced these films less and less as movie theater fare, preferring to consume them in the direct-to-video and DVD markets initially and later streaming and paid video-on-demand.

Urban film directors also graduated to mainstream studio films. In 2000, with *Scary Movie,* a spoof of Hollywood horror films, Keenan Ivory Wayans became the first Black director to direct a mainstream film grossing more than $150 million. (Previously, Sidney Poitier had reached the $100 million mark distinction with *Stir Crazy* in 1980.) F. Gary Gray and John Singleton also reached the $100 million mark with the mainstream films *The Italian Job* and *2Fast 2Furious* in 2003. Well into the 2000s, 2010s, and beyond, other Black directors skipped the hood genre altogether.

Stepping out of the hood genre

Atlanta-based filmmaker Tyler Perry, well-known for his character Madea, an outspoken, over-the-top grandmother developed through his numerous traveling stage plays (flip to Chapter 14 for details), scored big in the 2000s. These lighthearted films grappled with drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, infidelity, molestation, and other serious issues through laughter and an underlying Christian theme. His first film, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2005), directed by Darren Grant, and follow-up, *Madea's Family Reunion* (2006), were each made for under $7 million but grossed more than $50 million at the box office. His third film, *Daddy's Little Girls,* released in February 2007, starred Idris Elba and Gabrielle Union, while *Why Did I Get Married?,* released a few months later, starred Tyler Perry in a non-Madea role alongside Jill Scott and Janet Jackson.

Likewise, Atlanta-based independent film production company Rainforest Films performed surprisingly well with sexually tinged films such as *Trois* (2002) and *Pandora's Box* (2002), featuring more upwardly mobile Black characters. In January 2007, *Stomp the Yard,* a film about Black fraternities and step shows at a Black college, grossed more than $38 million at the box office in two weeks for Rainforest. Main players Will Packer and Rob Hardy later dissolved Rainforest, with Hardy

going on to direct primarily in television. Packer, through Will Packer Productions, became one of the most successful Black producers in Hollywood with his *Ride Along* and *Think Like a Man* franchises, along with the 2017 summer blockbuster *Girls Trip*.

The Rise of Black Directors

Black directors became more and more visible in the late 20th and early 21st centuries with Spike Lee at the forefront. These sections identify some of the directors who made a name for themselves.

Spike Lee: Getting personal

From the 1986 film *She's Gotta Have It* to his later work on Netflix, Spike Lee truly helped inspire a generation of filmmakers (see the earlier section "Spike Lee and the Black film renaissance" for info on his influence).

In 2006, Lee, whose career had always been marked by generating his own projects, helmed a rare studio film, *Inside Man,* starring Denzel Washington, Jodie Foster, and Clive Owen; it became the highest grossing film of his career at roughly $88 million in the U.S. and Canada and more than $95 million overseas. Lee hit high marks with critics for his 2002 movie *25th Hour,* his rare film with white main leads (Edward Norton and Philip Seymour Hoffman) and not-so-high critical marks with his 2008 film *Miracle at St. Anna,* a film he specifically made reclaiming Black WWII history Hollywood films consistently erased.

Lee's 2015 film *Chi-Raq,* a musical drama he and co-writer Kevin Willmott adapted from the Greek play *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes to a modern-day Chicago notorious for its violence, became Lee's first film collaboration with a streaming service. Amazon Studios provided a limited theatrical release December 4 ahead of its December 29 streaming date.

His 2018 film *BlacKkKlansman*, written by him, Kevin Willmott, David Rabinowitz, and Charlie Wachtel, became an Academy Award darling; it was adapted from Rob Stallworth's 2014 memoir *Black Klansman* about his efforts as a Black man to thwart the Ku Klux Klan in Colorado. Starring John David Washington, son of Lee's frequent collaborator Denzel Washington, and Adam Driver, *BlacKkKlansman,* which grossed more than $90 million worldwide, was nominated for six Academy Awards, winning one for Best Adapted Screenplay — a first for Lee, who had received an honorary Oscar for his contribution to film in 2015.

Over his prolific feature film career, Lee had only received one nomination, in 1990 for Best Original Screenplay for *Do the Right Thing*. He fared slightly better with documentaries, receiving a nomination for his provocative *4 Little Girls* (1997), chronicling the murder of four girls in the Birmingham church bombing in 1963 (refer to Chapter 9). Other provocative documentaries from Lee include *When the Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts* (2006), his highly acclaimed exploration of post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans for HBO, featuring survivors, as well as his 2010 follow-up *If God Is Willing and da Creek Don't Rise.*

In 2020, Lee released *Da 5 Bloods* via Netflix. This epic Vietnam veteran tale reteamed him with Delroy Lindo (from *Crooklyn*) and Clarke Peters (from his 2012 film *Red Hook Summer*) and marked his first time working with newcomer Jonathan Majors as well as with Chadwick Boseman. With *Da 5 Bloods,* Lee achieved the distinction of having released films in five different decades, from the 1980s to the 2020s. He even refashioned *She's Gotta Have It* into a Netflix series starring DeWanda Wise as Nola Darling that ran from 2017 to 2019. An avid music and sports lover, Lee also helmed documentaries on Jim Brown, Kobe Bryant, and Michael Jackson, among others.

Lee, a long-time professor at his film school alma mater, helped produce films of several filmmakers, including Gina Prince-Bythewood's feature debut *Love & Basketball* in 2000.

1990s and early 2000s: The music video launch

The rise of hip-hop music gave Black directors opportunities to showcase their vision and skill in music videos. Both Spike Lee and John Singleton directed music videos, most notably Public Enemy's "Fight the Power" for Lee and Michael Jackson's "Remember the Time" for Singleton. Hype Williams elevated music videos with his innovative "The Rain (Supa Dupa Fly)" (1997) by Missy Elliott and "Big Pimpin'" (2000) by Jay-Z and UGK, among many greats. Williams's debut 1998 film *Belly* helped introduce rapper DMX as a leading man. Music video directors like F. Gary Gray, Tim Story, Antoine Fuqua, and Millicent Shelton began transitioning primarily into film.

Gray would hit with *Friday* (1995) and *Set It Off* (1996), starring rappers Ice Cube and Queen Latifah, respectively, on his way to later direct *The Italian Job* (2003), which made more than $175 million worldwide; *Straight Outta Compton* (2015), which made more than $160 million domestically and $200 million globally; and *Fate of the Furious* (2017) in the mighty *The Fast and the Furious* franchise, making him the first Black American director to have a film reach $1 billion dollars in global box office receipts.

With his films for the *Fantastic Four* and *Ride Along* franchises all grossing more than $100 million and more globally, Tim Story established himself as one of the most financially successful Black directors around.

Black directors without strong music video roots were also active at this time, including Carl Franklin with *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995), Rick Famuyiwa with *The Wood* (1999), Malcolm D. Lee with *The Best Man* (1999), and Gina Prince-Bythewood with *Love & Basketball* (2000).

Lee Daniels, who produced *Monster's Ball* (2001), for which Halle Berry became the first Black woman to win the Academy Award for Best Actress, directed several films that made a huge impact. They included the 2009 film *Precious*, which was adapted from Sapphire's 1996 book *Push* and introduced actress Gabourey Sidibe; it was nominated for six Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director, with Mo'Nique winning the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress and Geoffrey Fletcher becoming the first Black screenwriter to win the Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay. Daniels' 2013 film *Lee Daniels' The Butler*, inspired by the true story of a Black man who worked for eight presidents in the White House, grossed more than $176.6 million globally; it starred Forest Whitaker and Oprah Winfrey. Turning to TV, Daniels scored big with the sensational hip-hop centered series *Empire* (2015–2020), starring Terrence Howard and Taraji P. Henson, about a rapper with three sons who built a music empire largely due to their mother serving 17 years in prison. He also surprised again with his 2021 film *The United States vs. Billie Holiday* starring singer Andra Day, who won several awards and critical acclaim, in her very first acting role.

The 2010s: Drama, horror, heroes, and more

The late 1990s and early 2000s gave only a glimpse into what was to come. The 2010s ushered in Black directors who experienced even more notable breakthroughs, most notably Ava DuVernay, Barry Jenkins, Jordan Peele, and Ryan Coogler.

Ava DuVernay

Ava DuVernay, a Los Angeles area native, began her Hollywood career as a film publicist specializing in outreach to Black audiences. She worked on a string of successful films, including *The Brothers* (2001), *Shrek 2* (2004), and *Dreamgirls* (2006), which launched Jennifer Hudson's career.

She directed several small films prior to breaking through at Sundance, first with *I Will Follow* in 2011 and then with *Middle of Nowhere* in 2012, with which she became the first Black female director to win its U.S. Directing Award: Dramatic.

As her career progressed, DuVernay became acclaimed for both her filmmaking and her bold advocacy for inclusion. Filming *Selma* (2014), the first Hollywood feature film directly centered on Martin Luther King Jr., brought together DuVernay and Oprah Winfrey, who portrayed the real-life Annie Lee Cooper and her courageous struggle to vote in Jim Crow Alabama. That led to DuVernay's spearheading the dramatic series *Queen Sugar,* adapted from Natalie Baszile's 2014 novel and revolving around three siblings from the Bordelon clan, as its creator and visionary. With its launch in 2016, DuVernay committed *Queen Sugar* to utilizing all female directors, which opened up additional opportunities for Black women directors like Julie Dash, the first Black woman director to have a film distributed theatrically with her 1991 film *Daughters of the Dust;* Tina Mabry, known for *Mississippi Damned;* Channing Godfrey Peoples, known for *Miss Juneteenth;* and Felicia Pride, known for the short *Tender.*

With her 2018 film *A Wrinkle in Time*, adapted from Madeleine L'Engle's classic 1962 novel and starring Storm Reid, along with Oprah Winfrey, Reese Witherspoon, and Mindy Kaling, DuVernay became the first Black woman director to have a film pass $100 million at the box office.



REMEMBER

Through the streaming platform Netflix, DuVernay was able to make profound social justice statements, particularly through her 2016 documentary *13th,* exploring the constitutional amendment and its relation to the mass incarceration of Black people. This documentary won four Emmys and an NAACP Image Award and garnered an Oscar nomination. Her Netflix limited series *When They See Us,* about the Central Park Five (later known as the Exonerated Five), who were falsely imprisoned for the 1989 rape of the Central Park jogger, won several African American Film Critics Association (AAFCA) and NAACP Image Awards, as well as the Emmy for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Limited Series or a Movie for Jharrel Jerome, a first for an Afro-Latino actor.

Barry Jenkins

Director Barry Jenkins's 2016 film *Moonlight* is a tender coming-of-age story based on playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney's unpublished semiautobiographical play *InMoonlightBlack Boys Look Blue,* centered on a young man exploring his sexuality. It surprised critics and fans when it won the Oscar for Best Picture in 2017 over frontrunner *La La Land* after a dramatic mix-up initially announced *La La Land* as the winner.

Jenkins's 2018 film adaptation of James Baldwin's celebrated 1974 novel *If Beale Street Could Talk,* addressing mass incarceration, resulted in actress Regina King winning her first Oscar for Best Supporting Actress. *The Underground Railroad,* Jenkins's limited series for Amazon, a first for him, was adapted from Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize–winning novel.

Jordan Peele

Jordan Peele surprised many when his 2017 feature film debut *Get Out* garnered him a Best Director and a Best Picture Oscar nomination, a first-time combo for a Black director. It was also a win for Black horror films and horror in general. The film, starring British actor Daniel Kaluuya, takes a turn when he and his white girlfriend visit her parents and he begins meeting Black people in a "sunken place" devoid of their essence or souls. He suspects it's intentional and tries to escape the same fate. Made for less than $5 million, *Get Out,* also starring Lil Rel Howery, LaKeith Stanfield, and Betty Gabriel, grossed $255.5 million worldwide. Peele, who had previously been best known for his Comedy Central sketch comedy show *Key & Peele* (2012–2015) with Keegan-Michael Key, followed *Get Out* with *Us* (2019), starring Oscar winner Lupita Nyong'o as both the protagonist and the antagonist, grossing more than $255 million worldwide.

Peter Ramsey

The often-overlooked animated director Peter Ramsey, whose films include *Monsters vs. Aliens: Mutant Pumpkins from Outer Space* (2009) and *Rise of the Guardians* (2012), became the first Black Oscar nominee and winner for the Best Animated Feature with *Spider-Man: Into the Spiderverse* (2018), featuring an Afro-Latino as Spider-Man; he co-directed the film with Bob Persichetti and Rodney Rothman.

Ryan Coogler

California Bay Area native Ryan Coogler's first feature film, *Fruitvale Station* — about the 2008 Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) cop killing of 22-year-old Oscar Grant III — was released in 2013, at the same time as the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the murder of Trayvon Martin (see Chapter 11). It starred Michael B. Jordan, who was just starting to make a real push toward the big screen. *Fruitvale Station* was the rare film that humanized the victims of cop killings and not just the cop.

From there, Coogler turned his attention to Sylvester Stallone's iconic *Rocky* franchise and created *Creed,* his 2015 film, shifting the focus to Adonis "Donnie" Creed. *Creed* starred Michael B. Jordan as an offspring of Apollo Creed and starred Sylvester Stallone as Rocky. That film grossed more than $170 million worldwide.

None of Coogler's previous achievements, as impressive as they were for a director, especially one younger than 30 and Black, foreshadowed how significantly he would change the film landscape as the co-writer and director of *Black Panther,* the first standalone Black-cast film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. It starred Chadwick Boseman as T'Challa/Black Panther, the would-be king of the fictional African nation of Wakanda and Michael B. Jordan as Killmonger, a challenger to the throne. Other characters, played by Black actors from all over the African

Diaspora, include T'Challa's sister Shuri (Letitia Wright); long-time love Nakia (Best Supporting Actress winner Lupita Nyong'o for *12 Years a Slave*); Okoye (Danai Gurira), leader of Wakanda's all-women fighting squad, the Dora Milaje; queen mother Ramonda (Angela Bassett); King T'Chaka (Forest Whitaker); W'Kabi (Daniel Kaluuya), T'Challa's friend and security expert; and M'Baku (Winston Duke), a disgruntled Wakandan tribal leader. At the heart of the narrative, T'Challa must be a good leader and fend off challenges to his authority while trying to shield Wakanda and its treasured natural resource vibranium from the dangers of the outside world.

Released February 16, 2018, to critical and popular acclaim, *Black Panther,* with its African Diasporic casting of actors from the United States, England, various parts of the African Continent, and the Caribbean, proved to be a global sensation. In the United States, Black patrons embraced the fictional African nation and showed up in African attire to watch the movie. In the United States and Canada alone, the film grossed more than $700 million on its way to a worldwide gross of more than $1.3 billion, making Coogler the highest-grossing Black director, just ahead of Gray's *The Fate of the Furious,* which grossed more than $1.2 billion in 2017.



REMEMBER

"Wakanda Forever," a recurring phrase in the film accompanied by the gesture of folding arms over the chest in the fashion of pharaohs in Egyptian burials (also reflecting the symbol for "love" or "hug" in American Sign Language), became a widely embraced pop culture phrase and gesture. People were also stunned by the world of Wakanda on screen, as well as its magnificent costuming created by Hannah Beachler and Ruth E. Carter, who became the first Black Oscar winners in production design and costume design. Carter had received previous nominations for her work on *Amistad* and *Malcolm X*. Beachler was also the first Black person ever nominated for Best Production Design at the Academy Awards.

The love and pride audiences have for *Black Panther* made the unexpected passing of Chadwick Boseman on August 28, 2020, at age 43 a cause of national and international mourning. He had also played real-life Black heroes Jackie Robinson, James Brown, and Thurgood Marshall. Boseman, who many noticed had lost a lot of weight in the few years prior to his death, kept his battle with colon cancer hidden as he continued to work, even turning in stellar performances for Spike Lee's 2020 film *Da 5 Bloods* and the Denzel Washington-produced film adaptation of August Wilson's play *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (2020) with Viola Davis, Glynn Turman, and Colman Domingo, directed by George C. Wolfe.

2020: A stream of Black women directors

A high point of 2020 was the emergence of Black women directors, with a Black woman-directed feature-length film released almost every month. It began with Numa Perrier's *Jezebel* on Netflix in January 2020, followed by Radha Blank's *The*

40-Year-Old Version, which won Sundance's U.S. Dramatic Competition Directing Award prior to being shown on Netflix that October. That February, Canadian-American director Stella Meghie released *The Photograph,* which she wrote and directed, starring Issa Rae and LaKeith Stanfield on the big screen.

Other films that followed include the high school mean-girl tale *Selah and the Spades* from writer/director Tayarisha Poe on Amazon Prime Video; writer/director Channing Godfrey Peoples' *Miss Juneteenth,* starring Nicole Beharie, on video-on-demand; Gina Prince-Bythewood's action film *The Old Guard* for Netflix starring white South African Charlize Theron and Black actress KiKi Layne; writer/director Ekwa Msangi's IFC film *Farewell Amor,* showcasing an African immigrant experience in the U.S.; and actress Regina King's feature film directorial debut *One Night in Miami.*

In the year prior, 2019, Melina Matsoukas, a music video master known for her collaborations with Beyoncé, Rihanna, and even Whitney Houston, had gotten the party started early with her feature film debut *Queen & Slim,* starring Kaluuya and Jodie Turner Smith. It generated considerable buzz. So did the announcement that Nia DaCosta, whose anticipated *Candyman* reboot was pushed to 2021, would direct the next *Captain Marvel* film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Alano Mayo and Nicole Brown's respective ascension as heads of Orion Pictures (under MGM) and TriStar Pictures in 2020, coupled with more capable Black directors than ever and Black talent overall, certainly created an expectation of more opportunities for Black filmmakers and storytellers overall and Black women specifically.

Black Film Stars: From Song to Celluloid

Black actors have come a long way since Hollywood's beginnings, widening the range of roles available to them far beyond the maid and the butler ones that dominated Hollywood studio films in the early 20th century. Secret agents, dignitaries, music legends, and any other imaginable characters are all within reach. During the mid-20th century, Black entertainers (most notably musicians and comedians) sometimes had a leg up — a fact that was still relatively true in the latter part of the 20th century as rappers and comedians became the latest crop of Black performers tapped for the big screen. Still, the backbone of Black Hollywood, as it has been for Hollywood in general, is the serious actor, and those ranks have grown stronger as well.

Hollywood has long considered Black musicians as prime candidates for film. Following is a sampling of a few notable entertainers, past and present, who've made an impact on the big screen.

Singers-turned-actors

Considered two of the most beautiful singers of their time, Lena Horne and Dorothy Dandridge never realized their full potential but left a legacy nonetheless. Horne, one of the first Black actors to sign a long-term studio contract, broke many of Hollywood's social customs by eating in the studio's commissary and appearing in mainstream magazines. She was also the first Black actor to land the cover of a fan publication. Dandridge became the first Black woman nominated for the Best Actress Oscar (for her role in *Carmen Jones*, a Black version of the classic opera).

Robeson, Harry Belafonte, and Sammy Davis Jr. are perhaps the more prominent men fitting this category. Robeson was athletic and intellectual, with a pleasing singing voice and impressive acting ability, but his career was very short, with *The Emperor Jones* (1933) serving as his most memorable role. Likewise, Belafonte, who popularized calypso music, left strong impressions with *Carmen Jones* and *Island in the Sun.* The multi-talented Davis Jr.'s film credits include the films *Porgy and Bess* (1959), *Anna Lucasta* (1959), and the original *Ocean's Eleven* (1960).

Rappers-turned-actors/producers

Here are some Black rappers turned actors or producers who have contributed to movies:

- **Will Smith,** with Oscar nominations for *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006) and *Ali* (2001), not to mention his successful *Bad Boys* and *Men In Black* franchises, summer blockbusters like *Independence Day* (1996) and classic TV sitcom *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* (1990–1996), which served as his launching pad, leads the pack of "raptors." His Overbrook Entertainment has had a hand in producing most of his projects, as well as other films like Gina Prince-Bythewood's *The Secret Life of Bees* (2008) and *The Karate Kid* (2010), starring his son Jaden Smith.
- **Queen Latifah,** another prominent rapper-turned-actor, received an Oscar nomination for her performance as Mama Morton in *Chicago* (2002), a long way from her debut film role as a waitress in *Jungle Fever* (1991). Her Flavor Unit Entertainment produced most of her projects, including the 2021 series

reboot of *The Equalizer* on CBS, the Dee Rees–directed film *Bessie* (2015), *The Last Holiday* (2006) with LL Cool J*, Beauty Shop* (2005), and the 2017 comedy summer blockbuster *Girls Trip*.

- **Ice Cube** went from a reluctant actor in John Singleton's *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) to an accomplished actor/producer with films such as *Friday* (1995), *Are We There Yet?* (2005), and the *Barbershop* and *Ride Along* franchises, most funneled through his own production company, Cube Vision.
- **LL Cool J** made his first mark on the TV comedy *In the House* (1995–1998) but expanded to taking on many roles, including Julian Washington in *Any Given Sunday* (1999) and Dwayne Gittens/God in *In Too Deep* (1999), as well as Sam Hanna on the successful CBS series *NCIS: Los Angeles,* launched in 2009.
- **Wu-Tang's Method Man** built a solid acting career that includes fun fare like the 2001 film *How High* (with fellow rapper Redman), *The Wire,* and *Power Book II: Ghost*.
- **DMX** was on pace to be a major film star with films like *Exit Wounds* (2001), *Cradle 2 the Grave* (2003), and *Never Die Alone* (2004), but personal issues, including drug use, derailed him.
- **Mos Def/Yasiin Bey** received acclaim for his roles in *The Italian Job* (2003), *Cadillac Records* (2008), and as Brother Sam on Showtime's acclaimed drama *Dexter* in 2011.
- **Common**, one of the busiest raptors, with credits including *Just Wright* (2010) with Queen Latifah; *Barbershop: The Next Cut* (2016) with rappers Ice Cube, Eve, and Nicki Minaj; *John Wick: Chapter 2* (2017); and *The Hate U Give* (2018). He and John Legend won an Oscar for the song "Glory" for director Ava DuVernay's 2014 civil rights film *Selma.* He also served as executive producer for the 2020 documentary *40 Years a Prisoner* and for the Showtime series *The Chi,* created by Lena Waithe in 2018, in which he also acted.

Atlanta rappers Bow Wow, Ludacris, and T.I. have starred in a variety of projects, with Bow Wow in *Roll Bounce* (2005) and *Like Mike* (2002); Ludacris in *Crash* (2004), which won the Best Picture Oscar, and *The Fast and Furious* franchise; and T.I. in *ATL* (2006), *Takers* (2010), and the *Ant-Man* franchise. Despite appearing in numerous films, including his semiautobiographical 2005 debut *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, also the title of his 2003 debut album, and 2018's *Den of Thieves*, Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson's biggest impact has been in television and is highlighted in Chapter 18.

Kings and Queens of Comedy

Comedy has long proved a good segue into television and film for Black men in particular. Before Redd Foxx, Flip Wilson, and Bill Cosby became television stars, they were successful comedians with several hit comedy albums to their credit. For most Black standup comedians working their way up on comedy stages across the country, Richard Pryor, followed by Eddie Murphy, joined by arguably Jamie Foxx, Chris Rock, and Dave Chappelle, are the standards. As for Black female comedians, Whoopi Goldberg remains supreme.

Richard Pryor

The drama of Richard Pryor's personal life, including his notorious 1980 freebasing incident in which he set himself on fire, never overshadowed how much wider he opened Hollywood's doors for Black performers. Initially, Pryor found comedy success copying the clean-cut stage style of Bill Cosby. Later, he infused his comedy with personal experiences and stinging social commentary. Frequently, he's credited with changing American standup comedy overall. *That Nigger's Crazy* and *Is It Something I Said?* are just two of his five Grammy wins for his classic comedy albums.


REMEMBER

Pryor's influence extends well beyond the Black community. Among Black comedians, however, Pryor's influence has remained intact well into the 21st century. Some even divide the genre of Black American comedy into two categories: before Richard Pryor and after Richard Pryor.

Pryor flipped his success as a comedian into film roles. He won acclaim for his nuanced performance as a drug-addicted piano player in the 1972 Billie Holiday biopic *Lady Sings the Blues*; he played an impressive three characters in the comedy *Which Way Is Up?* (1977); and he starred as Wendell Pierce, the nation's first Black stock racing champion, in *Greased Lightning* (1977). Still, some audiences remember him fondly for his films with Gene Wilder: *Silver Streak* (1976), *Stir Crazy* (1980), and *See No Evil, Hear No Evil* (1989). A gifted writer, Pryor contributed to Mel Brooks's *Blazing Saddles* (1974) and television projects like *Sanford and Son,* his own short-lived series *The Richard Pryor Show,* and Lily Tomlin's Emmy Award–winning *Lily.*

Eddie Murphy

Eddie Murphy got his start at age 19 on television's *Saturday Night Live* (SNL), where he created memorable characters such as Buckwheat and Gumby. Before leaving the show in 1984, Murphy tested the movie waters opposite Nick Nolte in

48 Hours (1982), a comedy about a cop who is paired with a convict to track down a killer. Murphy followed that film with the successful cable comedy special *Delirious* as well as box office hits *Trading Places* (1983) (with fellow SNL alum Dan Aykroyd) and the *Beverly Hills Cop* franchise.

Murphy's concert film *Raw* (1987), in addition to *Coming to America* (1988) and *Boomerang* (1992), remain favorites among audiences. *Harlem Nights* (1989), which he wrote and directed, was a dream project pairing him with comedic greats and personal idols Pryor and Redd Foxx. The *Nutty Professor* and *Dr. Doolittle* franchises from the 1990s and 2000s, as well as *Shrek,* the animated franchise to which he lent his voice, are among his biggest box office successes. For the 2006 film adaptation of the legendary Broadway hit musical *Dreamgirls,* Murphy tackled a rare dramatic role and received a Best Supporting Actor Oscar nomination and other honors for his efforts.

Although his box office numbers cooled with films such as *The Adventures of Pluto Nash* (2002), *Norbit* (2007), *Meet the Dave* (2008), and *Mr. Church* (2016), Murphy never lost his star status. In 2015, he was awarded the prestigious Mark Twain Prize for American Humor. Earlier that same year, he appeared on *The Saturday Night Live 40th Anniversary Special* but disappointed fans by telling no jokes or doing any skits. That was rectified when he hosted *SNL* in December 2019, receiving his first-ever Emmy for Outstanding Guest Actor in a Comedy Series.

He also rehabilitated his movie star image with the Netflix film *Dolemite Is My Name,* a biographical comedy about the underground comedian and independent filmmaker Rudy Ray Moore. In March 2021, he also released the long-awaited sequel *Coming 2 America* on Amazon. A film veteran with more than 40 films, mostly as the star, and 30 years of experience under his belt, Murphy ranks among the highest grossing and most prolific leading actors of all time and arguably has few equals among comedians-turned-actors of any race. Like his idol Pryor, he also inspired a new generation of comics.

Male comedians who followed Pryor and Murphy

Following is a sampling of comedians/actors who might have found breaking into film and TV much harder without the success of Pryor and Murphy:

- **Arsenio Hall:** Hall is a long-time collaborator of Eddie Murphy's, and he was especially memorable in their iconic 1988 film *Coming to America.* Hall carved a lane all his very own with *The Arsenio Hall Show,* arguably the first successful late-night show with a Black host. The show ran from 1989 to 1994. Hall is credited for expanding the reach of hip-hop as well as for breaking a plethora

of new music artists, including TLC, Mariah Carey, Toni Braxton, Boyz II Men, and Bobby Brown, who all got their first break on Hall's show.

- **Martin Lawrence:** On the heels of his humble beginnings in *House Party* (1990), Martin Lawrence first hit big on TV as the host of Russell Simmons's *Def Comedy Jam* on HBO in 1992 and then as the star of the sitcom *Martin* (1992–1997). He made even greater strides on the big screen in the hit franchises *Big Momma's House,* as well as the buddy cop action romp *Bad Boys* with Will Smith, whose 2020 installment *Bad Boys for Life,* the sequel to 2003's *Bad Boys II,* grossed more than $400 million worldwide.
- **Jamie Foxx:** Even before winning the Best Actor Oscar for his turn as Ray Charles in the biopic *Ray* (2004), Jamie Foxx fared better than other Black comedians at the box office in noncomedic roles, most notably in *Any Given Sunday* (1999) and *Ali* (2001). The Texas native got his start on television in the irreverent comedy sketch show *In Living Color* from 1991 to 1994 before helming *The Jamie Foxx Show* from 1996 to 2001. Other roles for which he has received critical and popular acclaim include Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* (2012), *Just Mercy* (2019), and the animated film *Soul* (2020).
- **Chris Rock:** Despite appearing in a slew of films, Chris Rock enjoyed some of his greatest successes on stage, namely with comedy specials like his breakthrough 1996 HBO special *Chris Rock: Bring the Pain* and his 2018 Netflix special *Chris Rock: Tamborine*. On the small screen, he scored with both his own weekly late-night talk show, *The Chris Rock Show* (1997–2000), and his breakout series *Everybody Hates Chris,* loosely based on his own childhood growing up in a Black neighborhood in Brooklyn and attending a predominantly white school. In 2019, he took a well-publicized dramatic turn in the FX hit series *Fargo* as mobster Loy Cannon. Rock is one of the few Black comedians to host the Oscars twice, in 2005 and 2016.
- **The Original Kings of Comedy:** Capitalizing on the successful late 1990s comedy tour, the success of the Spike Lee–directed 2000 standup film *The Original Kings of Comedy* helped firmly establish the quartet:
  - **Bernie Mac:** Bernie Mac, thanks in large part to showrunner Larry Wilmore, had subsequent success with *The Bernie Mac Show.* He also added to his *Players Club* fame with other films, most notably the 2001 remake of *Ocean's Eleven*. Mac died in 2008.
  - **D.L. Hughley:** D.L. Hughley maintained an active standup career, venturing into more political fare as well as hosting his own radio show while also making timely television appearances and starring in the successful sitcom *The Hughleys* (1998-2002).
  - **Cedric the Entertainer:** St. Louis native Cedric the Entertainer parlayed his elevated star status into several TV shows, including TV Land's *Soul Man* (2012–2016) and *The Neighborhood* (opposite Tichina Arnold of *Martin* and

Everybody Hates Chris fame), which launched in 2018. He also starred in films like the *Barbershop* franchise and had various hosting gigs.

- **Steve Harvey:** Cleveland's own Steve Harvey created a multimedia empire, hosting the successful radio show *The Steve Harvey Morning Show,* penning books like the 2009 bestseller *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man,* which became the successful *Think Like a Man* franchise, starring in his long-running sitcom, *The Steve Harvey Show* (1996-2002), hosting his own talk show *Steve,* and taking over *The Family Feud* game show as well as memorably hosting the *Miss Universe* pageant.

- **Chris Tucker:** Although his role as Smokey in *Friday,* opposite Ice Cube, was his big break, Chris Tucker's greatest box office success came through the profitable *Rush Hour* franchise alongside Chinese martial artist and action star Jackie Chan. It grossed more than $800 million worldwide with three films in 1998, 2001, and 2007.

- **Dave Chappelle:** More of a pure standup comic than a TV or film star, Dave Chappelle rose to fame through his groundbreaking 2003 show, *Chappelle's Show,* on Comedy Central. Irreverent skits centered on Prince, Rick James, Tupac, and R. Kelly, as well as characters like Clayton Bigsby, a blind white supremacist who doesn't know he's Black. Unsatisfied with Comedy Central mandates for the show in Season 3 in 2005, Chappelle shocked many people by walking away from a $50 million contract.

  After a relatively long hiatus, Chappelle made a comeback in the 2010s through standup that led to his first *Saturday Night Live* hosting stint, which earned him an Emmy, the Saturday following Donald Trump's presidential election. That appearance also affirmed Chappelle as a leading political voice. Within weeks, Netflix announced a three-comedy special with Chappelle, for which it paid him $20 million for each show. The special successfully kicked off in March 2017.

- **Kevin Hart:** Philadelphia native Kevin Hart took the industry by storm when he began hitting with his successful comedy tours, including 2011's *Laugh at My Pain* and 2013's *Let Me Explain,* which became successful standup films. Teaming with Will Packer for the Tim Story–directed ensemble film *Think Like a Man,* adapted from comedian Steve Harvey's 2009 bestselling relationship book, was another major breakthrough for Hart. Co-starring with Ice Cube for the *Ride Along* franchise, once again directed by Tim Story and produced by Will Packer, resulted in two $100 million–plus films in 2014 and 2016 that established Hart as a major box office draw.



DEF COMEDY JAM

From 1992 to 1997, Russell Simmons's *Def Comedy Jam* introduced HBO audiences to some of the rawest and funniest Black comedians in the nation. Boldly mixing hip hop with comedy, the 30-minute shows created instant celebrities and revolutionized American comedy. Chris Tucker, Bernie Mac, Bill Bellamy, Adele Givens, and Eddie Griffin are just a few of the comedians who appeared on *Def Comedy Jam.* Martin Lawrence hosted the shows, and New York DJ Kid Capri provided the music.

Whoopi Goldberg

By entertainment standards, Whoopi Goldberg became the most successful Black female comedian in American history almost instantly. On October 24, a few weeks before her 30th birthday in 1984, her one-woman show *Whoopi Goldberg* hit Broadway. It closed to critical acclaim in March 1985, and aired to more acclaim on HBO as *Whoopi Goldberg: Direct from Broadway*.

Steven Spielberg caught Goldberg's Broadway show early and cast her as the lead of Celie in *The Color Purple,* released limitedly in December 1985 and wide in February 1986. Globally, the film grossed more than $142 million, and Goldberg was nominated for Best Actress at the Academy Awards. After that, her career shot off like a rocket. From 1985 to 1996, she appeared in at least one film a year and as many as three films some years. Her rapid success was something the vaudeville veteran and pioneering Black female comedian Moms Mabley — whose life Goldberg chronicled in the 2013 HBO documentary *Whoopi Goldberg Presents Moms Mabley: I Got Somethin' to Tell You* — probably couldn't fathom.

In addition to scoring big with the *Sister Act* franchise, Goldberg continued to flex her dramatic chops with the civil rights films *The Long Walk Home* (1990) and *Ghosts of Mississippi* (1996), where she played Myrlie Evers, wife of murdered civil rights activist Medgar Evers, along with *Ghost* (1990), for which she won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar for playing shady psychic Oda Mae Brown.

In 1994, Goldberg became the first female comedian and the first Black comedian to host the Academy Awards solo (Richard Pryor had co-hosted twice). In all, she hosted the Oscars four times (1994, 1996, 1999, and 2002). Chris Rock and Ellen DeGeneres, who have both hosted multiple times, became the second Black comedian and second female comedian to host the iconic awards show solo. By 2020, no other Black female comedian had hosted the Oscars.

Other comediennes

Here are some of the more notable comediennes.

Wanda Sykes

Wanda Sykes, who grew up in the Baltimore-DC metro area, was among the few post-Goldberg Black female comedians who made a major name for herself. Sykes, who got her big break on *The Chris Rock Show,* built perhaps the purest comedy career of the majority of super-successful Black comedians, sticking primarily to comedic roles on CBS's *The New Adventures of Old Christine,* HBO's *Curb Your Enthusiasm,* and *ABC's Black-ish.*

She also guest-hosted late-night comedy shows, even attempting her own politically slanted *The Wanda Sykes Show* on FOX in 2009 and several specials. In her HBO comedy special, *I'ma Be Me,* she infused her comedy with her truth as a Black LGBTQ woman without missing a laugh.

Mo'Nique

Introduced to the larger entertainment landscape as Nikki Parker on the UPN sitcom *The Parkers* (1999–2004), Mo'Nique also scored with *The Queens of Comedy,* a 2001 standup special, and 2005's *Mo'Nique's F.A.T. Chance,* a plus-size beauty pageant. The comedian made the greatest impact with her dramatic skills, earning the Best Supporting Actress Oscar for the 2009 film *Precious* nearly 20 years after Whoopi Goldberg won hers (approximately 50 years after Hattie McDaniel won the very first one).

In the late 2010s, Mo'Nique became negatively vocal about her *Precious* awards campaign experience, calling out director Lee Daniels as well as executive producers Tyler Perry and Oprah Winfrey. Not long after, in 2018, Mo'Nique called for a boycott of Netflix for paying Black women comedians unfairly. The following year, she filed a lawsuit charging the streaming service with racial and gender discrimination; the suit later was permitted to proceed through the courts. Other memorable roles by Mo'Nique include her Emmy-nominated portrayal of blues singer Ma' Rainey (who didn't hide her same-sex attraction) in the 2015 HBO film *Bessie* by openly LGBTQ director Dee Rees. Mo'Nique's late-night show on BET, *The Mo'Nique Show,* which ran from 2009 to 2011, received positive fan feedback.

Tiffany Haddish

Tiffany Haddish's first major TV breakthrough came via the edgy NBC sitcom *The Carmichael Show* (2015–2017), starring comedian Jerrod Carmichael. But her role as Dina in the summer 2017 blockbuster comedy *Girls Trip,* starring Queen Latifah, Jada Pinkett-Smith, and Regina Hall, transformed her into one of the most recognizable female comedians in Hollywood. That fall, she became the first Black female comedian to host *SNL* —she won the Best Outstanding Actress in a Comedy Series Emmy. Her memoir *The Last Black Unicorn* (Gallery Books) became a *NY Times* bestseller.

In addition to starring in comedy specials like *She Ready! From the Hood to Hollywood* for Showtime, Haddish became an in-demand film actress, starring in *Night School* with Kevin Hart, in Tyler Perry's *Nobody's Fool* and *Uncle Drew* (with *The Carmichael Show* castmate Lil Rel Howery) in 2018, and in *The Kitchen* (2019) with Melissa McCarthy. She also lent her voice to animated films such as *The Angry Birds Movie 2* and *Secret Lives of Pets 2*. Haddish also starred in the TV series *The Last O.G.* (2018–2020) with Tracy Morgan as well as the limited series *Self Made: Inspired by the Life of Madam C.J. Walker* (2020). In 2021, she became the second Black female comedian, after Whoopi Goldberg, to win the Grammy for Best Comedy album and only the fourth woman to ever win in that category in Grammy history.

Enter Stage Left: Serious Actors

Early Black film actors such as Lena Horne, Sammy Davis Jr., and Harry Belafonte built their acting careers from their musical gifts, but toward the middle of the 20th century, dedicated Black actors with no musical foundation began to emerge. The following sections introduce a few of the many venerable Black actors.

Sidney Poitier

Defying Hollywood typecasting, Sidney Poitier received plum roles from the beginning of his career, playing a doctor in his first film, *No Way Out* (1950), and a reverend in *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1951). He exuded dignity even when playing a convict in *The Defiant Ones* (1958), for which he received an Oscar nomination. In 1961, he revived his powerful stage role as Walter Lee Younger in the film version of the Broadway hit *A Raisin in the Sun*. He also became the first Black actor to win an Academy Award for Best Actor for his starring role in *Lilies of the Field* (1963), in which his character unwillingly aids impoverished nuns. He also helped put interracial dating and marriage front and center with the 1967 film *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* just months after the Supreme Court decision in *Loving v. Virginia* overturned laws banning interracial marriage. In the 1970s, he starred, alongside Bill Cosby, in the successful Black films *Uptown Saturday Night, Let's Do It Again,* and *A Piece of the Action*, which he also directed. Poitier, who would also become the first Black director to release a $100 million-grossing film with *Stir Crazy* (1980) starring Richard Pryor and Gene Wilder, proved he could also appeal to the masses.



Raised in the Bahamas, Sidney Poitier came to New York as a teenager. Initially rejected by the American Negro Theater (ANT; see Chapter 15) because of his thick accent, Poitier worked hard to lose it. Determined to become an actor, Poitier worked as a janitor at the ANT in exchange for acting lessons.

Yet Poitier's career wasn't without controversy. Black critics of his day charged that Poitier, whom they characterized as "nonthreatening" to white audiences, ushered in a new stereotype of the "ebony saint." Others noted that Poitier rarely enjoyed the on-screen romantic associations of other leading men. Today, however, Poitier's legendary status is never in question.

Cicely Tyson

Born in 1924 in Harlem to Caribbean immigrants from Nevis, Cicely Tyson set a high bar in acting, intentionally playing roles that brought dignity and humanity to Black women specifically and Black people as a whole.

Tyson, who began her career on stage, landed her first film role in her early 30s playing Dottie in *Carib Gold* (1956), opposite the great Ethel Waters. After more than a decade spent mostly in TV, Tyson hit her stride in the 1970s with notable films and miniseries. Her role in the 1972 film *Sounder* earned her an Oscar nomination, while *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* in 1974 got her an Emmy. Her roles in *The River Niger* (1977) and *A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich* (1978) earned her the first of numerous NAACP Image Awards. Real-life heroines she played include Wilma Rudolph, Harriet Tubman, Coretta Scott King, and super educator Marva Collins.

Even in her later years, Tyson remained at the top of her craft, including a Tony Award-winning performance in *A Trip to Bountiful* in 2013, which marked her first Broadway play in 20 years. Her presence in Tyler Perry films introduced newer fans to her excellence. A year prior to her death in 2021 at age 96, she delivered stellar performances in Tyler Perry's *A Fall from Grace*, in Ava DuVernay's anthology *Cherish the Day* on the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN), and opposite Viola Davis on the Shonda Rhimes-produced *How to Get Away with Murder.*

Denzel Washington

Like Poitier, Denzel Washington distinguished himself in one spectacular role after the next. After making only a handful of films, he earned his first Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor for playing Steve Biko in *Cry Freedom* (1987). Two years later, Washington won the Best Supporting Actor Oscar, his first, for the film *Glory* (1989).

Teaming up with director Spike Lee for the jazz-themed *Mo' Better Blues* (1990) launched a collaboration that would include three more films, including *Malcolm X* (1992), for which Washington received his first Best Actor nomination and help establish him as a solid leading actor. He won his first Best Actor Oscar for playing a corrupt cop in *Training Day* (2001), directed by Antoine Fuqua. Other Best Actor

nominations came from his performances in *The Hurricane* (1999), *Flight* (2012), *Fences* (2016), and *Roman J. Israel, Esq.* (2017).

Fences, the long-awaited big-screen adaptation of August Wilson's Pulitzer Prize–winning play, which Washington also directed, earned a Best Picture Oscar nomination as well as an Oscar win as Best Supporting Actress for Viola Davis. Both Washington and Davis received Tony Awards for the Broadway production. *Fences,* as well as the 2020 Netflix film *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom,* which Washington produced, starring Viola Davis and Chadwick Boseman, are part of Washington's commitment to make feature-length adaptations of all ten of August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle (also known as Century Cycle).

Washington's other films as a director include *Antwone Fisher* (2002), Derek Luke's feature film debut; *The Great Debaters* (2007), starring Nate Parker; and *Journal for Jordan,* starring Michael B. Jordan, which wrapped up filming in 2021.

Washington's many other standout films include *The Equalizer* films (2014, 2018) and *The Magnificent 7* (2016) with Antoine Fuqua. Each crossed the $100 million mark in global box office receipts, three of the more than 20 films he appeared in that grossed more than $100 million worldwide.

Morgan Freeman

Prior to his roles on the big screen, Morgan Freeman's most notable role had been on the PBS children's show *The Electric Company*. Freeman's Oscar-nominated roles include three Best Actor nominations for *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989), *The Shawshank Redemption* (2004), and *Invictus* (2009). Freeman, who received his first Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actor in *Street Smart* (1987), won the Best Supporting Actor Oscar for *Million Dollar Baby* (2004). Freeman's many beloved roles include tough high school principal Joe Clark in *Lean on Me* (1989). He also starred in *Se7en* (1995), *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and *The Dolphin Tale* (2011).

Wesley Snipes

An actor with range, Wesley Snipes co-starred with Denzel Washington in *Mo' Better Blues* (1990), played opposite Angela Bassett in *Waiting to Exhale* (1995), and donned heels for *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar* (1995). But Snipes, who has the distinction of appearing in Michael Jackson's historic "Bad" video (1987), is perhaps best known as a pioneering action star.

Snipes emerged as a bankable star with his role as drug kingpin Nino Brown in the 1991 film *New Jack City.* He followed with Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* (1991) and *White Men Can't Jump* (1992). Snipes, who had begun studying martial arts as age 12,

connected as an action star in countless films, including *Passenger 57* (1992), *Demolition Man* (1993), and the *Blade* trilogy (which kicked off in 1998) to become one of the biggest stars in the 1990s.

Eight of his films crossed the $100 million domestic box office mark, and collectively he's exceeded more than a billion dollars in global box office. An income tax conviction resulted in prison time from 2010 to 2013, pausing his career, but Snipes got back in the swing with *The Expendables 3* (2014) with Sylvester Stallone and a bevy of action stars, as well as *Dolemite Is My Name* (2019) and *Coming 2 America* (2021) with Eddie Murphy.

Samuel L. Jackson

In a career spanning at least four decades, Chattanooga-raised Morehouse alum Samuel L. Jackson earned more than 190 acting roles, most of them in film. He generated a collective box office of more than $27 billion worldwide, essentially making him the highest grossing actor of all time.

Playing the Bible-quoting hitman Jules with a penchant for the word "motherf---er" in writer/director Quentin Tarantino's 1995 smash *Pulp Fiction* put Jackson — who had appeared in various films, including Spike Lee's *School Daze* (1988) and *Jungle Fever* (1991) — on the fast track to stardom. He followed with films such as *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (1995), *A Time to Kill* (1996), and *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace* (1999), in addition to starring in Kasie Lemmons' debut feature *Eve's Bayou* (1997).

In the 2000s, Jackson kicked into overdrive, starring in *Shaft* (2000) and *Unbreakable* (2001), continuing his *Star Wars* appearances, and voicing the animated 2007 series *Afro-Samurai* as well as Gin Rummy in *The Boondocks* (2005–2010). In the 2010s, he officially joined the Marvel Cinematic Universe as Nick Fury in *Iron Man 2* (2010). He appeared in its various films, including *The Avengers* (2012) and *Captain Marvel* (2019). He also appeared in smaller films such as *The Banker* (2020), voiced Lucius Best/Frozone in *The Incredibles* franchise, and played the villain in Quentin Tarantino's 2012 film *Django Unchained*.

Halle Berry

Former beauty pageant runner-up Halle Berry will be forever remembered for becoming the first Black woman to win the Oscar for Best Actress in 2002 (the same year Denzel Washington won his Best Actor Oscar) for her role as Leticia in the independent film *Monster's Ball* (2001), produced by Lee Daniels. Just a few years prior, the Cleveland native had won the Emmy for Lead Actress in a Limited Series for her 1999 HBO film *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge.* There, she played the

actress who, with the 1954 film *Carmen Jones,* was the first Black woman to even be nominated for the Best Actress Oscar.

Berry's debut feature film role was as a crack addict opposite Samuel L. Jackson in Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* (1991). Other films Berry is known for include *Boomerang* (1992), *B.A.P.S.* (1997), the Bond film *Die Another Day* (2002), and the *X-Men* franchise as Storm, spanning 2000 to 2014.

Viola Davis

Prior to making her mark on the big and small screens in the 2000s, South Carolina-born, Rhode Island-raised, Juilliard-trained Viola Davis made it on the stage with notable appearances in four of August Wilson's Pittsburgh Cycle, also known as the American Century Cycle. She won a Tony as Tonya for the 2001 production of *King Hedley II*, the ninth play in Wilson's Cycle, the Obie in 1999 for her lead performance in *Everybody's Ruby,* and the 2004 Drama Desk Award for award-winning playwright Lynn Nottage's *Intimate Apparel*.

Perhaps fitting, her Hollywood breakthrough came with *Doubt* (2008), the film adaptation of the acclaimed 2004 play for which she received her first Oscar nomination for Best Supporting Actress, sharing the category with Taraji P. Henson who received a nomination for *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (2008), in 2009. From there, she continued to soar, garnering an Oscar nomination as Best Actress for the 2011 film *The Help.*

Working opposite Washington in *Fences* (2016), another adapted Wilson play, Davis won her first Oscar for Best Supporting Actress in 2017. Not content with just her own success, Davis, who launched JuVee Productions in 2011 with her actor/producer husband Julius Tennon, became a loud voice for Black actresses in particular, advocating for more opportunities in which to demonstrate their talents.

Davis, herself, made history, becoming the first Black actress to win the Emmy as lead in a drama series as well as the most Oscar-nominated Black actress, with her 2021 Best Actress nomination for the film adaptation of August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, produced by Denzel Washington; she shared the category with newcomer, singer Andra Day in the Lee Daniels-directed *The United States vs. Billie Holiday*, making it the first time since 1973 that two Black women were nominated for Best Actress in the same year and only the second time ever in Oscar history.

And the Award Goes to . . .

With both Washington and Berry winning Oscars for Best Actor and Best Actress, and Will Smith being a Best Actor nominee for *Ali*, the 21st century looked brighter for Black actors in terms of mainstream recognition. Several actors received nominations and wins with some notable highlights:

- **2005:** Jamie Foxx, a double nominee for Best Supporting Actor for *Collateral,* won his Best Actor Oscar for the 2004 Ray Charles biopic *Ray* (find more on Jamie Foxx in the "Kings and queens of comedy" section earlier in the chapter). The same year, Freeman won for Best Supporting Actor, with Don Cheadle also nominated for Best Actor for *Hotel Rwanda,* playing Paul Rusesabagina during a war.
- **2007:** Forest Whitaker won the Best Actor Oscar for playing Ugandan president Idi Amin in *The Last King of Scotland* (2006). Smith was nominated for Best Actor for *The Pursuit of Happyness,* inspired by the real-life story of businessman Chris Gardner and his son. Jennifer Hudson won Best Supporting Actress for *Dreamgirls,* with her co-star Eddie Murphy also receiving a nomination for Best Supporting Actor.
- **2010:** The 2009 film *Precious* garnered nominations for Gabourey Sidibe for Best Actress and a win for Mo'Nique for Best Supporting Actress.
- **2012:** Octavia Spencer won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress for *The Help* (2011).
- **2014:** Lupita Nyong'o won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar for *12 Years a Slave* (2013).
- **2017:** Davis won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar for *Fences* (2016) and Mahershala Ali won the Best Supporting Actor Oscar for *Moonlight* (2016).
- **2019:** Ali won the Best Supporting Actor Oscar for *Green Book* (2018) and Regina King won the Best Supporting Actress Oscar for *If Beale Street Could Talk* (2018).

In 2015, the Academy awarded all 20 acting nominations to white actors, prompting April Reign to create the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite in protest. The same lack of representation happened for the 2016 Academy Awards, curiously during the tenure of Cheryl Boone Isaacs, the first Black president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. The heightened awareness generated by #OscarsSoWhite created necessary conversation around diversity and inclusion in the industry overall. The NAACP Image Awards and the AAFCA Awards from the African American Film Critics Association (which began as a group of critics in 2003 but blossomed into an advocacy group championing diversity and inclusion) are two awards shows that honor the best in film and TV, with a focus on Black talent and content.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Exploring the early rumblings of being Black on TV
- Tracking comedy's impact
- Bringing the drama
- Facing Black reality TV
- Creating empires

Chapter 18
Black Hollywood: TV

Most Americans can't imagine a time when Black people appeared on television so infrequently that it was an event for Black viewers. As this chapter discusses, Black people have made significant contributions to the small screen.

Black Hollywood scholar Donald Bogle traces the beginnings of Black Americans on television to the one-night-only broadcast of *The Ethel Waters Show* by NBC in 1939, when television was still in its experimental stage. Other early Black shows Bogle notes include *The Bob Howard Show* on CBS in 1948, which has the distinction of being television's first regular broadcast show with a Black host; *Sugar Hill Times* (1949), a short-lived variety show starring Harry Belafonte that was the first network show with an all-Black cast; as well as *The Hazel Scott Show* (1950), starring the beautiful pianist; and the *Nat "King" Cole Show* (1956) showcasing the pioneering singer. When these shows went off the air, Black Americans showed up on television mainly as entertainers through guest appearances on programs like *The Ed Sullivan Show* until 1965. The actors who appeared in the comedies *Beulah* and *The Amos 'n' Andy Show* were exceptions.

That changed in 1965, when Bill Cosby revolutionized weekly television as agent Alexander Scott in the espionage drama series *I Spy.* Others like Greg Morris in *Mission Impossible,* Nichelle Nichols in *Star Trek,* and Clarence Williams III in *The Mod Squad* quickly followed. There was even an integrated high school drama, *Room 222,* chronicling the experiences of the Black male teacher Pete Dixon played by Lloyd Haynes. Comedy, however, ruled as the primary vehicle for Black talent.

Early Black TV Comedies

As early as the 1950s, two TV comedies prominently featured Black characters: *Beulah* and *The Amos 'n' Andy Show.* Both series had beginnings in radio, in which white actors voiced the Black characters. When *Beulah* was adapted from radio to television, it was clear that although the Black maid was technically the star, her role was to cater to the white family she served.

The fact that Amos and Andy, played by Alvin Childress and Spencer Williams, were intended to be buffoonish didn't sit well with many Black Americans, who largely objected to the main characters speaking what they perceived as "poor English." The many Black lawyers, judges, and other professionals on the show couldn't balance out the stereotypical images for its critics. The NAACP even protested the show. Despite flashes of genuine humor, CBS pulled *Amos 'n' Andy* after two years but syndicated it until 1966. From that time until the late 1960s, Black Americans were largely absent from television comedies on a routine basis.

Opening the doors wider

During the late 1960s into the 1970s, television underwent major changes. Although Bill Cosby secured his first solo comedy series with 1969's *The Bill Cosby Show*, two other shows from that period had a bigger impact:

- ***Julia:*** Diahann Carroll's 1968 series *Julia,* in which she starred as a widowed mother working as a nurse, was a rare show with a positive view of the life of a professional, Black single mother, especially for a comedy. But many critics charged that although it was nice, it wasn't groundbreaking. With the Black Power movement on the rise, for some Black and white critics, Carroll, as Julia, wasn't "Black enough." Despite the times, race was rarely a prominent storyline, with the show's white writers opting to emphasize Julia's middle-class status. Still the series ran from 1968 to 1971. In the 1980s, Carroll made television history again as the wealthy Dominique Deveraux on TV's top-rated soapy drama *Dynasty*.
- ***The Flip Wilson Show:*** Variety shows were a staple of early television, and several Black Americans, including Sammy Davis Jr., starred in their own shows. None, however, had the impact of Flip Wilson in the early 1970s. Characters like Reverend LeRoy of the Church of What's Happening Now, Sonny the White House janitor, and of course, Wilson's alter ego Geraldine Jones made the show a hit. *TIME* magazine even heralded Wilson as "TV's First Black Superstar" on its cover in 1972. Television executives took note of Wilson's popularity, whereas Black intellectuals criticized Wilson for his comedy routines, which they felt reveled in the same stereotypes apparent in shows like *The Amos 'n' Andy Show*.

Getting an edge

As TV became slightly edgier in the 1970s, so did its Black shows. *Sanford and Son*, *Good Times*, and *The Jeffersons* are three of the most memorable. Interestingly, a number of these shows experienced clashes between white writers and Black actors:

- ***Sanford and Son:*** Despite conflict off-camera, Red Foxx scored as Fred Sanford, a cantankerous Los Angeles junkman who lived with his son. *Sanford and Son* was one of the most popular shows of its time. Its five-year run ended in 1977, but the series continues to air in syndication.
- ***Good Times:*** *Good Times,* built around a character played by Esther Rolle on the 1972 television series *Maude,* featured a family trying to make ends meet in a Chicago housing project. Originally, the show's producers wanted Rolle to play a single mother, but she refused. Unlike other shows, *Good Times* brought dignity and humanity to poorer Black people. Sensitive to negative portrayals of Black Americans, stage actors Rolle and John Amos, who played her husband, objected to the increasing prominence of Jimmie Walker's character J.J. To them, he appeared buffoonish with his signature exclamation "Dyn-o-mite!" and disdain for school. Amos eventually left the show, and Rolle soon followed. Problems and all, *Good Times* remains an important part of television history, as evidenced by its success in syndication.
- ***The Jeffersons:*** Another groundbreaking series for the time, *The Jeffersons* depicted wealthy Black Americans. Like Archie Bunker from *All in the Family* — the show that first introduced the Jeffersons — George Jefferson, who gained wealth as a dry cleaner, was written to be as bigoted against white people as Archie was against everybody else but became a bigger symbol of Black business success and excellence. In addition, *The Jeffersons* regularly depicted a committed interracial marriage through George and Louise's neighbors, Tom and Helen Willis.

Kid comedies

Sitcoms came and went throughout the 1970s and early 1980s. For a time, all-Black shows like *What's Happening!!* (loosely based on the popular 1975 film *Cooley High*) lingered, but they soon gave way to broader comedies featuring Black characters, particularly children. Here are a few examples:

- Gary Coleman and Todd Bridges became fast celebrities from *Diff'rent Strokes,* a series about a rich white single father who adopts two orphaned Black kids.
- Kim Fields played the lone Black kid in *The Facts of Life,* a series about life at a boarding school.

» Emmanuel Lewis played a Black orphan cared for by a former white football player and his wife in the hit series *Webster*.

In the late 1990s and 2000s, the Disney Channel and Nickelodeon helped change the TV landscape, leading the way for shows that either prominently featured Black kid actors or, better yet, starred them, most notably with Kel Mitchell and Kenan Thompson on Nickelodeon's *All That* from 1994 to 2005. Their popular "Good Burger" skit became a movie in 1997. They also had their own show, *Kenan & Kel* (1996–2000). Other examples include the ABC/CBS series *Family Matters* (1989-1998), which made Steve Urkel, played by Jaleel White, a pop culture icon and is ranked among TV's longest-running Black cast comedies; ABC/WB sitcom *Sister, Sister* (1994–1999), starring twin sisters Tia and Tamera Mowry; Nickelodeon's *Cousin Skeeter* (1998–2001), starring Robert Ri'chard and Meagan Good; Disney's *The Famous Jett Jackson* (1998–2001), starring Lee Thompson Young; former *The Cosby Show* star Raven Symone on Disney's *That's So Raven* (2003–2007); Keke Palmer in Nickelodeon's *True Jackson, VP* (2008–2011); and Zendaya in Disney's *K.C. Undercover* (2015–2018).



Interestingly, the film shorts *Our Gang,* better known as *The Little Rascals,* which appeared before television introduced Black child actors to Hollywood. In the 1950s and into the 1970s, *Our Gang* showed up on television. Despite reinforcing stereotypes such as Black children routinely eating watermelon and fried chicken, *Our Gang*'s Ernie Morrison, who played Sunshine Sammy, was the first Black actor signed to a long-term Hollywood contract. Most people, however, are more familiar with Billie Thomas, who played Buckwheat, known for his signature unruly hair, because of Eddie Murphy's parodies of him on *Saturday Night Live.*

Cue the Huxtables and A Different World

It's really impossible to overstate the significance of *The Cosby Show* in television history, even as Bill Cosby, a once-revered father figure, lost his stature when he was imprisoned for sexual assault in 2018. A sitcom about the lives of an upper-middle class Black family headed by a husband and wife who were a doctor and lawyer, *The Cosby Show* was the most-watched show by all Americans during its eight-year run in the 1980s and early 1990s. For years, Cosby, who also created the Saturday morning cartoon classic *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*, which premiered in 1972 and ran until 1985, received "top television dad" honors.

Beyond its entertainment value, *The Cosby Show* educated Americans about Black American history and culture in a noninvasive way: The family home showcased Black art; Cosby's character Cliff Huxtable was a huge jazz buff, and some episodes featured legends like Lena Horne; and generational storylines showed complete families on both sides. The show sometimes ventured into political waters,

addressing the civil rights movement as well as apartheid in South Africa. Overall, the show was simultaneously traditionally American and Black American, creating stars out of Phylicia Rashad, who played matriarch Clair Huxtable, and their children Denise, Theo, Vanessa, and Sondra, played by Lisa Bonet, Malcolm-Jamal Warner, Tempestt Bledsoe, and Sabrina Le Beauf.

A Different World (1987–1993), a spinoff of *The Cosby Show* initially starring Lisa Bonet, highlighted the Black college experience at the fictional HBCU Hillman (find more about Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Chapter 12). The show also starred Jasmine Guy as Whitley, Kadeem Hardison as Dwayne Wayne, Daryl M. Bell as Ron Johnson, Cree Summer as Freddie Brooks, and more, including Jada Pinkett (Smith) as Lena. With Howard University Alum Debbie Allen at the helm, *A Different World* explored many important issues, including date rape, apartheid, racism, classism, and Black Greek life.



HISTORICAL ROOTS

Emmy winner and prolific TV producer Lena Waithe named her development and production company Hillman Grad Productions in homage to the fictional HBCU on *A Different World*.

BLACK WOMEN IN THE SNL CAST

Black female comedians on the variety sketch show *Saturday Night Live* have been scarce. Without question, Maya Rudolph had the best run. From May 6, 2000, until November 3, 2007, Rudolph (the biracial daughter of celebrated singer Minnie Riperton) was an *SNL* regular who continued in a recurring presence even into 2020, treating audiences to her portrayals of various personalities, including Beyoncé, First Lady Michelle Obama, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Gayle King, Whitney Houston, and Kamala Harris, particularly along the 2020 presidential campaign trail and as Vice President Elect.

Rudolph went on to star in several movies, including *Bridesmaids,* as well as TV shows such as *The Good Place.* She also lent her voice to various animated projects in TV and film, including *Big Mouth, The Willoughbys,* and *The Angry Birds* franchise. In 2020, Rudolph won two of her three Emmy nominations for portraying Harris on *SNL* and voicing Connie the Hormone Monstress in *Big Mouth.*

Prior to Rudolph, only three Black women, Yvonne Hudson, Danitra Vance, and Ellen Cleghorne, had been *SNL* regulars. In 2014, Sasheer Zamata and Leslie Jones joined *SNL,* leaving in 2017 and 2019, respectively. Going into 2021, Ego Nwodim, who joined the show in 2018, was the last Black woman *SNL* regular.

Targeting the Black Hip-Hop Audience

New networks Fox and The WB zeroed in on the young Black hip-hop audience in the early 1990s with several shows that included

- ***In Living Color***, an in-your-face sketch comedy show that incorporated popular culture, including a hip-hop DJ and dancers; the show made the Wayans family stars — Damon in front of the camera and Keenan behind — along with Jamie Foxx (not to mention white actor Jim Carey)
- ***The Fresh Prince of Bel Air***, a comedy starring rapper Will Smith whose mother sends him from his rough Philadelphia neighborhood to Los Angeles, to Bel-Air, to live with his wealthy uncle Phil and his family
- ***Martin***, a comedy built around a Detroit radio personality (played by Martin Lawrence), his girlfriend, and their friends
- ***Living Single***, a comedy starring Queen Latifah and Kim Fields revolving around six friends, four women and two men, that preceded the all-white NBC hit *Friends* by a year

Interestingly, Fox, The WB, and even UPN, which created Black shows like *Moesha*, *Girlfriends*, and *The Parkers*, began distancing themselves from the Black audience after they gained firmer footing as a network to pursue non-Black TV audiences. NBC, ABC, and CBS had presented few Black-oriented shows since the 1970s and 1980s, choosing to have one show on one night at a time and never in a block like UPN did on Monday nights, with its entire comedy block featuring Black cast sitcoms like *The Parkers*, *Eve*, *Girlfriends*, and *Half & Half* in 2003.

The merger of UPN and The WB to form The CW in 2006 left the fate of the Black-oriented sitcom there mostly up in the air. *The Game* (2006–2009, 2011–2015) from *Girlfriends* creator Mara Brock Akil made it to the new network, but relocated to BET two years after its 2009 cancellation by The CW. The show, about a fictional football team, its players, and the women in their lives, starred Tia Mowry from *Sister, Sister* (1994–1999). Immensely popular, the show enjoyed later success on BET for four additional seasons, plus thrived in syndication.

Cable TV Opens the Door to More

In contrast to network TV, cable was largely dedicated to Black comedy, particularly comedians, initially through influential shows such as HBO's *Def Comedy Jam* and *The Chris Rock Show*, along with numerous standup comedy specials from Whoopi Goldberg, Chris Rock, Mike Epps, Cedric the Entertainer, and others in the

1990s and 2000s. Comedian Dave Chappelle shook up basic cable with his edgy sketch comedy program *Chappelle's Show* in 2003 on Comedy Central before discontinuing the show in 2005.

Cartoon Network raised the temperature with its Adult Swim animated show *The Boondocks* (2005–2014) from comic artist Aaron McGruder. Its two main characters, Huey and Riley, voiced by Regina King, often criticize Black political leadership and offer blunt cultural commentary. In this time, Tyler Perry also proved that he had a TV audience with his sitcoms *House of Payne* (2006) and *Meet the Browns* (2009–2011) on TBS.

In the 2010s, however, television seemed to get the memo, offering up more complex Black TV comedies like Issa Rae's *Insecure* (2016–2021), placing *The Mis-Adventures of Awkward Black Girl* star in her native Inglewood in the Los Angeles metro area to explore relationships and work from a Black millennial perspective. FX's off-kilter *Atlanta* (2016–present) stars Donald Glover as the underachieving Earn, who attempts to manage his cousin Paper Boi's transition from drug dealer to rapper. The show amplified Glover's stardom while making fast stars of Brian Tyree Henry and LaKeith Stanfield, who play Alfred "Paper Boi" Miles and his main friend Darius.

BLACK-ISH MAKES A SPLASH

Kenya Barris's breakthrough in 2014 with his ABC comedy *Black-ish* opened up TV for his *ish* universe, including *Grown-ish* (2018) and *Mixed-ish* (2019). *Black-ish* features Anthony Anderson, who had success in *Two Can Play That Game* (2001), *Scary Movie 3* and *4* (2003, 2006), and the 2000s *Barbershop* franchise as Andre "Dre" Johnson. Barris used his own life, including his then-five kids with longtime wife Rainbow and his challenging childhood growing up in Inglewood, California, as a blueprint to create a multigenerational comedy. *Black-ish* tells the story of a husband and father from humble means managing his affluent lifestyle with his biracial wife Bow (or Rainbow), their four kids (the school-age twins Diane and Jack and teenagers Zoey and Junior), and his parents, Pop and Ruby, played by Laurence Fishburne and Jenifer Lewis.

Black-ish's penchant for addressing serious issues of the day such as police killings of unarmed Black men both courted controversy and praise. Since its debut, *Black-ish* was among TV's top comedies. *Grown-ish,* exploring oldest daughter Zoey's (Yara Shahidi) college experience on Freeform, didn't shy away from controversial issues like drugs, sex, and college loan debt, whereas *Mixed-ish* is a throwback to Bow's childhood, navigating life as biracial. Based on the success of these three shows, Barris, who also co-penned scripts for films like 2017's *Girls Trip,* launched his own show, *#BlackAF,* on Netflix as part of a 2018 deal with the streamer for a reported $100 million.

Black Women Comedians Contribute on TV

On TV, Black female comedians haven't fared as well as their Black male counterparts. Black male comedians who have led their own sitcoms especially are too numerous to name (see Chapter 17 for a rundown). Although Black women comedians haven't received TV shows in record numbers, their presences did grow in the 2000s. Some of the highlights in daytime television include Sherri Shepherd on ABC's *The View* (2007–2014); Sheryl Underwood on the CBS show *The Talk* (2011–), along with Aisha Tyler (2011–2017); and Loni Love on FOX's *The Real* (2011–). Robin Thede created *A Black Lady Sketch Show* for HBO in 2019. Amber Ruffin, who rose to fame through her appearances on *Late Night with Seth Meyers*, for which she also wrote, launched *The Amber Ruffin Show* on Peacock in 2020. Comedians who emerged in the 2010s include Dulce Sloan, who rose to fame on *The Daily Show*; former *SNL* writer Sam Jay; Nicole Byer of *Nailed It* fame; Yvonne Orji, best known for HBO's *Insecure*; and Michelle Buteau of *The First Wives Club* on BET Plus.

BLACK SOAP STARS

Most people are surprised to discover that Cicely Tyson, James Earl Jones, Phylicia Rashad, and Laurence Fishburne are among the long list of Black actors who appeared on soap operas at some point in their careers. Vivica A. Fox even shared how she got the role of Will Smith's girlfriend in the film *Independence Day* (1996) when the producer's wife saw her as Dr. Stephanie Simmons on *The Young and the Restless.*

In the 1980s, a storyline on *All My Children* involving the characters Angie and Jessie (played by Debi Morgan and Darnell Williams) broke the soap opera mold by prominently featuring a Black couple. On *Days of Our Lives,* actor-turned-screenwriter Tina Andrews's interracial relationship was so controversial with viewers that she was fired. In time, interracial relationships weren't automatic deal breakers on soap operas. Kristoff St. John, who played Neil Winters, on CBS's *The Young & the Restless* from 1991 until his death in 2019, was a true trailblazer and soap icon. Neil's love triangle with Victoria Rowell as Drucilla and Shemar Moore as his brother Malcolm casting doubt if Lily (Christel Khalil) was his child was a pioneering storyline for Black soap actors. In addition, St. John helped anchor the short-lived *Generations* (1989-1991), which was the first soap opera to incorporate a Black family at its inception. Other notable Black actors who appeared on soaps include Nia Long, Lauryn Hill, Michael B. Jordan, Lamman Rucker, and Taye Diggs.

By 2020, daytime soap operas had almost completely faded from the TV landscape, with the exception of *The Young and the Restless* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* on CBS, ABC's *General Hospital,* and NBC's *Days of Our Lives.*

TV's many unsung Black female comedic trailblazers include LaWanda Page, best known as Aunt Esther from *Sanford and Son;* Marsha Warfield, who played Roz Russell on *Night Court;* Thea Vidale from the sitcom *Thea;* Kim Wayans from *In Living Color;* Kim Coles from *Living Single;* and Kim Whitley from various projects, including *Black Dynamite* in film and TV, as well as Adele Givens and Sommore of *Def Comedy Jam* fame.

No More Drama with Dramas

For a long time, very few networks attempted all-Black dramatic series or those depicting multiple strong Black characters. In television, ensemble casts, particularly for hospital dramas and cop shows, served as the winning strategy for including Black actors. *Hill Street Blues, St. Elsewhere, Miami Vice, L.A. Law,* and others provided weekly exposure for actors such as Michael Warren, Denzel Washington, Philip Michael Thomas, and Blair Underwood. In the 1990s, the cop genre even became more hip-hop-oriented; *New York Undercover,* for example, which paired a Black and Latino cop, relied heavily on hip-hop dress, slang, music, and attitude. By the early 2000s, shows such as *ER* had firmly established a standard for using Black talent sparingly.

The Rhimes effect

Pioneering Black showrunner Shonda Rhimes shook up the formula a bit with multiracial casting of her long-running flagship ABC series, *Grey's Anatomy* (2005–present), and then broke the mold completely with *Scandal* (2012–2018), with Kerry Washington becoming the first Black actress to lead a primetime drama series. Her character, political fixer Olivia Pope, and her ongoing affair with the president of the United States Fitz became embedded in television history.

Rhimes then followed *Scandal* by executive producing ABC's *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014–2020), starring Viola Davis as the complex lawyer and professor Annalise Keating. In this role, Davis became the first Black woman to win the Emmy for Outstanding Actress in a Drama Series in 2015. Prior to Rhimes and her Shondaland empire, network television offered little variety for Black actors in dramatic series, but many of them fared better with cable series.

BLACK REALITY SHOWS

Bravo's expansion of its *Real Housewives* brand to Atlanta in 2008 set off waves. The popularity of the previously unknown NeNe Leakes — coupled with the addition of celebrities such as 1990s girl group Xscape singer/songwriter/producer Kandi Burruss and former Miss USA Kenya Moore — created a fervor among more than just the Black audiences. In 2010, basketball great Shaquille O'Neal's ex-wife Shaunie O'Neal fed the fervor with the launch of VH1's *Basketball Wives*.

Then, in 2011, successful music industry manager Mona Scott-Young effectively changed the game with the *Love & Hip Hop* franchise by centering known rappers like Jim Jones and Fabolous in New York, who helped launch the franchise, as well as Lil Scrappy for the Atlanta spinoff, and Trina and Trick Daddy in Miami with Keyshia Cole and Ray J in Hollywood. In no time, there was the *Black Ink Crew* franchise, revolving around tattoo artists, and *Growing Up Hip Hop,* featuring the offspring of hip-hop pioneers like Run-DMC, Dame Dash, and Master P. Whereas *Run's House* from 2005 had been more family-oriented, the new crop of hip-hop–inspired reality shows appeared to make every effort possible to be as sensational or "ratchet" as possible to record-setting ratings.

Some argue that the Bravo reality series *Being Bobby Brown,* which appeared around the same time as *Run's House,* showcased what some contended was the dysfunctional marriage of the late 1980s — early 1990s Bobby Brown to music superstar Whitney Houston, whose image on the reality show was completely opposite to the one her record label painted. Even as debates raged among certain segments of the Black community about the harmful imagery and the promotion of violence, ratings continued to grow, leaving many to wonder if reality TV was a permanent fixture of Black television and entertainment at large.

Made-for-TV movies

From the 1990s to the early 2000s, made-for-TV movies, particularly those by HBO, became real standouts, with many of them winning numerous awards. Highlights include the following:

- ***Miss Evers' Boys,*** this intense 1997 film about the controversial 1930s Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, which injected Black men, without their knowledge, with syphilis and didn't treat them
- ***Don King: Only in America*****,** this 1997 biopic of the infamous boxing promoter (flip to Chapter 19 for more details about Don King)
- ***The Corner*****,** this 2000 groundbreaking miniseries about a Baltimore family's struggles with crack and poverty

» ***Lackawanna Blues,*** this 2005 drama about a young boy's colorful childhood growing up in a rooming house in civil rights–era Lackawanna in upstate New York, for which S. Epatha Merkerson won the Emmy for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Movie or Miniseries

In the late 2010s, HBO would expand its investment in Black content with original films such as the Dee Rees–directed *Bessie* (2015), starring Queen Latifah; the Rick Famuyiwa–directed *Confirmation* (2016), with Kerry Washington as Anita Hill and Wendell Pierce as Clarence Thomas; the George C. Wolfe–directed, Oprah Winfrey–produced *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2017), starring Winfrey and *Hamilton*'s Renée Elise Goldsberry; *Fahrenheit 451* (2018), which Michael B. Jordan produced and starred in; and *O.G.* (2019), starring Jeffrey Wright. Long the leader in Black original movies and edgy content in general, HBO faced more competition in the late 2010s, especially from Netflix.

With films such as the rap biopic *Roxanne, Roxanne* (2017), the sci-fi teen social justice film *See You Yesterday* (2019), the Dee Rees–directed Southern period drama *Mudbound* (2017) (which earned Mary J. Blige two Oscar nominations for best song and best supporting actress), and the film adaptation of August Wilson's celebrated play *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (2020), starring Viola Davis and Chadwick Boseman, Netflix definitely shored up its arsenal. Netflix doubled down in 2021 with films like *Malcolm & Marie,* starring Zendaya and John David Washington, fresh off his 2020 Christopher Nolan–directed action film *Tenet*. Amazon Prime video made noise at the end of 2020 and the top of 2021, particularly with *Sylvie's Love,* starring Tessa Thompson and Nnamdi Asomugha, and *One Night In Miami,* actress Regina King's feature-length directorial debut.

Lifetime, which tangoed with Black audiences from time to time, made a pretty loud statement with the success of the Christine Swanson–directed 2020 film *The Clark Sisters: The First Ladies of Gospel.* It featured an award-worthy performance by Aunjanue Ellis as the family matriarch, Dr. Mattie Moss Clark. Lifetime also featured the Kenny Leon–directed *Robin Roberts Presents: The Mahalia Jackson Story* (2021), starring Danielle Brooks as the legendary gospel singer. Brooks is known for being in *The Color Purple* on Broadway and on the Netflix show *Orange Is the New Black.*

Black actors in cable TV series

FX's *The Shield* featured CCH Pounder and Forest Whitaker. HBO's *Six Feet Under* broke all the rules with the character Keith Charles, a Black police officer turned private security expert played by Matthew St. Patrick in a gay, interracial relationship. HBO's innovative prison drama *Oz* featured many Black actors. *The Wire*

continued that innovation by showing Baltimore's drug scene from the perspective of law enforcement and the drug dealers. Its many Black actors, including Wood Harris, Michael K. Williams, Sonja Sohn, Wendell Pierce, Clarke Peters, Jaime Hector, and, of course, Michael B. Jordan and British actor Idris Elba, who became movie stars, established strong acting careers.

Showtime had success with *Soul Food*, a Black-cast family drama based on the hit 1997 film. In 2005, LOGO, the LGBTQ cable channel, launched Patrik-Ian Polk's all-Black series *Noah's Arc*, based on the 2004 film showcasing romance and friendship among Black gay men. (Refer to the later section, "Highlighting Black LGBTQ stories," in this chapter.)

AMERICA DISCOVERS ITS *ROOTS*

The success of the 1974 television movie *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman,* based on the Ernest Gaines novel about a Black woman whose life spans from Reconstruction to the civil rights movement, convinced ABC executives to greenlight the larger-than-life 1977 miniseries *Roots*, based on Alex Haley's best-selling novel. (Television's key Black actress during the 1970s and 1980s, Cicely Tyson, who starred as Miss Jane Pittman, also had a role in *Roots*.)

More than shattering television records during its unprecedented eight-night broadcast, *Roots* dramatically impacted the nation's racial consciousness, inspiring dialogue in schools and at work. On average, 80 million Americans watched each of the seven episodes, and 100 million (almost half the country) tuned in for the eighth and final episode.

With its multigenerational storyline and its intimate look at the institution of slavery, *Roots* underscored the idea that despite enduring the brutality of beatings, rapes, and other atrocities during slavery, Black Americans maintained a strong sense of family as humane and dignified as that of any other Americans. Although Haley later settled a plagiarism suit with Harold Courlander, who wrote a similar novel, *The African,* in 1968, the impact of his work never faded.

Roots didn't make the world perfect, but it proved that television could make a difference by entertaining, educating, and inspiring dialogue about taboo subjects. By today's standards, *Roots* is a tame and gross oversimplification of this critical period in our nation's history. At the time, however, it was a monumental step forward for race relations. Even today, it remains one of the few television programs watched by almost all Americans in its era or any era.

In August 2020, HBO premiered the sci-fi series *Lovecraft Country*, backed by Jordan Peele and J.J. Abrams and created by *Underground*'s Misha Green. Jurnee Smollett (of *Eve's Bayou* and HBO series *True Blood* fame) and Jonathan Majors, then a relative newcomer with *Da 5 Bloods* (2020) and *The Last Black Man In San Francisco* (2019) under his belt, led the charge as Leticia "Leti" Lewis and Atticus "Tic" Freeman. *Lovecraft Country* mixed cosmic horror and Jim Crow, raising the question of whether the make-believe monsters were as scary as the real-life white supremacist ones. Adapted from the book written by white author Matt Ruff to flip the racist legacy of white cosmic horror pioneer H.P. Lovecraft, *Lovecraft Country* brought Black history to life in many of its episodes. It revisited Emmett Till's tragic murder as well as the 1921 Tulsa Massacre.

The Tulsa Massacre was also a point of entry for *Watchmen*, another important HBO series based on a comic about masked vigilantes that preceded *Lovecraft Country*. It premiered on October 20, 2019, and starred Regina King as Angela Abar/Sister Night. Months prior, in June 2019, HBO premiered *Euphoria,* a disturbing teen drama wrapped around drug abuse and sex, starring former Disney star Zendaya. In 2020, she became the youngest and second Black actress to win the Emmy for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama. That same Emmys, King won her fourth Emmy in six years for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Limited Series or Movie for *Watchmen*. Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, who played Abar's husband Cal Abar/Dr. Manhattan opposite King in *Watchmen,* won his first Emmy for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Limited Series or Movie.

Nigerian-American actress Uzo Aduba, known for playing Suzanne "Crazy Eyes" Warren in *Orange Is the New Black,* won her third Emmy for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Limited Series or Movie playing Shirley Chisholm, the trailblazing Black congresswoman who boldly ran for president in 1972, in the 2020 FX on Hulu series *Mrs. America.* The limited series revolved around white conservative Phyllis Schlafly and her role in the failure to pass the Equal Rights Amendment.

Notable network series with Black casts or Black leads on The CW include superhero series *Black Lightning* (2018–2021) from husband-and-wife team Salim Akil and Mara Brock Akil; the 2021 second season of its *Batwoman* series, where Black LGBTQ actress Javicia Leslie assumed the lead role; and the high school football drama *All American* (2018–) set in Los Angeles led by Nigerian American showrunner Nkechi Okoro Carroll.

From the moment the FX series *Snowfall,* co-created by John Singleton, premiered in July 2017, it offered a glimpse into how crack cocaine ravaged Black neighborhoods in 1990s Los Angeles. The Starz series *Power,* created by Courtney Kemp and backed by Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson, starred Omari Hardwick as drug kingpin James "Ghost" St. Patrick who wanted to go legit; the show captivated audiences for six seasons, from 2014 to 2020, creating a foundation for a *Power*-verse of

spinoff series, including the 2020 series *Power Book II: Ghost,* with Mary J. Blige and Method Man joining the St. Patrick clan after Ghost's death. By contrast, FOX's groundbreaking series *Empire,* from director/producer Lee Daniels and starring Oscar nominees Terrence Howard and Taraji P. Henson, launched in January 2015, but seemed to just fade away when it ended in April 2020.

Network dramas

The courtroom drama series *All Rise,* starring Simone Missick, was most notable for being a trailblazing CBS series with a Black female lead when it launched in 2019. In 2021, Queen Latifah launched a reboot of *The Equalizer* and brought the network's count up to two. Shemar Moore's Los Angeles–set police drama *S.W.A.T.* launched in 2017. On ABC, the 50-Cent produced drama *For Life* was the lone ABC legal drama centered on criminal justice led solely by a Black man when it launched in 2020. In the long-running NBC juggernaut *This Is Us,* Sterling K. Brown's Randall Pearson and his wife Beth continued to serve as a rare symbol of Black love in a mainstream show with white actors.

Highlighting Black LGBTQ stories

Patrik-Ian Polk is a hidden figure in carving a space for Black LGBTQ stories. The native Mississippian scored his biggest break with his 2000 film *Punks*, described by some as the gay *Waiting To Exhale*, referencing the 1995 film adapting Terry McMillan's 1992 novel of the same name. Polk followed up *Punks'* success with his groundbreaking series *Noah's Arc* in 2005 on LOGO, a cable network targeting the LGBTQ community.

Like *Punks*, *Noah's Arc* revolved around friendship and searching for love. Set in Los Angeles, Darryl Stephens played Noah, a struggling screenwriter, surrounded by a core group of friends — HIV/AIDS educator Alex (Rodney Chester), promiscuous boutique owner Ricky (Christian Vincent), and economics professor Chance (Doug Spearman). One of the notable developments of the show became Noah finding love with Wade (Jensen Atwood). Their relationship was the first consistent romantic one between two Black gay men chronicled on the small screen. Even though the series lasted just two seasons, it was highly influential. It even put a spotlight on the gay marriage ban with its 2008 film *Noah's Arc: Jumping the Broom*, almost a decade before the historic 2015 Supreme Court ruling striking it.

Prior to *Noah's Arc*, Michael Kenneth Williams' portrayal of Omar on the HBO series *The Wire* proved pioneering. Although fans of HBO's *Six Feet Under* (2001–2005) had seen Keith Charles, played by Matthew St. Patrick in a gay, interracial relationship, Williams hit different with Omar. One of the main reasons is that Omar, as a character, was television's first regularly portrayal of a Black gay man

living in the heart of the city. Prior to Williams, Black gay men from urban areas were stereotyped as being effeminate and unable to protect themselves in rougher environments. Omar dispelled all those myths, helping to widely transform people's perceptions of Black gay men overall.

Netflix really opened up representations of Black lesbians and transwomen with *Orange Is the New Black* (2013-2019). The prison drama made Laverne Cox, the transgender actress who played Sophia Burset, a star. It also regularly featured the Black lesbian characters Poussey Washington, played by Samira Wiley, who was later outed in her actual life and embraced, and Suzanne "Crazy Eyes" Warren, played by Uzo Aduba, who won two Emmys for Outstanding Supporting Actress for her role.

Through *Empire* (2015-2020), Oscar-nominated director Lee Daniels, the series co-creator, challenged homophobia in the Black community. As the gay middle son of superstar rapper and record label owner Lucious Lyon, Jamal Lyon, played by Jussie Smollett, served as the show's main catalyst exploring a myriad of issues, including homophobia in hip hop as well as within the Black family. Evolution became one of the show's greatest strengths as audiences followed Lucious from shunning his son because of his sexuality at the show's beginning to his acceptance of both Jamal and the man he loved by show's end. Daniels kept that momentum going with *Star,* another musically driven series but about a girl group trying to make it in the industry. One of the show's major storylines revolved around salon owner and music manager Carlotta, played by Queen Latifah, not accepting her transgender daughter Cotton, played by trans actress Amiyah Scott. The show also featured gender nonconforming actor Miss Lawrence as Miss Bruce.

FX made their biggest mark with the Black LGTBQ drama *Pose*, which premiered in 2018. Co-created by openly queer Afro-Latino writer/producer Steven Canals with TV powerhouses Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk (whose credits include *Glee* and *American Horror Story*) centered its drama on the 1980s and 1990s, a period when the Black LGBTQ community was so often erased. With openly queer and trans actors such as Billy Porter (who won the Primetime Emmy for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series in 2019), Angelica Ross, Mj Rodriguez, Indya Moore, and Dominique Jackson, *Pose* provided much-needed representation and a voice for the Black and brown LGBTQ community and beyond, also pushing trans writer/producer/director Janet Mock to the forefront. The series, whose filming was disrupted by COVID in 2020, marked its end with its third season in 2021.

LGBTQ writer/producer Lena Waithe — who rose to prominence as the first Black woman to win an Emmy for comedy writing with her episode of comedian Aziz Ansari's *Master of None* based on her own coming out experience — pushed the envelope by incorporating Black LGBTQ prominently into Black shows. *Boomerang*, the small screen reimagining of the hit film that premiered on BET in 2019,

included the sexually fluid and active character Ari (Leland B. Martin) and former stripper and lesbian Tia (Lala Milan).

The Chi, the Showtime series Waithe created with the backing of rapper Common about their shared hometown, also incorporated prominent Black LGBTQ storylines. In its third season in 2020, Waithe even played the show's mayor, mirroring Chicago's openly gay mayor Lori Lightfoot. That season also featured the groundbreaking storyline of a cisgender Black man, played by R&B singer Luke James, in a romantic relationship with a Black trans woman. Waithe's semiautobiographical comedy series *Twenties*, following Hattie (Jonica T. Gibbs), a queer Black girl with two straight best friends, as she tries to make her mark in Hollywood, premiered on BET in 2020.

The prominence of LGBTQ characters like Uncle Clifford, a nonbinary strip club owner who dresses femininely while wearing a full beard, on the Southern strip club drama, *P-Valley* on Starz, and Michael Kenneth Williams' Montrose, the closeted father of the show's leading character Atticus on the HBO limited series *Lovecraft Country* in the summer of 2020, offered new hope. The presence of these characters and the focus placed on their lives in their respective shows suggested that Black TV had entered a new era in which Black LGBTQ experiences were viewed as integral to the Black experience at large.

One of the rare popular mainstream LGBTQ reality shows, RuPaul's Drag Race, spearheaded by LGBTQ pioneer RuPaul since 2009, has been groundbreaking in its depiction of drag queens, many of them Black, as they seek to be "America's next drag superstar." The show, for which RuPaul is an executive producer and host, won several Primetime Emmys for Outstanding Reality-Competition Program and Outstanding Host for a Reality or Reality-Competition Program.

Black women TV executives

In 2020, Black women executives especially made major moves in mainstream television, offering hope that more opportunities would become available to Black creators across wider platforms. Former TV One head Wonya Lucas took the helm of Crown Media Family Networks, whose flagship is the Hallmark Channel; Tara Duncan took over Freeform; Vanessa Morrison became the president of streaming at Walt Disney Studios Motion Picture Production, particularly over Disney Plus; and Pearlena Igbokwe and Channing Dungey, who made history becoming ABC Entertainment Group president in 2016, became chairs of Universal Studio Group and Warner Bros. Television Group, respectively, placing the power of virtually all TV production in this country and the world in their hands.

Meanwhile, Michelle Rice became president of both TV One and CLEO in October 2020, Tina Perry took over as OWN president in 2019, and Michelle Sneed became president of production and development of Tyler Perry Studios in 2018.

The Next Level: Building Black Television and Film Empires

In just a few decades, two Mississippi-born media powerhouses, Robert Johnson and Oprah Winfrey, broke through television's glass ceiling. Johnson built the formidable cable network Black Entertainment Television (BET), and talk show host Oprah Winfrey became one of the most powerful individuals in television history, eventually parlaying that power into the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN). Aspire, Revolt, The Africa Channel, CLEO, and Bounce, in addition to TV One, are just a handful of the cable networks to specifically target Black audiences. BET, however, began the dance, with OWN and Tyler Perry arguably creating a move all their very own.

The billion-dollar BET

In 1980, former cable industry lobbyist Robert Johnson launched BET as a weekly, two-hour Friday-night block on USA Network (a 2002 divorce from his wife of 33 years, Sheila Crump Johnson, resulted in her mainstream recognition as a BET cofounder). Three years later, BET was a full-fledged, 24-hour network of its own. Even with its shaky history with Black viewers — the network was frequently criticized for its abundance of sexually charged rap videos — BET has many milestones. Four of its shows — *Bobby Jones Gospel*, launched in 1980; *Rap City*, launched in 1989; *ComicView*, launched in 1992; and *106 & Park*, launched in 2000 — are among the longest running Black shows in television history.



REMEMBER

BET was also one of the first Black-owned companies to go public. Over the years, BET attempted public affairs shows such as the nightly talk program *BET Tonight* (which launched the career of PBS host Tavis Smiley), *BET Nightly News*, and *Teen Summit*. BET's success inspired other channels, such as TV One, a joint venture between Black radio giant Radio One and cable giant Comcast. In 2000, media giant Viacom purchased BET for $3 billion.

In the 2010s, BET, first under Debra Lee's leadership until Scott Mills took over as president in 2018, successfully shook up its programming in the 2010s with various series and mini/limited series, including the Mara Brock-Akil original series *Being Mary Jane* (2013–2019), starring Gabrielle Union; *The New Edition Story* (2017); and the Lena Waithe comedies *Boomerang* (2019–present) and *Twenties* (2020–present). The Tyler Perry series *The Oval* and *Sistas* both launched in 2019.

Two shows helped launched the network's streaming platform BET Plus in 2019: *Girls Trip* co-writer Tracy Oliver's Black–cast series adaptation of the 1996 film *The First Wives Club*, starring Jill Scott, Ryan Michelle Bathe, and Michelle Buteau,

and the Will Packer–produced comedy *Bigger,* centered on the lives of Black millennials who are alums of Historically Black Colleges and Universities as they navigate love and career. In 2015, Johnson launched the Urban Movie Channel streaming service, acquired by AMC Networks in 2018. In 2021, the service changed its name to ALLBLK.

The big "O"

Born poor in Mississippi and raised in Milwaukee and Nashville, Oprah Winfrey landed her first media job in radio at age 17. Before leaving for Chicago in 1984, where she dethroned Phil Donahue, the reigning king of talk, she cohosted a talk show in Baltimore. In 1985, *The Oprah Winfrey Show,* which tackled issues from sexual molestation to racism and sexism, went national.

An avid reader, Winfrey gave the publishing industry a boost with her Oprah Winfrey Book Club; her recommendation literally sent books to the top of the best-seller lists.

As an actress, Winfrey was nominated for both the Oscar and Golden Globe for her role as Sophia in the film version of *The Color Purple* (1985), which she produced as a Tony Award–winning Broadway musical in 2006. Early film and TV projects Winfrey produced include *Beloved* (1998) and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (2005), starring Halle Berry, for ABC.

One of Winfrey's biggest pivots in that space, however, came when she partnered with Discovery Inc. to create OWN in 2011. The network floundered initially and didn't find its footing until it started to target Black audiences. The reality series *Welcome to Sweetie Pie's* (2011–2018), starring Ms. Robbie Montgomery (a former Ike and Tina Turner backup singer turned soul food queen) gave the network a life, attracting Black audiences.

Building on that, OWN added *Iyanla: Fix My Life,* starring life coach and author Iyanla Vanzant, in 2012. Winfrey struck a deal with longtime friend Tyler Perry to bring two shows to the network in 2013. Perry's soapy melodrama *The Haves and the Have Nots* was a ratings sensation that helped give the OWN network more solid footing. The addition of *Queen Sugar,* the Louisiana-set drama created by Ava DuVernay from Natalie Baszile's 2014 novel, and the Memphis-set megachurch drama *Greenleaf,* which Winfrey tapped white writer and showrunner Craig Wright to create in 2016, helped the network solidify a winning content strategy centering on Black women, particularly in the South.

Homing in on love and relationships, the network successfully launched the docuseries *Black Love*, featuring celebrity and noncelebrity couples as they describe how they met, their marital challenges, and their triumphs in 2017; the dating

relationship show *Ready For Love* from successful Black film producer Will Packer in 2018; and the reality show *Love & Marriage: Huntsville,* featuring three couples in Huntsville, Alabama in 2019.

Tyler Perry builds his own table

Born Emmitt Perry Jr. in New Orleans on September 13, 1969, Tyler Perry frequently felt unsafe as a child in large part due to his abusive father. Watching *The Oprah Winfrey Show* inspired Perry, a high school dropout who got his GED, to capture his daily thoughts and experiences in letters to himself. That eventually led him to write his first play, *I Know I've Been Changed,* in 1992 and produce it himself. The crowds initially didn't come, but Perry kept going and relocated to Atlanta after attending Freaknic (also Freaknik), a popular spring break event in Atlanta dating back to the early 1980s, and seeing Black people in important and powerful roles, including as mayor and business owners. He created 13 plays over 13 years, birthing the character Mabel "Madea" Earlene Simmons, inspired by his mother and his aunt.

Going to the movies

In 2005, Perry bet on himself: Already successful through his stage plays, where *Madea* was a hit, he put in his own money to finance the 2005 film version of his successful touring play, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman.* The movie directed by Darren Grant starred Kimberly Elise, Shemar Moore, and Perry himself as the irreverent, not-so-grandmotherly Madea. It hit number one at the box office and Perry kept rolling, amassing at least 10 number-one films, including *Madea Goes to Jail* (2009) and *Boo 2! A Madea Halloween* (2017), which topped Tom Cruise's *Jack Reacher: Never Go Back* on opening weekend.

Despite heavy criticism from his white and Black critics, who often straight-out declared his work trash, Perry, thanks to his underserved base of mostly Black churchgoing women in the South, rarely released a film that didn't make the top five opening weekend. Other actors Perry has worked with include Idris Elba, Gabrielle Union, Viola Davis, Taraj P. Henson, Jurnee Smollett, Sanaa Lathan, Angela Bassett, Alfre Woodard, Vanessa L. Williams, Derek Luke, Thandie Newton, Blair Underwood, Lynn Whitfield, Boris Kodjoe, and Cicely Tyson.

For his 2010 film adaptation of Ntozoke Shange's classic 1975 *choreopoem* (a poem presented as a play), "for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf," titled simply *For Colored Girls*, Perry assembled an outstanding roster of talent, including Whoopi Goldberg, Thandie Newton, Phylicia Rashad, Kerry Washington, Anika Noni Rose, Loretta Devine, Kimberly Elise, Janet Jackson, and Macy Gray, packing more Black actresses in one film than Hollywood had

used in its major releases all year. By 2021, Perry's films, which include *Why Did I Get Married?* (2007) and its sequel *Why Did I Get Married Too?* (2010) starring Jill Scott, Janet Jackson, and a non-Madea Tyler Perry, had exceeded $1 billion in box office receipts.

Signing TV deals

Perry turned his eye to TV early, creating *Tyler Perry's House of Payne* (2006–2012), where he signed a $200 million, 100-episode deal for TBS, and *Tyler Perry's Meet the Browns* (2009–2011). By 2008, Perry had established his first studio in two former Delta Airlines buildings, with 200,000 square feet of set and office space, in the predominantly Black Greenbriar area of Southwest Atlanta.

Just as he was moving out of his TBS deal, Perry struck an exclusive multi-year partnership with his friend Winfrey and OWN to bring content to the network, resulting in the soapy melodrama *The Haves and the Have Nots,* based on his 2011 play of the same name. *The Haves and the Have Nots* centers on three families, with the Young family, which is Black, on the "nots" spectrum. The Youngs include Crystal Fox as Hanna the mother and Tyler Lepley and Tika Sumpter as her children, Benny and Candace. On May 28, 2013, the show became the very first scripted show to premiere on OWN.

Just as Perry was winding down his deal with OWN, for which he had created more than 500 episodes of programming since 2013, he struck another deal with Viacom (later ViacomCBS) in 2017: He would essentially create 90 episodes of original drama and comedy series annually primarily for BET and BET Plus (the streaming service in which he also financially partnered) and offer Paramount Pictures first-look rights to his feature films until 2024. On October 23, 2019, Perry premiered two series, his own White House drama *The Oval* and *Sistas,* which tells the story of four best friends primarily struggling with their love lives.

Opening Tyler Perry Studios

A little more than two weeks before Perry premiered his shows on BET, he hosted an extravagant, once-in-a-lifetime star-studded opening of his dream Tyler Perry Studios, located on the historic Fort McPherson military base (once utilized by Confederate soldiers) on October 5, 2019. Perry purchased the 330-acre property with some controversy in a deal facilitated by Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed in 2015 to create the first major Black-owned studio in the country as well as one of the largest and most impressive of any studio.

In addition to the 40 buildings — including one in which President Franklin Delano Roosevelt once stayed — there are 12 state-of-the-art sound stages named

for Black Hollywood trailblazers, including Cicely Tyson, Oprah Winfrey, Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, and Spike Lee, that even the Atlanta-filmed *Black Panther* helped christen by being among the first to film there. There's also a replica of the White House at Tyler Perry Studios. Beyoncé and Jay-Z, Halle Berry, Whoopi Goldberg, Samuel L. Jackson, Denzel Washington, Cicely Tyson, Viola Davis, former President Bill Clinton and Secretary Hillary Clinton, Debbie Allen, Phylicia Rashad, Jennifer Hudson, Patti LaBelle, Chris Tucker, Taraji P. Henson, and more were among the 800 guests in attendance for the two-day event that included a gospel brunch.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

"While everybody was fighting for a seat at the table talking about #OscarsSoWhite, #OscarsSoWhite, I said, 'Y'all go ahead and do that,'" Perry shared during his acceptance speech for the Ultimate Icon Award at the 2019 BET Awards in Los Angeles on June 23, about three months before his Tyler Perry Studios grand opening on October 5. "But while you're fighting for a seat at the table, I'll be down in Atlanta building my own. Because what I know for sure is that if I could just build this table, God will prepare it for me in the presence of my enemies."

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Developing a league of their own
- Standing out on the basketball court
- Making a name in boxing and football
- Succeeding in track and field, tennis, and golf

Chapter 19
Winning Ain't Easy: Race and Sports

Looking at the NBA, NFL, and other popular sports leagues today, it's hard to imagine a time when Black Americans weren't welcomed in the general sports world. In a time when racism made no exceptions for talented athletes, barriers against Black Americans were as prevalent in sports as they were in any other part of American society. Therefore, sports became an important civil rights battlefield, with the success of early Black athletes resonating far beyond the individual.

This chapter covers the many sports arenas, such as baseball, boxing, and track and field, in which Black American athletes have not only participated but excelled. It also explores some of their milestones and highlights important figures, both historically and in the contemporary sports world, who contributed both to their respective sports and to overall social change.

Baseball

The first known Black American baseball game occurred in 1860 when the Weeksville of New York and the Colored Union Club played in Hoboken, New Jersey. James H. Francis and Francis Wood formed the Pythians in the Philadelphia area

in the 1860s, but when the Pythians applied to the National Association of Base Ball Players (NABBP) for official recognition in 1867, that organization resolved to ban any club that included Black Americans. Other baseball organizations, particularly professional ones, didn't have an outright ban against Black American players. As a result, Bud Fowler, William Edward White, Moses Fleetwood "Fleet" Walker, and his brother Welday Walker played baseball at a high level in the late 19th century.

Playing baseball in overwhelmingly white environments wasn't easy. At first, many white players tolerated the few Black players. As the 20th century drew closer, however, anti-Black attitudes intensified. In the International League, an early minor league in which Walker and Fowler played, some white players refused to play against the "colored" talent of opposing teams. Others wouldn't pose next to their own Black teammates for team pictures. In 1887, International League owners voted against extending contracts to future Black players but agreed to honor the contracts of existing players. When the Supreme Court officially sanctioned segregation in its 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision (refer to Chapter 7), Black Americans didn't play alongside white players in Major League Baseball (MLB) until Jackie Robinson broke that color line in 1947.



Thanks to early player/manager/sportswriter King Solomon White, better known as Sol White, early Black American baseball history wasn't lost. White published his seminal work, *History of Colored Base Ball,* in 1907.

The Negro Leagues

Professional Black American baseball players didn't solely turn to predominantly white baseball clubs to play. In 1885, the Babylon Black Panthers (of New York), later renamed the Cuban Giants, became the first Black professional team. Shortly thereafter, the first Negro League took root. Others soon followed. These leagues, the key personalities that populated them, and other developments paved the way for Jackie Robinson's historic entry into Major League Baseball.



Players in the Negro Leagues came mostly from the East, Midwest, and South, but others came from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other nearby countries.

Famous leagues

The Negro Leagues, which included several leagues composed of countless baseball clubs, some more successful than others, really shone in the early 20th century. But the idea of independent Black baseball began before then with early organizations such as the Southern League of Colored Base Ballists, formed in 1886, and the National Colored Base Ball League, established in 1887.

WOMEN AND GIRLS TAKE THE FIELD

In the 1940s and '50s, three women, Toni Stone, Connie Morgan, and Mamie Johnson, played in the Negro Leagues. Lydia R. Diamond, the Black woman playwright known for plays such as *Stick Fly,* wrote a play titled *Toni Stone* chronicling and championing her amazing journey. It was performed for the first time in 2019.

In 2014, 13-year-old little leaguer Mo'Ne Davis, from Philadelphia, became the first girl in Little League World Series history to pitch a winning game as well as pitch a shutout in postseason. She is the first Black American girl to play in the Little League World Series and just the fourth American girl to ever play in the series overall. This milestone was achieved during the 75th anniversary of Little League Baseball. That same year, Davis became the first Little Leaguer to appear on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*.

In 2021, Bianca Smith became a minor league coach for the Boston Red Sox, making her the first Black woman to coach in Major League Baseball (MLB). And prior to Kim Ng becoming MLB's first female general manager in 2020, Elaine Weddington Steward, who grew up in Queens in New York City, became the woman with the highest ranking in MLB when the Boston Red Sox appointed her assistant general manager in 1990. Her MLB career, spanning more than 30 years, certainly makes Steward, who rose to vice president and counsel of the Red Sox, a pioneering executive.

Interestingly, the short-lived 2016 Fox TV series *Pitch* picked Black Canadian-American actress Kylie Bunbury to star as Ginny Baker, the first woman to become an MLB pitcher, offering hope that a woman would play for MLB for real.

Equally important in developing early Black baseball were the Colored All Americans, a traveling barnstorming unit pitting the legendary Cuban Giants against their rivals, the New York Gorhams. Both teams gained admission to the white Middle States League before later hitting the road. The following leagues, however, directly inform what most people think of as the Negro Leagues:

- **Negro National League:** The Black workers substituting for the depleted white force during World War I gave Black baseball enough of a financial boon to help create the Negro National League in 1920, with Andrew "Rube" Foster serving as league president. Founding teams included Foster's Chicago American Giants, the legendary Kansas City Monarchs, and the St. Louis Giants.

  In 1921, the semi-pro Negro Southern League, whose impressive roster included pitcher Satchel Paige, strengthened the NNL, but it still folded in 1931. The next year, Homestead Grays' owner Cumberland Posey's East-West League tried to replace the NNL but also failed. In 1933, reputed gangster and Pittsburgh Crawfords' owner Gus Greenlee successfully revived the NNL until 1948.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

ANDREW "RUBE" FOSTER

Considered the father of Black baseball, Texas-born Andrew "Rube" Foster began as a pitcher with the Cuban X-Giants. When he led them to victory over the Philadelphia Giants in the 1903 Colored Championship, the Philadelphia Giants' white owner, H. Walter Schlichter, hired Foster, and the very next year they topped the X-Giants. In 1907, Foster left the Philadelphia Giants, which early Black baseball historian Sol Whilte led, to manage and play for the Chicago Leland Giants.

On the field, Foster created a more aggressive team known for seeking extra bases. He also fine-tuned the pitchers. Off the field, he took over bookings and increased the team's gate take from 10 percent to 40 percent. Confident of his skills, Foster threatened to leave the team if owner Frank Leland didn't step away from all baseball operations, but Leland refused. Eventually, Foster gained legal control of the Leland Giants name, forcing Leland to start the Chicago Giants. Foster's Leland Giants later became the Chicago American Giants.

In 1920, Foster created the National Negro League (NNL) but became mentally ill in the late 1920s and died in 1930. Without him, the league faltered and folded in 1931. Revived in 1933, the NNL thrived until 1948.

- **Eastern Colored League:** Spearheaded in 1923 by Pennsylvania's Ed Bolden (owner of the Hilldale Daisies) and Nat Strong (a white businessman), the Eastern Colored League (ECL) rivaled the NNL. The two leagues reconciled in 1924, and agreed to play each other in the Negro League World Series. The ECL folded in 1928.
- **Negro American League:** Considered the last great Black baseball league, the Negro American League, formed in 1937, is the league for which Jackie Robinson played. Dr. J.B. Martin, a Memphis dentist who, along with his brother B.B. Martin, built a baseball powerhouse with the Memphis Red Sox, led Black baseball during one of its most explosive periods. Even after Major League Baseball began raiding its rosters, Martin tried to keep the league going through the 1950s before folding in the early 1960s.

Key people

Cool Papa Bell, Oscar Charleston, Martín Dihigo, and Buck Leonard, all in the Baseball Hall of Fame, are just a handful of the great players that electrified the Negro Leagues. Two of the most famous players from that era, however, may just be Josh Gibson and Satchel Paige:

- **Josh Gibson:** Baseball historians regularly place catcher Josh Gibson, who played with the Homestead Grays and Pittsburgh Crawfords among baseball's all-time greatest hitters. Often compared to Babe Ruth, the Georgia-born Gibson, who had a career batting average that exceeded .350, reportedly hit nearly 800 home runs throughout 17 years. Sadly, he died at age 35, just months before Major League Baseball (MLB) integrated.
- **Satchel Paige:** Born in Mobile, Alabama, Leroy "Satchel" Paige, the Negro Leagues' most well-known pitcher, had an illustrious career that included stints with the Pittsburgh Crawfords and the Kansas City Monarchs. His crowd-pleasing showmanship was such a draw that he was often loaned out to help struggling teams improve their attendance records and stay afloat. Paige reportedly pitched 300 shutouts. MLB's oldest rookie at age 42 in 1948, he became the first Black pitcher to pitch in the 1948 World Series, which his club, the Cleveland Indians, won.

Key events

In addition to regular play, the Negro Leagues hosted many special games. The early prototype for generating interest in Black baseball was *barnstorming*, the practice of traveling around and presenting special events. Other crowd-pleasing contests also developed. As early as 1896, the first Colored Championships occurred, and there were similar contests throughout the Negro Leagues' long history:

- **All-Star games:** These games were the Negro Leagues' biggest draw. First held in 1933, the All-Star game allowed fans to select deserving players and often attracted more than 40,000 fans.
- **Contests between all-Black and all-white teams:** Black players couldn't play alongside white players, but many did play against and beat white players.


REMEMBER

Negro Leagues players and their many Black owners were well aware of America's racial climate. Many, like the Newark Eagles, which hosted Anti-Lynching Day in 1939, often stepped up in civic matters.

The demise of the Negro Leagues

The integration of MLB devastated the Negro Leagues as more and more players, following Jackie Robinson's lead, headed to the majors. Larry Doby, Don Newcombe, Willie Mays, Ernie Banks, and Henry "Hank" Aaron were just some of the distinguished MLB players with Negro League roots (see the later section "The modern era" for details on some of these players). In 1958, the Negro American League played its last game. The Indianapolis Clowns, the team Hank Aaron initially played for, continued to play exhibition games into the 1980s, but Black baseball never recovered.

NEGRO LEAGUES PLAYERS IN THE BASEBALL HALL OF FAME

It took years of intense debates, including a plea from baseball great Ted Williams and the 1970 publication of Robert Peterson's influential *Only the Ball Was White,* before the Baseball Hall of Fame began inducting Negro Leagues players. In 1971, Josh Gibson, Cool Papa Bell, Satchel Paige, and Oscar Charleston were among the first Negro Leaguers inducted. Hall of Fame recognition, along with the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City, Missouri, has ensured that this critical chapter in American sports history won't be forgotten. Nearing the close of 2020, MLB announced that they would add Negro Leagues to their official records.

Jackie Robinson: Integrating baseball

Brooklyn Dodgers President and General Manager Branch Rickey challenged MLB's unwritten policy against Black players when he signed the Kansas City Monarchs' Jack Roosevelt "Jackie" Robinson. On April 15, 1947, the 28-year-old Robinson debuted as a Brooklyn Dodger and changed modern-day baseball forever. Over the course of his ten seasons with the Dodgers, the team won six pennants and a World Series. Robinson, who led the league in stolen bases his first year, achieved individual honors including Rookie of the Year and National League MVP.

While it has generally been acknowledged that Robinson wasn't the Negro Leagues' best player, Rickey believed that Robinson, who had attended UCLA and served in the military, could withstand the abuse that would accompany integrating MLB. Rickey made Robinson promise that he wouldn't retaliate against any racial provocations or publicly address them for an entire year. Well aware that Robinson once faced court-martial for protesting segregation in the army, Rickey sent Robinson to a minor league club in Canada to prep him for playing ball in MLB.

Before Robinson even suited up, white players from his own squad and others considered protesting his entry. On the field, white fans taunted him with racial slurs. He also received many death threats. Still, in the face of such pressures, Robinson persevered and excelled. By the end of his first season, Robinson, who enjoyed a faithful Black fan base, could also count on his ever-growing white fan base.

"QUEEN OF THE NEGRO LEAGUES": EFFA MANLEY

Much more than an owner's wife, Effa Manley, who many assumed to be Black, was a player advocate who took an active role in managing the Newark Eagles, often fighting for better schedules and salaries. Civic-minded, Manley, who insisted she was white but raised in biracial households, served as treasurer of the NAACP's Newark chapter and involved the team in many civil rights causes. When MLB began raiding the Negro Leagues rosters, Manley was outspoken about MLB compensating owners like her and her husband, Abe Manley. Although Manley, who kept a scrapbook of Black baseball's glory days, died in 1981, she became the first woman inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2006.

The modern era

MLB wasted little time embracing Black players. Following are a few prominent players from the 1950s to the end of the 1970s:

- **Willie Mays:** This legendary center fielder for the New York–turned–San Francisco Giants amassed an amazing 3,283 hits, 660 home runs, 12 Gold Gloves, 24 All-Star game appearances, and four World Series appearances (and 1 win) during a major league career that began in 1951 and ended in 1973.
- **Bob Gibson:** In the 1967 World Series, St. Louis Cardinals pitcher and eventual two-time Cy Young winner Bob Gibson allowed just three earned runs in three complete game victories and hit an important home run himself. In 1968, he set a World Series record by striking out 17 Detroit Tigers in the very first game.
- **Curt Flood:** Outstanding player Flood made his mark off the field when he refused a 1969 trade from the St. Louis Cardinals to the Philadelphia Phillies, taking his case all the way to the Supreme Court. Although he lost the legal battle, many agree that he opened the door to today's era of free agency. As a result, the salaries of today's baseball players represent a much larger portion of their team's and the league's overall wealth.
- **Hank Aaron:** Before 53,775 fans, on April 8, 1974, Atlanta Braves right fielder Hank "the Hammer" Aaron broke Babe Ruth's long-standing home run record of 714 home runs. When Aaron retired from baseball in 1976, he had 755 career home runs.
- **Reggie Jackson:** Known as Mr. October and considered Major League Baseball's first Black megastar, Reggie Jackson played in five World Series and sealed his legend in the final game of the 1977 World Series. Playing for the

New York Yankees, Jackson hit three home runs off three different pitchers. His two MVP World Series honors for two separate teams, the Oakland Athletics and the New York Yankees, also placed him in the elite company of Babe Ruth.

From the 1980s and 1990s into the 2000s, quite a few Black American baseball players accepted the torch. In his first year of eligibility, longtime San Diego Padres right fielder Tony Gwynn got the go-ahead for the Baseball Hall of Fame. Oakland Athletics player Rickey Henderson, baseball's stolen-base king, was inducted in 2009. Seattle Mariner great Ken Griffey Jr., who earned his spot in Cooperstown when he surpassed Mickey Mantle on baseball's home run list, was officially inducted in 2016. Despite his reign as baseball's home run king with 762 career home runs and arguably being the greatest player of all time, former Pittsburgh Pirates and longtime San Francisco Giants franchise player Barry Bonds may never be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame due to longtime allegations of steroid use. By contrast, former New York Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter, a five-time World Series champion whose father played shortstop at Fisk University, was elected to the Hall of Fame his first time out by a vote of 396 out of 397 in 2020. In 2017, Jeter, who played for the Yankees from 1995 to 2014, became a part-owner and CEO for the Florida Marlins, a first for a former Black MLB player. NBA all-time great Magic Johnson became an owner in the LA Dodgers in 2012.

Basketball

It didn't take long for the U.S. to embrace basketball, invented by Canadian-born James A Naismith in 1891. By the 1900s, the U.S. had a few professional teams. In 1902, Massachusetts native Harry "Bucky" Lew became the first Black American pro player. Harvard-educated physical education instructor Edwin Bancroft Henderson, who many call "the father of Black basketball," introduced the game to Black schools in Washington, D.C. in 1904.



HISTORICAL ROOTS

Henderson recognized basketball's potential in the area of civil rights. Through the all-Black Interscholastic Athletic Association of the Middle States (ISAA), established in 1905, Henderson encouraged competitive basketball among Black Americans, as did New York's Smart Set Athletic Club of Brooklyn and the St. Christopher Club of New York City. The latter organizations, along with three others, formed the Olympian Athletic League in 1907. For years, these organizations fostered Black basketball talent and took it to new heights, planting the seeds for both collegiate and professional play among Black Americans. Even today, basketball's communal spirit thrives as basketball courts and programs are very prominent throughout the nation, particularly in urban areas.

HOLCOMBE RUCKER AND RUCKER PARK

In 1946, longtime NYC Department of Parks worker Holcombe Rucker created a neighborhood basketball program to keep kids off Harlem's mean streets. Rucker, whose motto was "each one, teach one," emphasized education and checked report cards to decide who played in his program. He even tutored his charges in the fundamentals of English and life. With his help, over 700 program participants attended college on athletic scholarships.

Rucker's idea of pitting professional players like Wilt Chamberlain and Nate "Tiny" Archibald against celebrated local talent like Richard "Pee Wee" Kirkland and Earl "The Goat" Manigault (whom Don Cheadle played in the 1996 HBO film *Rebound*) made his tournaments legendary. Even after Rucker died in 1965, the tournaments survived, relocating to what became Rucker Park in 1974.

Concerned about injuries, NBA players stayed away from Rucker Park until the Entertainers Basketball Classic brought them back in the 1980s. Today, the park is the site of epic court battles between street ball talent and NBA legends like Allen Iverson and Kobe Bryant. Music luminaries such as P. Diddy and Fat Joe have sponsored teams. Music from hip-hop DJs and colorful and funny commentary also distinguish the Rucker Park experience.

College ball

Basketball eventually evolved into a viable option for Black American men in particular to attend college and then later as a means to a professional career. Following is a quick glimpse into the college game and its overall impact.

Black colleges

Black colleges quickly embraced basketball and provided the first opportunity for Black Americans, male and female, to play the sport. Black coaches and schools were among basketball's early innovators, and the most enduring legacies have come from two head coaches:

- **Tennessee State's John B. McClendon:** A sports civil rights pioneer, McClendon cofounded the CIAA Tournament in 1946, Black college basketball's premier contest. He made a significant breakthrough when his team beat a white school for a national championship in 1957. Credited with creating fast-break basketball and the half-court press, McClendon coached all-Black teams that beat all-white teams during the height of racial segregation. In 1961, McClendon, who spearheaded other Black college programs,

became the first Black coach of a professional mainstream team in 1961. In 1966, he became the first Black coach hired by a predominantly white college, Cleveland State. He was also the first Black Olympic coach in 1968, as well as the first Black coach of the American Basketball Association's Denver Rockets in 1969.

- **Winston-Salem State's Clarence "Big House" Gaines:** Gaines's teams won 12 CIAA titles in his 47-year tenure as head coach, with him amassing 828 wins. Both Black and white college teams absorbed his fast-breaking style of play with athletic and fast players. NBA great Earl "the Pearl" Monroe and sports commentator Stephen A. Smith are two players he coached.

Mainstream colleges

Prior to World War I, Fenwick Watkins, Cumberland Posey, and Paul Robeson played basketball on predominantly white teams at predominantly white universities. Such strides continued into the 1930s, when Columbia University's George Gregory Jr. became the first Black All-American basketball player and Long Island University's William "Dolly" King became the first Black player to participate in the National Amateur Athletic Union. William Garrett continued that movement into the Midwest when he integrated the Big Ten at Indiana University in 1947.

Loyola University Chicago ended the customary practice of playing only three Black players at any given time, regularly playing four players and sometimes five. In 1963, in the NCAA Championship game, Loyola started four Black players and played five in its upset win over Cincinnati, which was looking for a three-peat. College basketball's racial walls were torn down completely when Texas Tech, as dramatized in the 2006 film *Glory Road*, went with an all-Black starting lineup to defeat the all-white basketball powerhouse University of Kentucky in the 1966 NCAA championship. Until Texas Tech's monumental victory, there were still a number of Southern colleges that didn't play Black players at all.

Since then, Black Americans have dominated college basketball. Along the way, great coaches like Georgetown's John Thompson, former Temple University coach John Chaney, and former University of Arkansas coach Nolan Richardson paved the way for other Division I Black college coaches.

Pro ball

Early Black men's basketball flourished, especially in the cities, during what is often referred to as the Black Fives Era. Professional play emerged as early as 1909, with Pittsburgh's Monticello Rifles, owned by Cumberland Posey, being the most popular team. Countless college students emulated the players' fast-paced style.

In 1913, Posey created the Loendi Big Five in Pittsburgh. This team ruled Black basketball until Robert Douglas formed the New York Renaissance, a Harlem-based basketball powerhouse. Known as the Rens, they proved their superiority by defeating the National Basketball League (NBL) champion all-white Oshkosh All-Stars in the World Professional Basketball Tournament in 1939. During the 1948–1949 season, the franchise moved to Ohio and joined the NBL, becoming the first all-Black franchise in a white league. Although the NBL folded, the Dayton Rens/New York Rens are in the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts.


HISTORICAL ROOTS

Because the American Basketball Association excluded Black Americans when it launched in 1925, players from Chicago's Wendell Phillips High School formed the Savoy Big Five in 1927. Renamed the Harlem Globetrotters when agent Abe Saperstein took over, the team suffered many racial indignities during its journey to become a credible basketball team. In 1940, the Harlem Globetrotters defeated the Chicago Bruins in the World Professional Basketball Tournament and then beat the World Champion Minneapolis Lakers, now in Los Angeles, two out of three times in 1948 and 1949. Despite those competitive beginnings, the Harlem Globetrotters became a novelty act in later years.

Integration on the court

Prompted by World War II's effect on the white player pool, the NBL chose to welcome Black players instead of folding. In 1942, the Toledo Jim White Chevrolets in Ohio signed four Black players, while the Chicago Studebakers signed five former Harlem Globetrotters. Curiously, though, the NBL had only one Black player in 1943. Still the move was positive, as the West Coast professional leagues began integrating in 1944. The Basketball Association of America (BAA), which banned Black players in 1946, merged with the NBL to create the National Basketball Association (NBA) during the 1949–1950 season, making integration the norm. Chuck Cooper, signed by the Boston Celtics, became the NBA's first Black draft pick, though the Washington Capitols' Earl Lloyd was the first Black American to play in the NBA.

Unlike other sports, the NBA had Black coaches and general managers early. Bill Russell opened the doors as the NBA's first Black coach. Of the many who've followed in his footsteps, his former college teammate K.C. Jones (who also coached the Celtics) and Lenny Wilkens (who followed Russell as the Seattle Supersonics' coach) both won NBA championships.

Having Black Americans in upper management also wasn't rare in the NBA. Elgin Baylor, Joe Dumars, and Isiah Thomas are just three former players who have been attached to high-profile teams. In 2003, the NBA made history when Black Entertainment Television co-founder Robert Johnson became the nation's first Black

majority owner of an NBA franchise with the Charlotte Bobcats. That franchise reached another milestone in 2010 when Michael Jordan, who previously owned a minority stake became team owner of what is now the Charlotte Hornets, making him the first former NBA player to be a majority owner of an NBA team.

Great players

Many great Black American players helped build as well as sustain the NBA. Some notable Hall of Famers include

- **Bill Russell:** With legendary center Russell, who served as the team's coach as well as a player from 1966 to 1969, the Boston Celtics won an astonishing 11 NBA championships in 13 seasons. Russell set many playoff scoring and defensive records that remain untouched.
- **Wilt Chamberlain:** Revered center Chamberlain is still the only NBA player to score 100 points in a single game. He holds nearly 100 NBA records, making him arguably the greatest NBA player of all time.
- **Elgin Baylor:** Baylor is considered one of the NBA's purest scorers. Many credit him for saving the Lakers franchise, located in Minneapolis at the time of his draft. Baylor's double-digit scoring brought out the crowds and helped the Lakers make the playoffs. His many accomplishments include a 71-point game against the Knicks in 1960 and a 61-point playoff effort against the Celtics in 1962.
- **Oscar Robertson:** King of the triple doubles, Robertson, who earned Player of the Year honors for three consecutive seasons while a student at the University of Cincinnati in the late 1950s, became the NBA prototype for the all-around player. Robinson filed an anti-trust lawsuit against the NBA in 1970 when he was the president of the National Basketball Players Association (a position he held from 1965 to 1974). The NBA's 1976 settlement, which created free agency, is known as the Oscar Robertson Rule.
- **Julius "Dr. J" Erving:** Dr. J's electrifying play changed the game of basketball forever. Thanks to him, the dunk went from a rare treat to a regular feature. He also combined energetic showmanship with dignity and grace. It's often been said that the NBA merged with the American Basketball Association (ABA) just to get Erving.
- **Earvin "Magic" Johnson:** Magic Johnson helped curtail declining interest in the NBA during the late 1970s when he and Larry Bird carried their college rivalry into the NBA in 1979. Playing in Los Angeles, point guard Johnson, aided by great center Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and a host of other all-stars, regenerated fan excitement and directly contributed to the NBA's survival. Post-NBA, Johnson also succeeded in business, which included owning Starbucks franchises and Magic Johnson Theatres in predominantly Black

neighborhoods, before eventually becoming a co-owner of the LA Dodgers in 2012. He also served time as president of basketball operations for the Lakers, where he helped bring LeBron James to the storied franchise in 2018.

- **Michael Jordan:** When the Chicago Bulls drafted Michael Jordan in 1984, few had any idea he would become the most famous basketball player on the planet. But his unbelievable rookie-year scoring offered only a glimpse into the player he would become. Jordan's spectacular offensive and defensive play on his way to six NBA championships put him in the running for the honor of greatest NBA player of all time. Off the court, his Nike partnership launching the iconic Air Jordan brand to the public in 1985 created a more lucrative athlete endorsement blueprint, freeing many athletes from being dependent on just the team for which they played for their income. *Forbes* revealed that Jordan was a billionaire with a net worth of $2.1 billion in 2020, making him the world's richest former athlete.

- **Allen "AI" Iverson:** From cornrows to tattoos, baggy jeans and beyond, the All Star and NBA Hall of Famer, most prominently associated with the Philadelphia 76ers, was the primary catalyst for bringing hip-hop culture to the NBA in the mid-1990s, just as it was on the brink of exploding into the mainstream, nationally and globally.

- **LeBron James:** Among the last crop of high school players going straight to the NBA, LeBron James entered the league in 2003 playing for the Cleveland Cavaliers, very much home for the Akron, Ohio, native. He later won two NBA championships with the Miami Heat. Comparisons of him as a player to both Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant polarized NBA fans.

  The Decision, a live TV announcement of James's decision to play alongside Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh for the Miami Heat as a free agent in 2010 was controversial. So was his decision to leave Cleveland for the Los Angeles Lakers in 2018, after delivering the franchise's first-ever championship. These moves, however, contributed to the power shift in the NBA in favor of the player.

- **Kobe Bryant:** As a player, especially one who went straight from high school to the NBA, few have done better than Kobe Bryant. A lifetime Lakers player, he was a five-time NBA champion, an 18-time NBA All-Star, a 12-time All-Defensive player, and a two-time Olympic gold medalist in basketball. His 81-point game in 2006 against the Toronto Raptors is second only to Wilt Chamberlain's 100-point game.

  On January 26, 2020, Kobe Bryant, Giana "Gigi" Bryant (his 13-year-old daughter and a budding basketball player in her own right who had been pegged to elevate women's basketball), and seven other people were killed in a helicopter crash in Calabasas, California. The news devastated more than Lakers fans. At just 41, Bryant had created a great post-NBA rhythm coaching his daughter, supporting the WNBA, publishing books, and even winning an Oscar for his 2017 short, *Dear Basketball*.

LeBron JAMES ON RACIAL INJUSTICE

Lebron James's outspokenness against racial injustice is one of his most enduring legacies. He has never hesitated to speak out against injustice, be it George Zimmerman killing Trayvon Martin in 2012, or the police killings of Eric Garner and Michael Brown in 2014. When cellphone video captured Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin's horrific killing of George Floyd in 2020, James, who had been unafraid to criticize the racial maneuverings of President Donald Trump in the late 2010s, continued to speak out.

As the NBA continued its *season in the bubble* (the term applied to the players isolating in Orlando to carry out the playoffs in 2020) due to COVID-19, James and his fellow players, with the blessing of the NBA and its commissioner Adam Silver, adapted their uniforms with Black Lives Matter messaging. During press conferences, James and other players, including those in the WNBA, spoke of the murders of Breonna Taylor in her home by the Louisville police, and more. When police shot unarmed Jacob Blake seven times while he was with his kids in Kenosha, Wisconsin, in August 2020, James, his Lakers teammates, and the rest of the NBA players in the playoffs supported the Milwaukee Bucks in their boycott by sitting out game five in the playoffs. When play resumed, James and his cohorts continued to speak out, defying their "shut up and dribble" critics who insisted they keep their social activism off the court.

Women's basketball

Black women in basketball have traveled a much harder road than men, but the Black community embraced Black women's basketball early. New York and Philadelphia had a few teams before World War I, and both the Chicago Romas and the Philadelphia Tribunes, the first professional sports teams for Black women, were very popular. The Philadelphia Tribunes even traveled extensively throughout the South to introduce young girls to the sport.

Women's college basketball


REMEMBER

As early as the 1920s — long before Title IX of the Educational Amendment of 1972 mandated that federally funded colleges provide women access to sports and scholarships — Black colleges began investing in women's basketball programs. Games were well-attended, and Black newspapers extensively covered collegiate women's basketball into the 1940s. At that time, white institutions and the white community in general didn't support female athletics in the same manner.

Title IX forced many mainstream universities to establish or invest more in women's sports programs. Coupled with ongoing desegregation efforts, the legislation benefited Black female athletes, and college players like Lusia Harris, who attended Mississippi's Delta State University, received more opportunities to

display their talents. In 1971, the women's game went from a half-court to a full-court game.

Competition heightened further when the NCAA Women's Basketball Championship kicked off in 1982. Powerhouse women's programs at the University of Tennessee, University of Connecticut, and Louisiana Tech emerged. In addition to players, those institutions also snatched up Black female coaching talent like C. Vivian Stringer, one of the all-time greats.

The Olympics

Women's basketball grew in stature when it debuted at the 1976 Olympics, and the U.S. team, on which Lusia Harris played, won a silver medal. A surprising gold medal win at the 1984 Olympics gave women's basketball another huge boost. Key team members included Cheryl Miller, now a sports commentator, and Lynette Woodard, who was the first woman to play with the Harlem Globetrotters. At the 1996 Olympics, Team USA went undefeated. Teresa Edwards, Dawn Staley, and Nikki McCray are just a few of the outstanding players from those teams.

The WNBA

The NBA-supported WNBA started in 1997. Early on, top talent included Sheryl Swoopes, the first female basketball player to receive her own shoe from Nike; Olympic gold medalist Cynthia Cooper; and two-time Olympic gold medalist Tina Thompson. They all played for the Houston Comets, which won the first four WNBA championships. Lisa Leslie, the L.A. Sparks' dominating center, also attracted fans to the league. Leadership from women's basketball pioneers like Cheryl Miller made the league credible.

As the nation's premier league for women's basketball, the WNBA — as demonstrated in the 2000 film *Love & Basketball*, directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood — offered female college basketball players an opportunity to play in the United States and not just overseas.

That became more evident in the 2000s, when college superstars like Chamique Holdsclaw, Tamika Catchings, Ivory Latta, Candace Parker, Kristi Toliver, Angel McCoughtry, Seimone Augustus, and more entered the league from women basketball powerhouse schools such as Tennessee, UConn, Rutgers, North Carolina, and more, attracting their already sizeable fan bases. That continued into the 2010s as Tina Charles, Maya Moore, Skylar Diggins, Brittney Griner, Breanna Stewart, A'Ja Wilson, and Napheesa Collier entered the league, playing for teams such as the Minnesota Lynx, Phoenix Mercury, and Seattle Storm. As an NBA analyst on TNT, alongside basketball Hall of Famers like Shaquille O'Neal as well as for the NCAA men's basketball, Parker, especially helped advance not just the WNBA but women's basketball overall as a respected artery of the game as a whole.

In 2005, BET co-founder Sheila Johnson, the first Black woman to attain billionaire status and ex-wife of original Charlotte NBA franchise owner Bob Johnson, became the WNBA's first female owner with the Washington Mystics. She also scored stakes in the NHL's Washington Capitals and the NBA's Washington Wizards.

As the WNBA increased in popularity, pay discrepancies came more to the fore. In 2020, the WNBA and the WNBPA reached a groundbreaking collective bargaining agreement, resulting in a more than 50 percent increase in pay, ensuring that all players would at least make six figures, even if it was on the lower scale. Revenue-sharing as well as increased cash bonuses, paid maternity leave, and earlier unrestricted free agency were also a part of the deal. COVID-19 may have derailed the full implementation of the new agreement, but the WNBA continued to prove its staying power.

During the 2020 season, the Atlanta Dream made headlines by supporting Democrat Raphael Warnock over its owner Kelly Loeffler in the Georgia U.S. Senate race, which she lost, making Warnock the state's first-ever Black U.S. senator. In addition, the WNBA, like the NBA, raised awareness of the police killing of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, as well as that of George Floyd and others as they did press conferences and hit the court.

Boxing

Slaveholders were notorious for staging fights between those they enslaved, and that's precisely how some early Black boxers got the bulk of their boxing experience. As professional boxing developed in 19th-century America, promoters generally banned Black Americans from challenging white fighters, especially in the heavyweight category. To gain credibility, fighters like Tom Molineaux, an enslaved boxer whose skill eventually freed him, went to England, boxing's mecca (the British championship was equivalent to the world championship). In 1810, Molineaux earned a shot at reigning heavyweight champion Tom Cribb. Although he lost that bout and a rematch with Cribb, he proved a formidable foe.

During the late 19th century, a Black boxing circuit developed, but competing for the titles that white fighters held was still difficult. That changed in the 20th century. Following are several of boxing's key Black figures:

- **Jack Johnson (1878–1946):** Although lightweight boxer Joe Gans's 1902 world title opened doors for other Black boxers, heavyweight John Arthur "Jack" Johnson's battles epitomized Jim Crow America. In 1903, he became the Colored Heavyweight Champion, but the reigning white world champion,

Jim Jeffries, refused to fight him. When Johnson easily defeated Canadian Tommy Burns in 1908 to win the title and other white fighters failed to avenge Burns's defeat, Jeffries was lured out of retirement. Billed as "the Great White Hope" in the "Fight of the Century," Jeffries fell to Johnson on July 4, 1910. Johnson's victory sparked a wave of race riots and resulted in certain states refusing to film his victories over white fighters. The critically acclaimed 2004 PBS documentary *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson,* directed by Ken Burns, explores his career in the context of American race relations.

- **Joe Louis (1914–1981):** From his boxing debut in 1934 and throughout most of his career, Joe Louis's signature was knocking his opponents out. In his prime, Louis, nicknamed the Brown Bomber, rarely lost a fight. An upset loss to German boxer Max Schmeling in 1936 rattled Louis to the point that he insisted on a rematch until he got one in 1938. With the U.S. on the brink of entering World War II, the fight reached an international audience via the radio. More than a personal achievement, Louis's win symbolized a win for democracy. From 1937 to 1949, Louis successfully defended his title 25 times.
- **Sugar Ray Robinson (1921–1989):** In his long career, welterweight-middleweight champion Sugar Ray Robinson won 202 fights (108 by knockouts) and lost only 19, most of them at the end of his prime. A hard hitter with quick feet and hands, Robinson, whom many still consider the best pound-for-pound boxer of all time, fought all over the world.
- **Muhammad Ali (1942–2016):** Through the 1960s and 1970s, no fighter captivated the public like Kentucky native Muhammad Ali, born Cassius Clay (see Figure 19-1). The 1960 Olympic gold medalist's 1964 win over Sonny Liston ushered in boxing's new era. Known for his fancy footwork, his boastful, witty rhymes, and his stunning good looks, Ali — a convert to the Nation of Islam — paid for his outspokenness. When he refused his Vietnam draft order on religious grounds, he was stripped of his title and received a five-year prison sentence in 1967. The Supreme Court later reversed the decision.

  Ali went on to defeat George Foreman in the 1974 Don King–produced Rumble in the Jungle, where he won back his undisputed heavyweight title. In the following year's fight defending his title, Thrilla in Manila, against Joe Frazier, the referee ended the fight out of concern for the badly beaten Frazier. After a brief retirement, Ali returned to the ring in 1980 and lost his heavyweight title for good to Larry Holmes. Ali retired the next year, in 1981.
- **Sugar Ray Leonard (1956–):** At his prime in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, the North Carolina–born Leonard battled some of boxing's most formidable opponents, including Thomas "Hitman" Hearns, "Marvelous" Marvin Hagler, and Panama's Roberto Duran. Leonard won an Olympic gold medal in 1976.

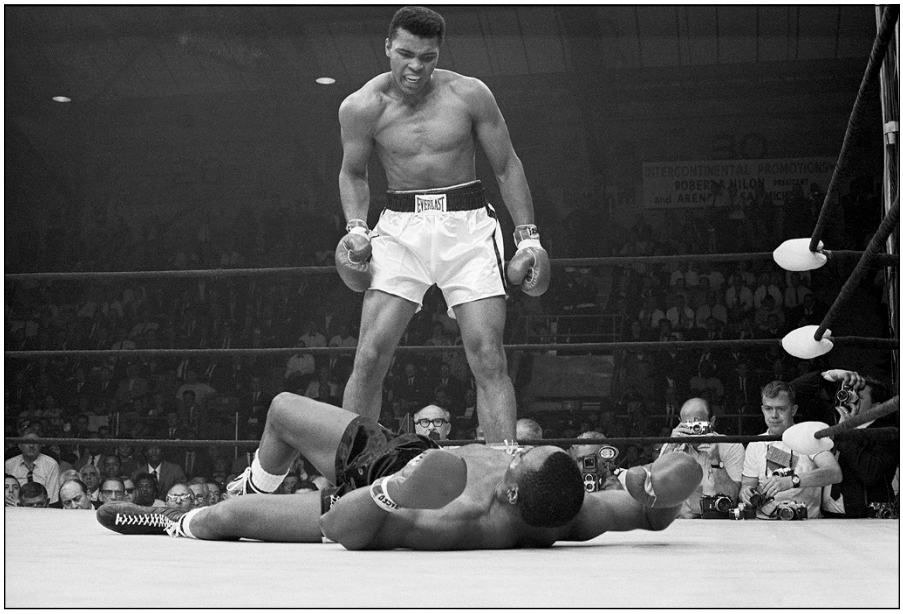


FIGURE 19-1: Muhammad Ali.

Bettmann/Getty Images

» **Mike Tyson (1966–):** In 1986, 20-year-old Brooklynite Tyson became boxing's youngest heavyweight champion. During 1987, "Iron" Mike defeated James "Bonecrusher" Smith and Tony Tucker to become the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world. Although Tyson beat the aging Larry Holmes in 1988, his unbelievable defeat of Michael Spinks in a fight that lasted only 1 minute and 31 seconds elevated his cult status. Troubles outside the ring, including a high-profile divorce from actress Robin Givens and a rape conviction, hindered Tyson's boxing career. After jail, Tyson appeared more troubled and, in a 1997 fight against Evander Holyfield, bit a part of Holyfield's ear off, presumably frustrated by Holyfield's repeated head-butting. Tyson retired in 2005.

Even when boxing no longer captivated the masses on the level it once did, Roy Jones Jr., Sugar Shane Mosley, and Floyd Mayweather Jr., among others, became recognized names. Muhammad Ali's daughter Laila Ali also made a name for herself in the sport while blazing a trail for female boxers. Flint, Michigan, native Claressa Shields helped break additional barriers for female boxers with her consecutive gold medal wins as a middleweight in the 2012 and 2016 Olympics, a first for any American boxer.



BLACK AMERICAN FACES

DON KING

"Only in America," to use a phrase coined by Don King, could a former street hustler who served nearly four years in prison for murder become one of sports' most famous figures. Known for his eccentric hair and creative use of the English language, the boxing promoter's career began in 1972, when he convinced Muhammad Ali to participate in a fundraiser to save a Black hospital in his native Cleveland. In 1974, King staged one of the greatest fights in boxing history, the Rumble in the Jungle in Zaire, in which Ali defeated George Foreman. Thrilla in Manila, in which Ali beat Joe Frazier in the Philippines, followed.

King headliners since the 1970s include Sugar Ray Leonard, Mike Tyson, Larry Holmes, Felix Trinidad, Evander Holyfield, and Oscar de la Hoya. King is credited with almost single-handedly transforming boxing into a multibillion-dollar global industry known for its lucrative live and pay-per-view events. King survived numerous lawsuits, from Muhammad Ali to Mike Tyson, charging that he robbed his boxers of millions. Ving Rhames played King in the 1997 HBO film *Don King: Only in America.*

Football

As far as American traditions go, football is second only to baseball. Like baseball, pro football welcomed Black American talent in the late 1940s. Curiously, college football, which absorbed Black Americans into its ranks early, lagged behind pro football from the 1950s into the 1970s, mainly because Southern colleges refused to embrace Black football players. At the same time, their football programs had increased in stature. Even in regard to Black Americans holding leadership positions in coaching and upper management, the college level, in some respects, lags behind the pro game, which has often been criticized for its lack of diversity.

Pro football

The American Professional Football Association, renamed the National Football League (NFL) in 1922, didn't begin as an exclusionary organization in 1920. Black Americans Robert "Rube" Marshall and Frederick Douglass "Fritz" Pollard played through intense racial harassment. As the NFL grew, it reversed its position and began excluding Black Americans in 1933. That color line remained in place until the Los Angeles Rams signed Kenny Washington and Woody Strode in 1946. Penn State's Wally Triplett became the first Black American draftee to play in the NFL in 1949. Arguably, in 1957, Jim Brown became the NFL's first legendary Black player.

Recognizing that segregation remained strong in the collegiate ranks, the NFL didn't bypass Black college talent. Grambling's Paul "Tank" Younger, who played with the Los Angeles Rams, became the NFL's first Black college star to join their ranks. Other Black college all-stars who excelled in the NFL include Jackson State's Walter Payton, who dominated as running back for the Chicago Bears; Mississippi Valley State's Jerry Rice, who stunned fans as a standout wide receiver for the San Francisco 49ers; and Grambling's Doug Williams, who in 1988 became the first Black American quarterback to win a Super Bowl. He was leading the Washington Redskins and was named MVP.

Although the Chicago Bears' Willie Thrower became the NFL's first Black quarterback in 1953 and Denver's Marlin Briscoe and Buffalo's James Harris were starting quarterbacks in the late 1960s, Black players were largely restricted from holding the position. In the 1980s, stellar play from Warren Moon (who proved himself in the Canadian Football League first) and Randall Cunningham helped move other Black quarterbacks to the forefront. Still, despite Doug Williams's Super Bowl win, some white fans repeatedly complained well into the 2000s about the NFL's many outstanding Black quarterbacks, particularly Michael Vick of the Atlanta Falcons, not emulating the white "pocket" quarterback, who stayed in one spot as the offensive line protected him long enough to throw the ball. This persisted even when Vick and others compiled winning records, leading their teams to championships and even Super Bowls. Vick's overall impact, was, however, derailed by a 2010 conviction for dog fighting.

Another point of contention for the NFL has been in coaching. Whereas basketball has integrated Black talent in almost all areas of the game, such change in the NFL has come relatively late. In 1989, the Los Angeles Raiders made Art Shell the first Black NFL head coach since Fritz Pollard.


TECHNICAL STUFF

The NFL really shook things up after attorneys Johnnie Cochran and Cyrus Mehri unveiled a report showing that while the NFL's few Black coaches typically had superior performance records, fewer head coaching opportunities existed for Black coaches. In response, the NFL instituted the "Rooney Rule," named for Pittsburgh Steelers owner Dan Rooney, requiring teams to interview at least one minority candidate while filling a head coaching vacancy or pay a fine. The Detroit Lions paid a $200,000 fine for hiring Steve Mariucci in 2003 and not interviewing anyone, white or Black.

At the top of 2007, however, Black coaches got a huge boost when Lovie Smith (Chicago Bears) and Tony Dungy (Indianapolis Colts) became the first Black coaches to lead their teams to the Super Bowl, with Dungy's team winning. Thirty-four-year-old Mike Tomlin's ascension as head coach of the Pittsburgh Steelers during that same time also signaled a major change.

COLIN KAEPERNICK TAKES A KNEE

Perhaps no one exposed the NFL's and the nation's racial issues more than Colin Kaepernick. Compelled by the police killings of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and of Philando Castile near St. Paul, Minnesota, Kaepernick, who led his longtime team, the San Francisco 49ers, to the Super Bowl in 2013, started the 2016 NFL pre-season sitting out the National Anthem, eventually adjusting to kneeling to show more respect to veterans as he protested throughout the season. Early on NFL media reporter Steve Wyche noticed Kaepernick sitting out the National Anthem almost immediately and questioned him.

"I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses Black people and people of color," Kaepernick told Wyche after the 49ers' August 26 loss to the Green Bay Packers at Levi's Stadium in California. As other players began kneeling with Kaepernick, NFL commissioner Roger Goodell spoke up, siding mostly with President Donald Trump who shared his displeasure over Kaepernick and others kneeling during the anthem.

After opting out of his contract with the 49ers, Kaepernick was unable to find another job. That, however, didn't keep him from kneeling or speaking out. On the heels of the mass protests against the police killing of George Floyd, ironically Goodell spoke up. On June 5, 2020, Goodell issued a statement. "We, the National Football League, condemn racism and the systematic oppression of black people. We, the National Football League, admit we were wrong for not listening to NFL players earlier, and encourage all to speak out and peacefully protest." Many, especially on social media, slammed the statement because neither Goodell nor the NFL apologized to Colin Kaepernick.

Ozzie Newsome (Baltimore Ravens) became the NFL's first Black general manager in 2002. In 2006, 2007, and 2008, things moved a little faster in the general manager ranks as Jim Reese (New York Giants), Rick Smith (Houston Texans), and Martin Mayhew (Detroit Lions) joined him. In 2016, the Miami Dolphins hired Chris Grier as its general manager, followed by Andrew Berry with the Cleveland Browns in 2020 and Terry Fontenot with the Atlanta Falcons in 2021. In 2020, the Washington Football Team made Jason Wright the first Black team president in the NFL.

College football

Black Americans have found a way to participate in college football almost from the beginning. William Henry Lewis, who played football at Amherst and Harvard, became an All-American in 1892 and 1893. In 1916, Fritz Pollard was the first Black college player to appear in the Rose Bowl. Black athletes in Northern

colleges endured racial harassment in addition to segregation from other athletes; many predominantly white universities in the South refused to accept Black students, in defiance of the Supreme Court.

Black colleges developed strong football programs in response to this reality. None, however, would prove as great as that of Louisiana's Grambling State University, where Eddie Robinson, beginning in 1941, built a football powerhouse that sent 210 players, more than any other college coach, to the NFL. In 1985, Robinson broke Bear Bryant's record as college football's winningest coach, and by 1995, his 400 career wins put him in a class of his own. Upon retirement in 1997, Robinson had amassed an astonishing 408 wins, 165 losses, and 15 ties.

It took a luminary such as Bryant to open up predominantly white college football programs in the South to Black players. In 1971, the University of Southern California opened its season against the University of Alabama. USC's integrated team trounced the all-white team from Alabama. Many have speculated that Bryant, who reportedly tried to integrate his football program at the University of Kentucky, intentionally scheduled the game to make a case for integration. Shortly thereafter, junior college transfer John Mitchell became the first Black player to play for Alabama. When Mitchell joined Bryant's coaching staff in 1973, nearly a third of Alabama's starters were Black.

In recent years, there's been no lack of Black talent on the field, but college football, like the NFL, has been accused of overlooking Black Americans in other positions. Of the 117 Division I-A schools in 2002, only four had Black head coaches. Those who applauded the iconic Notre Dame for signing Ty Willingham on as head coach were disappointed when the school dumped Willingham, who had a poor record in 2004, after just three of his contracted six seasons. Although the University of Washington quickly snatched him up, the consensus was that had he been able to succeed at Notre Dame, coaching walls could have tumbled for Black coaches. With that grand experiment failed, the ball shifted to former Bryant player Sylvester Croom, who became the first Black head coach in the Southeastern Conference (SEC) when he accepted the top job for the Mississippi State Bulldogs in 2003. In 2008, coming off a devastating loss to rival Ole Miss, Croom was asked to resign and never coached college football again. In 2020, there were 14 Black head coaches out of 130 NCAA Division I programs.

Track and Field

Black Americans have participated in track and field since the 1890s, with both Black and predominantly white colleges in the North cultivating their talents early on (predominantly white Southern colleges refused Black Americans admission

well until the middle of the 20th century). Tuskegee Institute, which hired its first athletic director, James B. Washington, in 1890, was competitive in track and field by 1893. Notable 19th-century track stars include William Tecumseh Sherman (Amherst's 1890 champion half-sprinter) and Harvard's Napoleon Bonaparte Marshall (who ran the 440 dash in 51.2 seconds). Other notable track and field stars include the following:

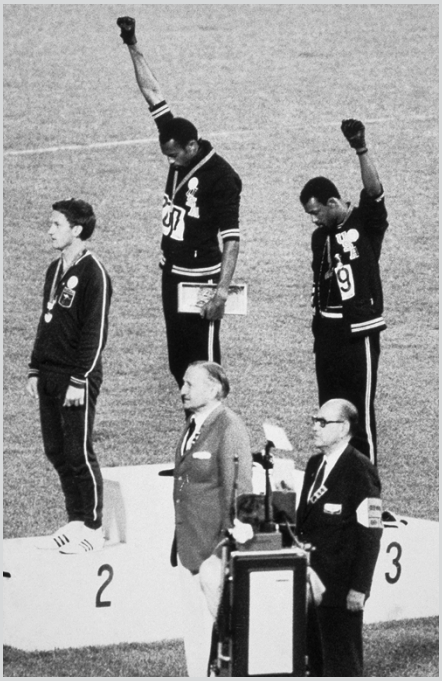
- **George Poage (1880–1962):** The University of Wisconsin's Poage became the first Black American to win an Olympic medal when he came away with two bronze medals in the 1904 Olympics.
- **John "Doc" Taylor (1882–1908):** The University of Pennsylvania's Taylor became the first Black collegiate track and field champion in 1907, and the first Black American to win an Olympic gold medal in the 1908 games in London.
- **Howard Drew (1890–1957):** Injury prevented Howard Porter Drew from competing in the 1912 Olympics, but he set the standard for running the 100-yard dash in under 10 seconds and was the first Black American to be tagged the world's fastest human.
- **Jesse Owens (1913–1980):** Before dominating track and field as a student at Ohio State University, the Alabama-born Owens broke world records in high school. His college success led him to the 1936 Berlin Olympics, where at the height of Hitler's assertion of Aryan supremacy, he won an unprecedented four gold medals. Owens was the first American to accomplish that feat. The 2016 documentary *Olympic Pride, American Prejudice* chronicles the lives of the 17 other Black Olympians in 1936, including Jackie Robinson's older brother Mack Robinson, who went to Germany with Owens.
- **Alice Coachman (1923–2014):** In the 1948 Olympics in London, master high jumper Coachman, whose talent was nurtured at Tuskegee Institute, became the first Black woman to win a gold medal and the first American woman to win a gold medal in track and field.
- **Wilma Rudolph (1940–1994):** One of 22 children and stricken with polio early in her life, Rudolph overcame tremendous obstacles to set the bar for female track. Her standout play in basketball in junior high school attracted the attention of legendary track coach Ed Temple of Tennessee State University (TSU). At age 16, she won a bronze medal in the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne, Australia, running with TSU Tigerbelles Isabelle Daniels, Mae Faggs, and Margaret Matthews. In the 1960 Olympics, where Temple served as head women's track and field coach, she became the first American woman to win three gold medals.
- **Bob Beamon (1946–):** Bob Beamon shattered the long jump record by an unbelievable 21+ inches to capture gold in the 1968 Olympics. His record stood for 23 years before Mike Powell broke it in 1991.

- **Edwin Moses (1955–):** In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Edwin Moses, who attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, Dr. King's alma mater, ruled the hurdles, winning gold medals in the 1976 and 1984 Olympics in Montreal and Los Angeles. Between 1977 and 1987, Moses won 122 consecutive races.
- **Carl Lewis (1961–):** One of the most accomplished athletes of all time, Lewis won ten Olympic medals (nine gold and one silver) and set countless world records during his career. Voted the Olympic Athlete of the Century, Lewis competed and medaled in the 1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996 Olympics.
- **Jackie Joyner-Kersee (1962–):** Joyner-Kersee, a heptathlon pioneer, was raised in East St. Louis, Illinois. Aided by her accomplished track and field coach husband Bob Kersee, she scored gold in both the long jump and the heptathlon, becoming the first American woman to win gold in either (while setting records for both) at the 1988 Olympics. That same year, she became the first woman to win the *Sporting News* Man of the Year honors. With six Olympic medals and four World Championship golds, Joyner-Kersee remains one of the greatest athletes of all time.
- **Florence "Flo Jo" Griffith Joyner (1959–1998):** Known for her bold fashion and colorful nails, Flo Jo, as many affectionately called her, lived up to her "fastest woman of all time" billing. More than 30 years later, records she set for the 100-meter and 200-meter dash in 1988 were still unbroken. In her 1984 Olympic debut in her native Los Angeles, she won silver. In the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, Joyner, sister-in-law to Jackie Joyner-Kersee, ran away with three gold medals. Her death at age 38 in her sleep, officially tied to an epileptic seizure, devastated the track world and her many fans.
- **Kevin Young (1966–):** Competing in the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Young won gold in the 400-meter hurdles and set a World and Olympic record of 46.78 seconds, marking the first time 47 seconds had ever been broken. The record remained untouched over 25 years later.
- **Michael Johnson (1967–):** Competing in the 1992, 1996, and 2000 Olympics, the self-proclaimed fastest man in the world amassed an impressive five gold medals.
- **Marion Jones (1975–):** Dubbed the fastest woman on earth, California native Jones made Olympic history in 2000 in Sydney, Australia, when she became the first female athlete to win five medals (three gold and two bronze) in a single Olympics. Although she was stripped of her medals in 2007 due to allegations of illegal drug use, some people still consider Jones to be one of the world's greatest female athletes.
- **Michelle Carter (1985-):** Carter, from Red Oak, Texas, is a three-time Olympian who competed in the 2008, 2012, and 2016 Olympics in Beijing, London, and Rio de Janeiro. In Rio, she became the first American woman to

ever win gold in the shot put and only the second American woman to win any medal in the event. Before Carter, Earlene Brown, an affiliate of Wilma Rudoph and the Tennessee State University Tigerbelles, had won the bronze in Rome in 1960.

MAKING A STATEMENT AT THE 1968 OLYMPICS

Emotions ran high at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City when track and field gold medalist Tommie Smith and bronze medalist John Carlos raised black-gloved fists in the air to represent Black Power and Black unity as the U.S. national anthem played. Inspired by sociologist Dr. Harry Edwards, who had asked them and other Black Olympians to boycott the games, Smith and Carlos paid for their silent protest with a suspension from the national team and a ban from the Olympic Village. Back home, they received death threats and struggled with employment for years. Since then, they've become heroes for using their grand moment to stand up for equality. HBO chronicled this pivotal event in the 1999 documentary *Fists of Freedom: The Story of the '68 Summer Games.*



(C) Bettmann/Getty Images

At the 2004 Athens Olympics, Shawn Crawford, Justin Gatlin, Joanna Hayes, and long jumper Dwight Phillips all won gold medals. In the 2016 Olympics in Rio, Brianna Rollins, Nia Ali, and Kristi Castlin completely swept the Women's 100-meter hurdles for Team USA. That same Olympics, Allyson Felix, with two gold medal wins, became the first woman in track and field to amass six gold medals, winning her first in 2008, and three in 2012. Dalilah Muhammad, who is Muslim, also made history as the first American woman to win gold in the Women's 400-meter hurdles.

Tennis

Black colleges formed tennis teams as early as the 1890s, but the American Tennis Association (ATA), formed in 1916 in response to the U.S. Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA) policy banning Black players, really nurtured Black American tennis players. One of the oldest Black sports organizations in the United States, the ATA sponsored its first tournament in 1917 in Baltimore, Maryland. Black tennis greats Althea Gibson, Arthur Ashe, Zina Garrison-Jackson, Lori McNeil, and Chanda Rubin all played on the ATA circuit. The ATA Junior Development Program, created by Dr. Robert Walter Johnson in the 1950s, continues to nurture new talent.

Tennis's color line was broken in 1950 when Althea Gibson, winner of ten ATA championships, competed in the now-defunct U.S. Nationals. In 1956, the New York–raised Gibson won the French Open. She also won consecutive Wimbledon titles in 1957 and 1958, as well as major doubles and mixed doubles titles. This section looks at other Black American tennis champs.

Arthur Ashe

Arthur Ashe pioneered men's tennis by becoming the first Black American named to the Davis Cup team in 1963. He also led UCLA to the NCAA tennis championship in 1965. In 1968, Ashe became the first Black man to win the U.S. Open and followed that victory with wins at the Australian Open in 1970 and Wimbledon in 1975. To honor Ashe, the USTA National Tennis Center in Queens, New York City, where the U.S. Open is played, renamed its main stadium the Arthur Ashe Stadium. In 2006, James Blake became the first Black male tennis player ranked number one in the United States since Ashe.

Ashe was a very outspoken civil rights advocate and one of the first prominent HIV/AIDS activists, educating the public about the disease before losing his battle in 1993. He had contracted the disease through a blood transfusion.

Venus and Serena Williams

Hailing from Compton, California, the Williams sisters, beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, raised Black American awareness of tennis, especially among young people. The older, Venus, won both Wimbledon and the U.S. Open in 2000 and 2001. In 2002 and 2003, Serena defeated her big sister to win the U.S. Open, French Open, Wimbledon, and the Australian Open.

The sisters became the first two women in Grand Slam history to square off in four consecutive finals and often swapped the top ranking in all of women's tennis. In 2008, Venus won her last Grand Slam, defeating Serena to earn her fifth Wimbledon title. After that, Serena, overcoming injury, regained her first number-one ranking since 2003 that same year and began creating her own lane. From 2008 to 2017, Serena won four of her six U.S. Open titles and five of her seven Wimbledon titles. After giving birth to her daughter in 2017, Serena continued to play and, in 2020, became the first woman to have at least one title in four decades (1990s, 2000s, 2010s, 2020s) and the first tennis player to reach the Grand Slam and U.S. Open semifinals in four decades.

In Olympics play, Venus has five medals, four gold and one silver, while Serena has four medals, all gold. They share three of the gold medals from doubles wins. Throughout their career, the Williams sisters endured racial slights. They also stood up for equal pay for the women's purse in tournaments. Serena boldly challenged umpires over unfair calls.

The Williams sisters' success inspired other Black women to play tennis, including Madison Keys, Sloane Stephens, Coco Gauff, and Naomi Osaka. Osaka, the daughter of Japanese and Haitian parents, plays for Japan. She defeated Serena in the 2018 U.S. Open. In March 2021, Serena was ranked No. 7 by the WTA (Women's Tennis Association).

Golf

Established as a white-only organization in 1916, the Professional Golf Association (PGA) and its prestigious Masters Tournament (instituted in 1934) allowed Black Americans in only as caddies and groundsmen. In response to their racist policy, the United Golfers Association (UGA) and its National Colored Golf Tournament took root in 1925.



World War II veteran and golfer Bill Powell found his own solution to golf's discrimination: He created his own golf course. He began designing Clearview Golf Course in East Canton, Ohio in 1946 and opened the first 9 holes to the public just two years later. The course became an 18-hole course in 1978. Named a National

Historic Site in 2001, Clearview is the first golf course built, owned, and operated by a Black American.

When Black golfers Ted Rhodes, Bill Spiller, and Madison Gunther filed a civil suit against the PGA in 1948, the PGA adopted an invitation-only policy to continue its discriminatory practices. Finally, in 1961, the PGA bowed to public pressure and let Black Americans play. The following year, Charlie Sifford became the first Black golfer on the PGA tour, and in 1964, Pete Brown became the first Black American to win a PGA title. Before the 1990s, Lee Elder, the first Black golfer to play at the coveted Masters Tournament in 1975 and the first to play on the U.S.'s Ryder Cup team in 1979, had been the most successful Black player.

In the 1990s, Tiger Woods emerged on the golfing scene. His mother hailed from Thailand and his father came from Kansas, prompting him to refer to himself as "Cablinasian" to reflect his Caucasian, Black, Native American, and Asian ancestry. Even before Woods could talk, his father Earl nurtured his talents. In August 1996, at age 20, Woods turned pro, winning his first Masters just eight months later on April 13, 1997, at age 21. From then on, he continued breaking records.

Woods's quest to become the best golfer of all time seemed derailed by multiple allegations of infidelity in 2009, resulting in Woods taking a brief break from the game. When he resumed play, however, his performance lagged and continued that way for years. Yet in 2019, Woods defied the odds, winning the Masters at age 43, becoming the second oldest player to Jack Nicklaus's 46 to do so. He also pulled in closer to Nicklaus's all-time record of 18 majors with 15. In 2019, Woods also locked in his 82nd win, tying all-time PGA Tour winner Sam Snead, who died in 2002. A horrific car accident in February 2021, however, appeared to cap Woods's golf career.

Other Sports

Black American sports milestones are plentiful and extend to sports not typically associated with Black Americans. Following is a sampling of those achievements:

- **Horse racing:** Black Americans dominated horse racing in its early years, with 13 Black jockeys of 15 competing in the first Kentucky Derby in 1875. (See Chapter 20 for more about this historic feat.) In fact, Black American Oscar Lewis was the first winner of that race. Beginning in the late 1890s, the numbers of Black Americans in the sport decreased due in part to racial discrimination, as well as Black Americans moving from the country to the city during the Great Migration. When Marlon St. Julien competed in the 2000 Kentucky Derby, he was

the first Black American to do so since 1921. U.S. Virgin Islands native Kevin Krigger mounted in the 2013 Kentucky Derby.

- **Cycling:** In 1899, cyclist Marshall "Major" Taylor became the first Black American to hold an international title when he won the world championship in Montreal. Al Whaley became the first Black American cycling champion of the modern era when he won the Masters World Championship in 1997.
- **Winter sports:** Figure skater Debi Thomas's bronze medal in 1988 made her the first Black American to win a medal in the Winter Olympics. Bobsledder Vonetta Flowers won a team gold medal in the 2002 Olympics.

  In 2006, speed skater Shani Davis became the first Black American to win gold in an individual sport (1,000 meters) in the Winter Olympics; he also won a silver medal. At the 2010 Winter Olympics, Davis won another gold and silver. His two back-to-back Olympic gold medals for 1,000-meter speed skating made him the first man to ever achieve this feat. In 2018, Davis received backlash for tweeting his outrage about not being selected as the American flagbearer for the opening ceremonies followed by the hashtag, #blackhistorymonth. The next year, he retired.
- **Gymnastics:** Dominique Dawes's individual bronze medal in the 1996 Olympics made her the first Black American woman to win an individual medal in gymnastics. Dawes's Olympic gold medal team win in the 1996 Olympics also made her the first Black gymnast to win gold. At the 1992 Summer Olympics, she and Uganda-born teammate Elizabeth "Betty" Okino were on the U.S. bronze medal team. Dawes is also the only American gymnast to be on three medal-winning Olympic teams (1992, 1996, 2000). Jair Lynch became the first Black man to win an Olympic silver medal on the parallel bars during the 1996 Olympics.

  Gabby Douglas became the first Black American woman, as well as first woman of any color from any country, to win the individual all-around event at the 2012 Olympics in London. Simone Biles won five medals — individual gold in the all-around, vault and floor events, and a team gold and a bronze in balance beam during the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro — making her the most decorated Black female gymnast in a single Olympics. With 30 Olympic and World Championship medals, Biles possessed the most of any American gymnast in history and ranked third all-time in the entire sport in 2020.
- **Fencing:** Six-time Olympian Peter Westbrook won the bronze medal in fencing at the 1984 Olympics. In 2003, Westbrook protégé Keeth Smart became the first American male fencer to be top-ranked in the world. Elite Black American female fencers include three-time Olympian Sharon Montplaisir as well as Smart's sister Erin, who made the Olympic team for the first time in 2004. At the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, the Smart siblings each won team silver medals; Erin in foil and Keeth in saber. At the 2016 Olympics

in Rio de Janeiro, Daryl Homer became the first American to win a silver medal in saber in 112 years.

- **Volleyball:** Known for her signature "Flying Clutchman," a spike traveling at 110 miles per hour, team captain Flora "Flo" Hyman, with assistance from fellow Black team members Rita "The Rocket" Crockett and Rose Magers, led the U.S. Olympic women's volleyball team to a silver medal in the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles. In 1992, sisters Kim and Elaina Oden, along with Tara Cross-Battle, were key members of the team that won the bronze medal in Barcelona. From 1996 to 2012, Danielle Scott-Arruda appeared in a record-setting five Olympics and was crucial to winning silver in 2008 and 2012, with Megan (Hodge) Easy contributing to the latter.
- **Rowing:** U.S. women's rowing team captain Anita DeFrantz led her team to a bronze medal at the 1976 Olympics. Denied a chance at gold, DeFrantz, an attorney, sued the U.S. Olympic Committee for boycotting the 1980 Olympics and lost; later, she received the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Olympic Order medal, the IOC's highest honor for those who exemplify Olympic values. In 1986, DeFrantz became a lifetime member of the IOC, the first Black American and the first American woman to serve on the committee.
- **Swimming:** Afro-Puerto Rican Maritza Correia, who is credited as the first Black American to set a world and American swimming record, earned team silver in the 2004 Olympics in Athens. Cullen Jones, who is the first Black American male to hold a world record in swimming, won a team gold medal in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, and later, in the 2012 Olympics in London, he won an individual silver in the 50-meter freestyle and team gold and silver.

  Competing in the 100-meter freestyle at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, Simone Manuel became the first Black woman to win an individual gold medal in swimming. She won team gold and silver, as well as an individual silver for the 50-meter freestyle, bringing her to a single Olympics total of four medals. Lia Neal won team bronze and silver medals in the 2012 and 2016 Olympics. Technically, Anthony Ervin, of Jewish and Black American descent who grew up in a largely white environment and appears white, is credited as being the first Black American Olympic medalist in swimming. He won gold in the 2000 Olympics in Sydney.

6 The Part of Tens

IN THIS PART . . .

Take a look at a list of ten Black firsts from medicine and law to exploration and fashion.

Check out ten Black books that you can read to gain a clearer picture of the experience of some of the best Black authors.

Get to know ten influential Black visual artists and see their vast array of contributions.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Saving lives
- Making courageous strides
- Enlightening the worlds of arts and politics

Chapter 20
Ten Black American Firsts

Firsts are always milestones, but when a member of a marginalized group achieves them, the effects are even more profound. Culled from various fields, the ten Black American firsts in this chapter aren't as well-known as Barack Obama, son of a white Midwestern mother and Kenyan father, being elected the nation's first Black president in 2008 or Kamala Harris, daughter of immigrant parents — a mother from India and a father from Jamaica — becoming the first woman elected vice president in 2020. Other Black Americans have achieved other important milestones. Think of them as representations of the broad impact Black Americans have had on both the Black American community and the nation across the board.

Medicine (1837)

Dr. James Derham (sometimes Durham), circa 1780s, is generally cited as the first Black person to practice medicine in the United States, but the first licensed Black doctor in the nation was James McCune Smith. Born enslaved in New York City, Smith was emancipated in 1827, when the state abolished slavery. Educated at the African Free School, he didn't attend college or medical school in the United States due to his race. In Scotland at the University of Glasgow, Smith received several degrees, including his medical degree.

After completing a medical internship in Paris, Smith returned to the United States in 1837 as a doctor, opening a successful pharmacy and a racially integrated medical practice. He also worked at the Colored Orphan Asylum. A noted abolitionist, Smith kept company with Frederick Douglass, with whom he helped found the National Council of Colored People in the 1850s. He also debunked racist medical theories, becoming the first Black medical doctor to publish in medical journals like the *New York Journal of Medicine*, but was never admitted to the American Medical Association. A founding member of the New York Statistics Institute, Smith was also elected to the American Geographical Society. The University of Glasgow's James McCune Smith Learning Hub honors his legacy.

Law (1845)

Born in Indiana in 1816, Macon B. Allen is generally acknowledged as the first Black American to legally practice law in the U.S. In Portland, Maine, Allen, who apprenticed under abolitionist attorney Samuel Fessenden, passed the bar a month before his 28th birthday in 1844. Because Black residents generally could not hire him, and the white residents typically refused to, he relocated to Boston in 1845, where he passed the bar. He and Robert Morris, Jr. opened the first Black-owned law firm in the nation but couldn't sustain it. By 1850, Allen had become a justice of the peace in Middlesex County, Massachusetts. At the end of the Civil War, Allen moved to Charleston to practice law, becoming a probate judge there in 1874. Post-Reconstruction, he made another move to Washington, D.C. to work as an attorney for the Land and Improvement Association. He remained there practicing law until his death in 1894 at age 78.

Kentucky Derby (1875)

A little-known fact about the Kentucky Derby is that Black Americans were an integral part of its early history. Oliver Lewis, who rode Aristides, a horse trained by Ansel Williamson (also a Black American), wasn't just the first Black American jockey to win the Kentucky Derby but also the first jockey to win *period.* Interestingly, Black American jockeys won 15 of the first 28 Kentucky Derbies. Not only did Isaac Murphy become the first jockey of any race to win three Kentucky Derbies, but he was also the very first jockey inducted into the Jockey Hall of Fame. (Read more about Black American contributions to sports in Chapter 19.)

Congressional Medal of Honor (1900)

Nearly four decades after his heroic actions, Civil War hero Sgt. William H. Carney received the Congressional Medal of Honor, the first awarded to a Black American. Born enslaved in Virginia, his father reportedly escaped to Massachusetts via the Underground Railroad. His family joined him later. An inspiration for the film *Glory,* Carney distinguished himself during the crucial 1863 battle at Fort Wagner in Charleston, South Carolina. He spotted a wounded soldier about to drop the flag, a signal of defeat, and although wounded himself, Carney picked up the flag and refused to let it drop, even after Confederate soldiers shot him several more times. Carney survived, receiving his historic medal May 23, 1900, more than 35 years later, eight years before his death. Today, that same flag is enshrined in Boston's Memorial Hall. (Read more about the Civil War in Chapter 6.)

Rhodes Scholar (1907)

Philadelphia native and Phi Beta Kappa Harvard graduate Alain Locke was the first Black American Rhodes Scholar. A Howard University professor for 40 years, he was a pivotal figure during the Harlem Renaissance (see Chapter 14). Considered the "Father of the Harlem Renaissance," Locke, who edited the Harlem Renaissance's key manifesto *The New Negro,* encouraged Black artists, including artist Aaron Douglass and writers Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, to draw creative inspiration from their African heritage.

Exploration (1909)

A chance meeting with Robert E. Peary changed Matthew Alexander Henson's life as the pair spent almost two decades trying to reach the North Pole. Without Henson, who quickly learned the Inuit language and culture as well as arctic survival skills, it's doubtful Peary would have reached the North Pole. Although Peary seemed to acknowledge Henson's contributions, even admitting he couldn't "get along without Henson" and penning the foreword to Henson's 1912 book *A Black Explorer at the North Pole*, he barely spoke to Henson afterward.

Not uncommon for the Jim Crow era, mainstream organizations honoring the feat often excluded Henson. Black American organizations, however, regularly recognized his significant achievement. Slightly before his death in 1955, Henson, who some claim reached the North Pole 45 minutes before Peary, did receive more

mainstream praise, including a presidential commendation from Eisenhower in 1954. Posthumously, Henson's great honors include reinterment in Arlington National Cemetery near Peary as well as receiving the Hubbard Award, the National Geographic Society's highest honor.

Television (1939)

Noted film and television historian Donald Bogle credits Ethel Waters as the first Black American to broadcast a show on network television. *The Ethel Waters Show,* which NBC aired on June 14, 1939, featured several skits, including a dramatic sequence from Waters's hit play, *Mamba's Daughters*. In 1962, Waters, who often played an on-screen maid, became the first Black actress nominated for a primetime Emmy. (To read more about Black Americans in television, go to Chapter 18.)

Nobel Peace Prize (1950)

Longtime Howard University professor Ralph Bunche, who chaired the political science department from 1928 until 1950, and was an active participant in the civil rights movement, began working with the United Nations in 1946. From 1947 to 1949, Bunche, who spent his teenage years in Los Angeles where he excelled in high school and in college at the University of California Los Angeles where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa, tackled the deadly conflict in Palestine, eventually persuading Israel and the Arab States to sign the 1949 Armistice Agreements, thus ending the Arab–Israeli War. In 1950, Bunche became the first Black American to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. During the latter part of his life, Bunche served on several boards, including the New York City Board of Education, the Board of Overseers of Harvard University, the Board of the Institute of International Education, and as a trustee of Oberlin College, Lincoln University, and the New Lincoln School.

Pulitzer Prize (1950)

Poet Gwendolyn Brooks was the first Black American writer to win the Pulitzer Prize. Raised and nurtured on Chicago's South Side, a key feature in much of her work, Brooks published her first poem, *Eventide,* in 1930 in the legendary Black

newspaper the *Chicago Defender*. Her first book of poetry, *A Street in Bronzeville*, published in 1945 and set in the historic Chicago Black community of Bronzeville, received critical acclaim. Brooks's second collection of poetry, *Annie Allen,* paints a vivid picture of life as a young Black woman and won the coveted Pulitzer Prize. In addition to receiving a Guggenheim Fellowship, Brooks also became an American Academy of Arts and Letters fellow, as well as the state of Illinois's poet laureate. (You can read more about Black American literature in Chapter 14.)

Fashion (1988)

Fashion designer Patrick Kelly infused his work with the folk sensibilities of his Southern upbringing, including imagery some considered racist. Born in 1954, Kelly became the first American designer inducted in 1988 into the Chambre Syndicale, the elite French fashion industry organization to which Yves Saint Laurent and Christian Lacroix belong. He attended Mississippi's Jackson State University, an HBCU, before relocating to Atlanta, where he once hocked his refashioned thrift-store wares on the streets and worked as a window dresser for an upscale boutique. After a stint in New York where he attended Parsons School of Design, Kelly went to Paris and found great success. Sadly, in 1990, Kelly, on the brink of fashion superstardom, died, reportedly of AIDS complications.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Harnessing the power of "slave narratives"
- Spreading social commentary
- Illustrating personal struggles in fiction

Chapter 21
Ten Black Literary Classics

You're probably thinking there can't possibly be such a thing as a definitive work of Black culture. You're right! There is no one perfect work. The ten classic books in this chapter, however, represent a sampling of the books many people encounter in Black literature and other courses. One notable exception is from Carter G. Woodson, which many Black students, in particular, continue to find outside established curriculums. Black writers have been presenting diverse representations of Black culture and illuminating the human experience for centuries. Most of these works feature the timeless theme of freedom. Collectively, they also provide a broad overview of Black American history well into the 20th century, as well as raise key questions such as the value of education, the role of communal responsibility, and the true meaning of personal happiness that are just as relevant today as they were at the time these books were written.



REMEMBER

These ten books only scratch the surface. There just isn't enough space to include every phenomenal classic by a Black American author. Therefore, absences such as James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* or *Notes from a Native Son* and Ernest Gaines's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, not to mention more recent work like Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me* and Colson Whitehead's Pulitzer Prize winners, *The Underground Railroad* and *The Nickel Boys*, are simply reminders that the Black literary canon is especially deep. To find out more about Black literature, visit Chapter 14.

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself (1845)

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass is written in the slave narrative tradition, a literary style important to the overall development of Black or African American literature (refer to Chapter 14 for more on this style). Because white critics of the time often questioned whether slave narratives were written by the author or even real, a white man typically authenticated them. But even though William Lloyd Garrison followed that practice for this book, many white critics, like they had for Phillis Wheatley's work in the 18th century, still questioned Frederick Douglass's authorship especially given its eloquence

In the book — which helped the one-time fugitive become, arguably, the most important Black American leader of the 19th century — Douglass detailed his experiences of being enslaved, including his escape at age 20. Fearing his recapture, friends encouraged Douglass to spend time in Europe. While there, he helped bring international attention to slavery in the United States. Although he published his own newspaper, wrote other books, and was a noted orator and statesman after he returned to the United States, his *Narrative* still reigns as his most notable literary achievement.

Up from Slavery: An Autobiography by Booker T. Washington (1901)

Without argument, Booker T. Washington was the most dominant Black leader of his time, especially representing a Black educational institution. Even in the 21st century, it's hard not to find a school named for Washington in areas with a significant Black population. When his autobiography *Up from Slavery* appeared in 1901, it became an instant classic. Enslaved until he was 9 years old, Washington was nearly a teenager before he learned to read, yet he graduated with honors from Virginia's Hampton Institute (modern-day Hampton University).

While he was just a teacher at Hampton, Hampton's white president recommended him to the founders of Tuskegee Institute. Washington's remarkable feat of building (literally and figuratively) Tuskegee out of nothing into the nation's premier Black American institution of the time often placed him in prominent political circles. His public statements that vocational education served the Black

masses better than intellectual education alone and that Black Americans should be patient about full political equality fueled controversy among Black people for decades. Still, his own "up from slavery" odyssey, touching on many of those points, remains a treasured text.

The Souls of Black Folk by W.E.B. Du Bois (1903)

The cultural significance of W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* was immediately apparent when *The New York Times* and other revered mainstream publications reviewed the book. A poetic and eloquent tome of essays by the first Black American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard, *The Souls of Black Folk* provides a personal, sociological, and philosophical examination of being Black in white America.

Its impact was so far-reaching that Du Bois's direct challenge of Washington's accommodationist attitude toward segregation divided Black leadership into two camps for decades. In *The Souls of Black Folk,* Du Bois, one of the NAACP's 60 founders, asserted that the "problem of the Twentieth century is the problem of the color-line." He also advanced the concept of the Talented Tenth, his belief that the top 10 percent of Black Americans had a responsibility to lead the masses. To this day, Du Bois's many other publications have yet to surpass the popularity of this seminal work.

The Mis-Education of the Negro by Carter G. Woodson (1933)

Known as the "father of Black history," Carter G. Woodson pioneered scholarly study of Black/African American history and culture and, beginning with Negro History Week in 1926, is responsible for the ultimate establishment of Black History Month. In *The Mis-Education of the Negro,* Woodson questions the value of Eurocentric education for Black Americans and advocates for a more balanced educational system that doesn't ignore the tremendous contributions of Black people to American history and the world. Sadly, the book's continuing popularity among both students and nonstudents stems from the harsh reality that Woodson's interrogation of the American educational system's value to Black Americans remains valid.



Woodson's work inspired the title of Lauryn Hill's 1998 Grammy-winning album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill.*

Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston (1937)

A major player during the Harlem Renaissance, Zora Neale Hurston also studied with noted anthropologist Franz Boas as a student at New York City's Barnard College and even collected Southern folk music alongside famed folklorist Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress. This substantial study of "Negro folklore," coupled with her own personal experiences, permeate her timeless novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Set mostly in Eatonville, Florida, the all-Black town where she grew up, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* illustrates Hurston's poetic command of language.

In recent decades, female scholars have specifically praised Hurston's ability to capture protagonist Janie Crawford's frustrations as she struggles to find herself in the 1930s during a time when a Black woman, as Janie's grandmother Nanny tells her, is "de mule uh de world." Although once a heralded writer, Hurston died penniless in 1960. Largely ignored until celebrated writer Alice Walker resurrected her legacy in the 1970s, Hurston's classic novel reached an even larger audience when Oprah Winfrey produced the book's first film version starring Halle Berry for ABC in 2005.

Native Son by Richard Wright (1940)

Mississippi-born writer Richard Wright's "protest" novel *Native Son,* which deals head-on with racism and its sociological causes and effects, sold a whopping 250,000 copies during its first run. Set mainly on Chicago's poor and predominantly Black South Side during the 1930s, *Native Son* tells the tragic story of 20-year-old Bigger Thomas as his life spirals into an uncontrollable and tangled web of fear and murder.

A one-time member of the Communist Party, Wright, who escaped the Jim Crow South only to endure intense racial segregation in Chicago, uses Thomas's highly questionable actions to dramatize racism's devastating effects. An influential titan of 20th-century Black literature, Wright's use of the literary style of naturalism to depict Black Americans as victims of larger social forces defined Black (male) writers for decades.

Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison (1952)

Oklahoma native and one-time music student Ralph Ellison left Tuskegee Institute in 1936 for New York City. There he met Richard Wright and became affiliated with the influential Federal Writers' Project. In 1952, Ellison published his first novel, *Invisible Man,* to critical acclaim. In *Invisible Man,* the unnamed protagonist searches for his own identity, only to find it marred by American racism. Ellison mixes and matches American and Black American cultural traditions as he reveals that Black Americans or Negro Americans at the time, the unnamed protagonist included, are largely invisible in mainstream American society.

Through the fictional characters of Dr. Bledsoe and Ras the Exhorter (fictionalized versions of Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey and their respective positions), Ellison analyzes the various strategies Black Americans employ and have employed to achieve racial equality. Ellison's decision to infuse jazz, a uniquely American art form created by Black Americans, throughout the text subtly establishes an aesthetic perspective that is simultaneously American and Black American. Although another novel, *Juneteenth,* was published after his death, *Invisible Man* remains his American masterpiece.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X (As Told to Alex Haley) by Alex Haley and Malcolm X (1965)

Published just months following Malcolm X's assassination in February 1965, *TIME* magazine deemed *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* one of the 20th century's ten most important nonfiction books. Dictated to Alex Haley, who later wrote *Roots, The Autobiography of Malcolm X* details Malcolm Little's life from once-promising student to hustler as well as his rise from a prison convict to one of Black America's most charismatic leaders.

Unlike Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, who rose to prominence as a member of the Nation of Islam, didn't advocate nonviolence as a means of improving the overall condition of Black people in America. He favored a more militant approach to Black freedom and equality that proved especially popular in urban centers. Although incomplete, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* provides an intimate window into one of the 20th century's most intriguing and controversial figures of any race.

The Color Purple by Alice Walker (1982)

In *The Color Purple,* longtime activist Alice Walker, who coined the term "womanism" to distinguish Black American feminism, scored critically and commercially with the Pulitzer Prize–winning story of Celie, a young Black woman who overcomes poverty and sexual abuse in the rural South to realize her own self-worth. In *The Color Purple,* Walker uses folkloric techniques reminiscent of her literary mother, Zora Neale Hurston.

Infused with a womanist energy, *The Color Purple* questions taboo subjects (especially for the era) such as misogyny, sexual abuse, and homosexuality, as well as traditional religious beliefs within the Black community. Despite the critical acclaim Walker received for *The Color Purple,* many Black men accused Walker of portraying Black men negatively, especially after the film was released in 1985. Controversy aside, *The Color Purple* remains a widely read staple.

Beloved by Toni Morrison (1987)

Six years after she published *Beloved,* Toni Morrison became the first Black American recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature for her collected works. Partly inspired by the true story of Margaret Garner, an enslaved woman who elected to kill her children rather than return them to slavery, *Beloved* follows the life of Sethe, a woman haunted by both her enslaved past and the ghost of the infant daughter she kills to protect her from slave hunters tracking her down. Shunned by the Black community and living quietly with her daughter, as well as her mother-in-law Baby Suggs for a spell, in a house presumably haunted by the ghost of the dead baby girl, Sethe gets another chance at life and love when Paul D, an associate from her former plantation, comes to town. That's all shattered when Beloved, whom Sethe believes is her dead child reborn, appears.

A beacon of achievement in both Black literature and literature overall, *Beloved* represents the maturation of a genre rooted in the critical slave narrative tradition by paying homage to and transcending those origins. Refreshing in its multifaceted approach to enslavement and Reconstruction, *Beloved* examines the shackles, literally and figuratively, of the enslaved past of both Sethe as well as that of the nation at large.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Creating Black American art
- Destroying conventions

Chapter 22

Ten (Plus One) Influential Black American Visual Artists

As a result of the special significance artisans held in African culture, woodcarving, pottery, basket weaving, ironworks, and other crafts largely characterized early visual art from Black Americans. Even though portrait artists did emerge prior to the Civil War, Black American artists recognized in the mainstream were relatively few until after the Civil War. During the Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro Movement, as many knew it, of the late 1910s into the early 1930s that was evident throughout the nation, many Black American artists' embrace of their African heritage was reflected in their work. Today, the permanent collections of many world-class museums include work from Black American artists.

The ten (plus one) influential Black American artists featured in this chapter are far from definitive. Instead, they serve as a representative taste of a Black/African-American art tradition that continues to grow and evolve.

Joshua Johnson (c. 1763–1832)

Believed to be the first successful Black American artist, Joshua Johnson (sometimes Johnston), who was likely born enslaved in the West Indies, worked in the Baltimore area between the 1790s and early 1800s, where he painted prominent middle-class families, including free Black Americans. His talent and fame rivaled that of his white contemporary Charles Wilson Peale, whom some scholars believe Johnson knew personally. More than 80 of his portraits hang in some of the world's most prestigious museums, including the American Museum in Bath, England.

Edmonia Lewis (c. 1844–1907)

Born to a Haitian-American father and a mother with Native American ancestry and orphaned at a young age, sculptor Edmonia Lewis, largely supported by her wealthy older half-brother early in her career, was among the few successful female artists of her time. Unlike other Black artists, Lewis, who survived racial tensions at Oberlin Collegiate Institute, despite its reputation as one of the first mainstream institutions to admit Black students, didn't hide her heritage and liked being photographed with her work.

A bust of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the white commander of the Union army's legendary all-Black 54th Regiment, earned Lewis, who also sold medallions of prominent abolitionists, widespread acclaim and enough money to move to Rome, then a thriving center for writers, poets, and artists often visited by wealthy Americans. There, Lewis flourished but still exhibited her work in the United States.

Her most well-known work, *The Death of Cleopatra,* was lost for years. After not selling the piece, which exhibited at both the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition and the 1878 Chicago Interstate Exposition, Lewis couldn't afford to ship the piece to Rome and instead stored it. Until its discovery in 1988, the famous piece made several rounds, including spending time in a Chicago saloon and serving as a grave marker for a horse named Cleopatra. Today, the restored masterpiece resides in the Smithsonian National Museum of American Art. Other institutions with work from Lewis include the Howard University Gallery of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

FACE VESSELS

Functional pottery modeled in the shape of human faces, known as *face vessels* or *face jugs,* emerged prior to the Civil War. Although first noted in the North around 1810, those created by enslaved people in Edgefield, South Carolina, are especially distinctive. Marked by their alkaline-glazed stoneware and simple, earthy tones, face vessels have been found in other parts of the South. Their creators, however, haven't been satisfactorily identified.

While people in various parts of the world, including Africa, use face vessel–like objects in specific rituals, scholars have been unable to determine whether the face vessels created during the antebellum period functioned beyond mundane tasks such as holding water. Given the number of face vessels recovered along key Underground Railroad routes, however, there is reason to believe they served a greater purpose. Face vessel production waned after 1865, but they still serve as a reminder of the existence of early Black American artists.

Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859–1937)

Largely touted as the first Black artist to achieve international fame, Henry Ossawa Tanner, the son of an African Methodist Episcopal minister father and a mother who escaped enslavement through the Underground Railroad, infused his art with spiritual and natural themes. Early paintings depicting Black Americans from Tanner, who studied art at the prestigious Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, are especially rare and valuable. After a failed photography studio in Atlanta, Tanner made his way to Paris in 1893, where he studied at the Académie Julian. Inspired by the Paul Laurence Dunbar poem "A Banjo Song," Tanner created his most famous work, *The Banjo Lesson*, an emotionally moving portrait of an elderly man teaching the banjo to the young boy on his knee. The famed painting has been housed by the Hampton University Museum since 1894. Although Tanner held exhibitions in the United States, he lived the rest of his life in France with his wife and child.

Aaron Douglas (1899–1979)

Known as the "father of Black American art," Aaron Douglas, born in Kansas, made a bold artistic and political statement by incorporating African and Black American influences in his work. During the Harlem Renaissance, Douglas's work

regularly appeared on the cover of the magazine *Opportunity* as well as in books by Harlem Renaissance writers such as James Weldon Johnson. Douglas served as the first president of the Harlem Artists Guild, which succeeded in getting Black artists accepted for projects with the Works Progress Administration (WPA), created during FDR's administration.

Through the WPA, Douglas created one of his most famous murals, *Aspects of Negro Life*, in 1934 for the 135th Street branch of the New York Public Library, later renamed for Harlem Renaissance luminary Countee Cullen and now absorbed into the renowned Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City. First commissioned to paint murals for Fisk University, Douglas went on to help create the school's art department in the late 1930s but didn't become a full-time art professor there until 1944. Douglas, who also chaired the art department, remained at Fisk until his retirement in 1966. Today, his work, including his signature murals, remains a valued feature of the historic campus.



In 1938, WPA alumnus Hale Woodruff was commissioned to create the extraordinary *Amistad* murals, depicting the famous slave ship rebellion of 1839 for Talladega College in Alabama. The 1997 Steven Spielberg-directed, Debbie Allen-produced historical drama *Amistad* detailed the story of how African captives represented by former president John Quincy Adams regained their freedom, as well as other historic events. For nearly 70 years, the murals hung above the school's Savery Library before being taken down in 2008 for much-needed conservation in collaboration with Atlanta's High Museum of Art, followed by a multiyear tour to museums in major urban centers. The murals, valued at $50 million, returned to the school in 2020, in the newly opened Dr. William R. Harvey Museum of Art.

Horace Pippin (1888–1946)

Formally pursuing art as a child was too expensive for Horace Pippin, so he taught himself. At age 14, Pippin, who grew up mostly in Goshen and Middleton in New York, left school altogether to help support his family. As a member of the famed all-Black 369th Infantry Regiment (more popularly known as the Harlem Hellfighters), which fought honorably alongside the French in World War I, he was wounded by enemy fire and lost normal use of his right arm. Back in his West Chester, Pennsylvania birthplace, Pippin and his wife eked out a modest living on his disability, income from odd jobs, and her earnings as a laundress as they raised her son.

Unable to erase the horrors of war from his mind, Pippin returned to art at around age 40. Presumably triggered by his injury, Pippen's first painting, *The End of the War: Starting Home*, took a reported three years to complete. Artist N.C. Wyeth and

art critic Christian Brinton, who lived in the area, were key in introducing Pippin's work to a wider audience. The art world embraced Pippin's bold use of colors, his depictions of Black American life, and his antiwar, religious, and landscape paintings. Four of Pippin's works were included in a 1938 traveling show for the Museum of Modern Art. Just as he was becoming more famous, Pippin died of a stroke in 1946 at age 58.

Loïs Mailou Jones (1905–1998)

Artist Loïs Mailou Jones, a Howard University art professor from 1930 until 1977, developed her own gift while nurturing younger artists such as sculptor Elizabeth Catlett and African American art advocate David Driskell. Jones began her impressive art career, which spanned more than six decades, in her native Boston, where she graduated from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in 1927. Dissatisfied with the anonymity of life as a textile designer, Jones sought a teaching career to complement her art career, but racism forced her south. She began developing the art department at North Carolina's Palmer Memorial Institute before Howard University wooed her away.

Jones, who secretly entered her work in contests barring Black artists and won, explored her craft freely during a sabbatical in Paris in the late 1930s, where she studied, visited museums, and painted. There, she created *Les Fétiches*, her celebrated piece of African masks. In 1953, Jones married acclaimed Haitian graphic artist Louis Vergniaud Pierre-Noel, adding regular travel between Haiti, where she had lived and taught, and Washington, D.C. to her routine. Fascinated with Haiti's strong African retentions, Jones integrated that influence into her work and later traveled and studied in various African countries, which also impacted her work. Important pieces from the artist, who created new work practically up until her death in 1998, can be found in the permanent collections of several art institutions, including the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



HISTORICAL ROOTS

Loïs Mailou Jones student and accomplished artist David Driskell (1931–2020), who passed due to COVID-19, also championed Black artists as both an art historian and curator. His landmark 1976 exhibition *Two Centuries of Black American Art* that he curated featuring 63 artists and more than 200 works inspired Sam Pollard's 2021 HBO documentary *Black Art: In the Absence of Light* highlighting not only prominent artists like Jacob Lawrence and Romare Bearden, but also addressing sexism in Black art with Faith Ringgold even as it highlights such artists as Kehinde Wiley, Amy Sherald, Kerry James Marshall, Carrie Mae Weems, and Radcliffe Bailey.

Jacob Lawrence (1917–2000)

Jacob Lawrence directly benefited from the cultural richness of the Harlem Renaissance and, at an early age, took classes with respected artists Charles Alston and Augusta Savage. A child of the Great Migration, Lawrence used his personal experiences, along with historical research collected at the 135th Street Library (now the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture), to create his highly acclaimed series, *The Migration of the Negro,* also known as *The Migration Series,* in 1940 and 1941. Although Lawrence created several impressive series around historical figures such as Haiti's revolutionary leader Toussaint L'Ouverture, *The Migration Series* catapulted him into mainstream American art circles. Today, at least 200 museums house Lawrence's work, including the National Gallery of Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Elected to the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1983, Lawrence, who painted until his death in 2000, created a large body of work documenting varying aspects of Black American life in an astonishingly beautiful and provocative modernist style. One of the most well-known American artists of the 20th century, Lawrence, who also taught art, helped widen the parameters of American art and opened doors previously closed to Black American artists.

Romare Bearden (1911–1988)

The Harlem Renaissance and the Great Migration greatly influenced the North Carolina–born and Harlem-raised artist Romare Bearden. Although Bearden (whose mother was a noted journalist) created cartoons for mainstream and Black American publications early in his life, the World War II veteran and longtime social worker didn't make his mark in the art world until later. During the 1960s and 1970s, Bearden began cultivating his now-famous collage technique, which resembles Black American quilts on canvas.

Greatly inspired by jazz, the one-time jazz artist incorporated that love into famous works such as *Jammin' at the Savoy.* Equally important, Bearden, with his insightful essays and such books as *A History of African American Artists: From 1792 to the Present,* published posthumously by his coauthor Harry Henderson, helped elevate the Black American artist as a thinking, creative person whose gifts extended beyond raw talent. Bearden also played key roles in establishing Black institutions such as the Studio Museum in Harlem and the Black Academy of Arts and Letters in Dallas. Recognizing Bearden's importance as an artist, in 2003, the National Gallery of Art hosted *The Art of Romare Bearden,* its first major retrospective of a Black American artist.

John Biggers (1924–2001)

The youngest of seven children born to parents in Gastonia, North Carolina, John Biggers, under the guidance of respected Austrian-born art educator Viktor Lowenfeld, began his artistic journey at Hampton Institute, where another mentor, Charles White, served as artist-in-residence. Following a two-year stint in the Navy, Biggers, at the urging of Lowenfeld, came to Pennsylvania State University, where he earned several degrees, including his Ph.D. In 1949, Biggers began developing the art department at what is now Texas Southern University. A 1957 UNESCO fellowship allowing Biggers to travel to Africa deeply affected him and his work. He shared that experience in his 1962 book *Ananse: The Web of Life in Africa,* where he mixed his drawings with his personal observations of countries such as Ghana and Nigeria.

Influenced by great Mexican muralists such as Diego Rivera, Biggers, who spent more than 30 years at Texas Southern University, created several treasured murals in Houston. Known for his rich and complex style, Biggers created works that often highlighted Black women. Distinctive for their mythic quality as well as their resounding beauty, some of Biggers's many well-known works include *Birth from the Sea* and *The Contribution of Negro Women to American Life and Education.*

Samella Lewis, Ph.D. (1924–)

Born and raised in New Orleans in the 1920s, and mentored by the great Elizabeth Catlett and Charles White at Dillard University, Dr. Samella Lewis made contributions early on. As an art professor at such institutions as Morgan State University, Florida A&M, and Scripps College, Lewis, who earned doctorates in art and art history, a first for a Black woman, nurtured other artists as well as fostered a greater appreciation of Black art in general.

A founder of what became The International Review of African American Art as well as of the Museum of African American Art in Los Angeles, Lewis also wrote numerous books, including the textbook, *Art: African American* in 1978. Some of her cherished work as an artist includes the 2005 linocut "I See You" and the 1992 lithograph "House of Shango." In 2021, the College Art Association awarded Lewis the Distinguished Artist Award for Lifetime Achievement at age 96.

Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988)

Jean-Michel Basquiat's rapid commercial success remains enigmatic to many. Born in Brooklyn, New York, of Haitian and Puerto Rican ancestry, Basquiat rose to fame as a graffiti artist behind the tag "SAMO," a concept meaning "same old s**t" developed with high school friend Al Diaz. In addition to creating graffiti images, accompanied by such provocative slogan-esque statements as "SAMO© . . .4 THE SO-CALLED AVANT-GARDE" in and around New York City's influential Soho art community, Basquiat also gained notoriety through appearances on the public access show *TV Party*. His inclusion in the multi-artist exhibition, The Times Square Show, in 1980, followed by an *Artforum* article by Rene Ricard lauding his work, served as critical launching pads for his meteoric international art career. A brief friendship with Andy Warhol only elevated his profile.

Staple features of Basquiat's work, typically characterized as *neo-expressionist,* include primitive-like figures and words. Descriptions of his work by some white critics as simply "primitive" conjure up racist assumptions questioning the artistic merit of Black American artists. His unexpected death to a heroin overdose in 1988 at just 27 years old only fueled his legend. Although Basquiat isn't specifically tied to Black American cultural traditions in the same ways as pioneering artists such as Jacob Lawrence, his commercial success raised critical questions about what is Black or African-American art while also expanding general notions regarding acceptable and unacceptable content for Black American artists. Because his ascendancy accompanied that of hip-hop, Basquiat, who collaborated with rappers, is associated in that space as well.

Even in death, he remains influential, prompting the 1996 film *Basquiat,* with actor Jeffrey Wright drawing early acclaim portraying him, and numerous documentaries, including 2017's *Boom for Real: The Late Teenage Years of Jean-Michel Basquiat*. In 2016 and 2017, Japanese billionaire Yusaku Maezawa set records, acquiring untitled works by Basquiat for $57.3 million and $110.5 million. The latter marked the highest price for which any work by an American artist had been purchased through auction. Both ensured that Basquiat's legend would live on.

Index

A

Aaron, Hank, 455
Abernathy, Ralph David, 177, 180, 182, 204–205
abolition movement
  about, 85
  arguing for/against slavery, 87–88
  colonization (emigration) movement, 94–96
  effects of proslavery politics, 96–98
  Emancipation Proclamation and, 115
  key abolitionists, 89–92
  Lincoln and, 107–108
  managing divide between slavery and freedom, 103–107
  reading and writing, 92–94
  societies, 86
  Underground Railroad, 98–103
Abrams, Stacey, 10, 129, 249, 253, 257
Abyssinia (musical), 336
accommodationist policy, 147–148
Adam Negro's Tryall, 309
Adams, Abigail, 58
Adams, Henry, 139
Adams, John, 58, 59
Addicted (Zane), 328
Adjaye, David, 26
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Twain), 16
Affordable Care Act (ACA), 238
Afonso I, 43–44
Africa, 33–47
"African," as a term, 16
"African American," as a term, 16
African American History For Dummies (Penrice), 1
African American Lives (docuseries), 9, 126
African Baptist ("Bluestone") Church, 266
African Grove Theater, 332
African Institution, 95
African Lodge, 62
African Methodist Episcopal (AME), 16, 266, 267
African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEX), 266, 267–268
The African Origin of Civilization (Diop), 37
Africanus, Leo, 43
"Afro-American," as a term, 16
Agricultural Adjustment Association (AAA), 159
AIDS, 228–229
Aiken, George, 337
Ailey, Alvin, 17, 237, 354–355
Alabama, 182–184, 187–189, 193–194
Alabama Christian Movement, 182
Albany Movement, 180–181, 203
Aldridge, Ira, 332
Alexander, Margaret Walker, 325
Alexander, Michelle, 22
Alfonso V, King of Portugal, 43
Ali, Muhammed, 3, 18, 465, 466
Ali, Noble Drew, 279–280
Alito, Samuel, 292
All God's Chilun Got Wings (play), 339
All In (documentary), 257
all-Black casts, 395–398
Allen, Debbie, 355
Allen, Louis, 191
Allen, Macon B., 482
Allen, Richard, 61, 267, 274
Allen, William Francis, 362
Almoravids, 35
Alpha Kappa Alpha, 305
Alpha Phi Alpha, 25, 305
American Anti-Slavery Society, 86, 90
American Colonization Society, 90, 95–96
American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS), 30
"American dream," achieving the, 19–20
American Negro Academy, 149
American Negro Theater (ANT), 343
American Revolution, 57–61, 69
Ames, Adelbert, 132
Amnegro Films, 398
ANC (Aid to Needy Children) Mothers Anonymous of Watts, 217
Anderson, Elijah, 101
Anderson, Garland, 341
Anderson, William, 180
Andrew, James Osgood, 270
Angelou, Maya, 324
Anna Lucasta (play), 343
Annie Allen (Brooks), 485
Another Country (Baldwin), 321

Anthony, Susan B., 130
antiphony. *See* call-and-response music
Antoine, C.C., 129
Appearances (play), 341
Appomattox Courthouse, 117
Arabella (ship), 53
Arbery, Ahmaud, 251
Arkansas, 125–126
Armstrong, Louis, 369, 373
Arrington, Richard, Jr., 221
Arte de los contratos (de Albornoz), 43
Ashe, Arthur, 18, 474
Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), 10
Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), 10
Atkinson, Charles, 352–353
Atlanta Compromise, 148
Atlanta Public Schools cheating scandal, 294
Atlanta Race Riot (1906), 142–143
Attaway, William, 319
Attucks, Crispus, 58, 59
The Autobiography of Malcolm X (Haley and Malcolm X), 197, 491
The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man (Johnson), 316
avant garde jazz, 371

B

Baby Momma Drama (Weber), 328
Baez, Joan, 185
Baker, Ella, 179, 216
Bakke v. California Board of Regents, 303
Baldwin, James, 10, 17, 237, 319, 320, 321
Baldwin, Ruth Standish, 154
Bale, Christian, 37
Baltimore, Charles, 143
Baltimore Riots, 243–244
Bambara, Toni Cade, 324
Bandana Land (musical), 336
banjo, 364
Bank of America, 252
banking, 128–129
Banneker, Benjamin, 89
Baptist War, 46
Baraka, Amiri, 322, 323
Barber, William, 278
Barbour, Nelson H., 282
Barnes, Stephen, 326
Barnett, Ross, 181
Barr, Will, 256
Barraccoon, 106
Barry, Marion, 179
baseball, 449–456
basketball, 456–464
Basquiat, Jean-Michel, 500
Bass, Karen, 253
Bates, Daisy, 216
Battle of Antietam (Sharpsburg), 114
Battle of Vicksburg, 117
Baylor, Elgin, 460
Beal, Francis, 217–218
Beamon, Bob, 471
Bearden, Romare, 498
beauty companies, 225
Beauty Shop (play), 346
bebop, 370–371
Before the Mayflower (Bennett), 14
Bel, Ricky, 23
Bell, Alexander Graham, 18
Bell, Sean, 229
Bell, W. Kamau, 250
Beloved (Morrison), 325, 492
Belton, Ethel, 166
Belton, Sharon Sayles, 222
Belton v. Gebhart, 166
Benezet, Anthony, 86, 89, 288
Bennett, Lerone, 14
Berea College, 296
Berlin, Ira, 67
Bernal, Martin, 37
Berry, Chuck, 17
Berry, Halle, 3, 424–425
Berry, Mary Frances, 31
Berry, Shawn, 229
Bertelsen, Phil, 199
Bethune, Mary McLeod, 159–160, 216
Bevel, James, 183
Beyoncé, 306
Biden, Joe, 218, 235, 251, 253–258
big band jazz, 369
Big Freedia, 237
Big White Fog *(play),* 343
Biggers, John, 499
Birther Movement, 279
The Birth of a Nation (film), 78, 337–338, 394
Bivins, Michael, 23
"Black," as a term, 16
Black activism, 227
Black AIDS Institute, 229
Black American Faces icon, 4
Black and Blue (musical), 346
Black Arts Movement, 322–323
Black Athena, 37
Black Catholics, 281–282
Black Caucus, 220
Black church, 266–275
Black Church Action Fund, 250
Black Codes, 122

Black demagogues, 283–284
Black Doctors COVID-19 Consortium, 250
Black Drama (Mitchell), 337
Black Entertainment Television (BET), 32, 224, 443–444
Black Exodus, 138–139
Black Fire (Baraka and Neal), 323
Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs), 304–306
Black heritage, celebrating, 23–24
Black History Month, 1, 10, 13, 23
Black inferiority, 88
Black Liberation Army (BLA), 211
Black liberation theology, 276
Black literature, 307–329
Black Lives Matter (BLM), 1, 2, 3, 10, 18, 21, 22, 238–245, 278
Black Masons, 61, 62
Black Nationalism, 13
Black Panther (film), 24
Black Panther Party (BPP), 15, 199–200, 208–213
Black Power movement, 16, 196. *See also specific topics*
Black pride, 22–24
Black Slaves, Indian Masters (Krauthamer), 126
Black Star Line Steamship Corporation, 157, 158
Black Theology and Black Power (Cone), 265
Black towns, 139–140
Black Voices (Chapman), 323
Black Women's Liberation Committee (BWLC), 217–218
A Black Explorer at the North Pole (Henson), 483
A Black Woman's Civil War Memoirs (King Taylor), 117
The Blacker the Berry (Thurman), 319, 341
blackface, 333
Black-ish *(TV show),* 433
#BlackLivesMatter, 241
The Black Book (Morrison), 325
The Black Church in the African American Experience (Lincoln and Mamiya), 265
The Black Megachurch (Tucker-Worgs), 273
The Black Panthers (documentary), 212
The Black Woman (Bambara), 218, 324
Blair, Ezell, Jr., 177–178
Blair, James, 262
Blake (Delany), 312
Blake, Eubie, 340
Blanco, Kathleen, 232
Bland, Sandra, 244–245
Blanton, Thomas, 189
Blassingame, John W., 14
Blesh, Rudi, 362
Blige, Mary J., 229
blood bank, 18
Bloody Sunday (1965), 1, 194
Blue Blood (play), 342
blue notes, 367
blues, 363–367
Blues People (Baraka), 322
The Bluest Eye (Morrison), 324
Bluett, Thomas, 53
Boaz, Franz, 317
Bogle, Donald, 484
Bolden, Charles "Buddy," 368, 373
Bolling v. Sharpe, 166
Bond, J. Max., Jr., 26
Bond, Julian, 221
Bonner family, 26
Booker, Cory, 253
Bookerites, 150
Booth, John Wilkes, 120
Bosley, Freeman, Jr., 222
Boston Massacre, 58, 59
Bottoms, Keisha Lance, 253
boxing, 464–467
boycotts, 174–177
Boyer, Nate, 246
Boykin, Keith, 237
Boynton v. Virginia, 179
Bradford, Perry, 365
Bradley, Joseph P., 147
Bradley, Tom, 221
Brando, Marlon, 185
Braun, Carol Mosley, 219
breakdancing, 353
Breed, London, 247–248
Breedlove, Sarah, 152
Brewer, Lawrence, 229, 231
Bridgeman, Valerie, 275
Bridges, Ruby, 291
Briggs, Harry, 165
Briggs v. Elliott, 165
broad marriages, 68
Bronner, Dale, 278–279
Brooke, Edward, 130
Brooke, Edward W., III, 220
Brooks, Gwendolyn, 319, 323, 325, 484–485
Brooks, Rayshard, 251
Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, 161
Browder, Aurelia, 174–175
Browder v. Gayle, 174–175, 176
Brown, Bob, 211
Brown, Debra M., 236
Brown, Edward, 88
Brown, Elaine, 213
Brown, James, 23, 277, 383
Brown, James Henry, 332
Brown, Jazebo, 367

Brown, John, 68, 91, 106–107
Brown, LaTosha, 253
Brown, Lee P., 222
Brown, Michael, 1, 3, 10, 21, 242, 256, 278
Brown, Mike, 232
Brown, Morris, 270
Brown, Ron, 222
Brown, Rory, 17
Brown, Sterling K., 231
Brown, William Wells, 89, 312, 337
Brown, Willie, 222
Brown University, 68
Brown v. Board of Education, 14–15, 160, 163–169, 173, 188, 282, 289, 290–292, 303
Bruce, Blanche K., 129–130
Bryan, Andrew, 266
Bryant, Carolyn, 170, 171
Bryant, Jamal Harrison, 278
Bryant, Kobe, 461
Buchanan v. Warley, 153
Bulah, Sarah, 166
Bulah v. Gebhart, 166
Bunch, Lonnie, III, 26
Bunche, Ralph, 11, 215, 484
Bundles, A'Lelia, 152
Burke, Tarana, 218
Burke, Yvonne Braithwaite, 220
Bush, Cori, 256
Bush, George W., 25, 26, 30, 196, 222, 231, 232, 304
business, 223–226
Bussey, Charles E., Jr., 221
Butler, Benjamin, 127
Butler, Octavia E., 326
By the Way, Meet Vera Stark (play), 350
Byrd, Harry F., Sr., 169
Byrd, James, Jr., 229, 231
Byrd, William, 266

C

Cable, George Washington, 314, 368
Caillous, André, 116
cakewalk, 351
Calhoun, John C., 86, 103, 104
California, 104
call-and-response music, 265, 360
Cameron, Daniel, 21
Cane (Toomer), 317
Cannick, Jasmyne, 237
Cantrell, LaToya, 247–248, 250
Cardozo, Francis L., 129
Cardozo, T.W., 129
Caribbean slavery, 41–47
Carmen Jones (musical), 345
Carmichael, Stokely, 179, 200–201, 208
Carnell, Yvette, 30
Carney, William H., 483
carpetbagger, 121
Carter, Betty, 372–373
Carter, Jimmy, 304
Carter, Michelle, 472–473
Carver, George Washington, 301
Cary, Mary Ann Shad, 151
Cash, Herman, 189
Castile, Philando, 245
Catholicism, 264, 281–282
Cedric the Entertainer, 417–418
Central Avenue jazz, 369–370
Central High School, 167–169, 291
Chamberlain, Wilt, 460
Chambliss, Robert Edward, 189
Chaney, James, 192
Chapman, Abraham, 323
Chappelle, Dave, 418
Charles I, King of Spain, 43
Charleston Church Massacre, 244
Charna, Dan, 225–226
Chauvin, Derek, 21, 233–234, 251–252
Cheat Sheet (website), 5
Cherry, Bobby Frank, 189
Chesnutt, Charles, 314
Chester, Thomas Morris, 119
Chestnut, Charles W., 326
Cheyney University, 295–296
Chicago, Illinois, 144
Chicago Freedom Movement (CFM), 202
children's march, 183
The Chip Woman's Fortune (play), 341
Chisholm, Shirley, 220, 221
Chrisman, Robert, 323
Christianity, 262–266
Christmas Uprising, 46
church, 261–284
Church, Frank, 212
Church of God in Christ (COGIC), 271–272
cimarrones, 46
City of Refuge (Fisher), 316
civil rights
  about, 187–188, 233–234
  Birmingham, Alabama, 187–189
  Black Literature from, 319–321
  Black Power, 196–201
  Civil Rights Act (1964), 189–190
  death of King, Jr., 203–205
  Freedom Summer, 190–193
  post-, 207–232
  pre-, 12–13
  Project Alabama, 193–194
  race relations in the north, 201–203
  Voting Rights Act (1965), 195–196

Civil Rights Act (1866), 12
Civil Rights Act (1875), 132, 147
Civil Rights Act (1964), 189–190
Civil Rights Act (1968), 205
Civil Rights Cases of 1883, 147
Civil Rights movement. *See also Brown v. Board of Education;* King, Martin Luther, Jr.
about, 16, 163
boycotts, 173–181
increasing Federal involvement, 181–182
March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963), 185–186
marches, 173–181
1963, 182–184
Ole Miss, 181–182
sit-ins, 173–181
Till, Emmett, 169–171
Civil War
about, 109
Confederate Army, 118–119
early days of, 111–112
Emancipation Proclamation, 113–116
end of, 119–120
end of Reconstruction, 131–134
Fifteenth Amendment, 130
government intervention and, 123–130
post-, 270–271, 289–290
Reconstruction, 121–123
slavery and, 110–111
Thirteenth Amendment, 119–120
Union Army and, 116–118
Clark, Jim, 194
Clark, Kenneth, 165
Clark, Mamie Phipps, 165
Clark, Mark, 212, 213
Clark, Mattie Moss, 377–378
Clarkson, Thomas, 89
class distinctions, 44–45
class wars, cocaine and, 227
classic blues, 365
classical dance, 354–356
Clay, Henry, 95–96
Clay, William L., 220
Cleaver, Eldridge, 209, 211
Cleaver, Emmanuel, 222
Cleaver, Kathleen Neal, 213
Cleopatra (film), 37
Cleveland, James, 377
Clinton, Bill, 25, 30, 219, 222
Clinton, Hillary, 234, 255
Clorindy, the Origin of the Cakewalk (musical), 336
Clotel, 312
Clotilda (ship), 105–106, 113
Cloud, John, 194
Clutchette, John, 210
Clyburn, James "Jim," 253
Coachman, Alice, 471
Coates, Ta-Nehisi, 28, 30
Coats, John, 67
cocaine, 226–228
Cochran, Johnnie, 230–231
Cochran, Thad, 146
Coffin, Catharine, 100
Coffin, Levi, 100
cohabitation, among enslaved people, 45
The Coldest Winter Ever (Souljah), 328
Cole, Bob, 336
Cole, Johnetta B., 304
Coleman, Johnnie, 275
Coleman-Singleton, Sharonda, 244
Colfax Courthouse, Massacre at, 131
Collins, Addie Mae, 188
Collins, Patricia Hill, 219
Colonization Council, 139
colonization (emigration) movement, 94–96
Color Struck (play), 342
"colored," as a term, 16
Colored Farmers' National Alliance and Cooperative Union, 138
Colored Women of America, 151
Colored Women's Progressive Franchise Association, 151
The Colored Players Film Corporation, 395
The Color Purple (Walker), 324, 492
Columbus, Christopher, 38, 39, 41–42
Colvin, Claudette, 174–175
Combs, Sean "Diddy," 15
comedy, 415–412, 428–431
Committee for the Improvement of Industrial Conditions Among Negroes, 154
Committee on Urban Conditions Among Negroes, 154
Common, 23, 229, 414
Compromise of 1850, 104
Cone, James H., 265
Confederate battle flag, 28–29
Confederate soldiers, 112, 118–119
Confederate States of America (CSA), 110
Confirmation (film), 218
Confiscation Acts (1861 and 1862), 111, 114
Congo, 43
Congo Square, 368
Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), 173, 215

Congressional Medal of Honor, first Black recipient of, 483
Conjur Man Dies (play), 343
The Conjure Woman, and Conjure Tales (Chesnutt), 314
Connecticut, 60
Connecticut Emancipation Society, 94
Connor, Bull, 179, 203–204
Considerations On Keeping Negroes (Woolman), 60
Conyers, John, 30
Coogler, Ryan, 241, 410–411
Cook, Will Marion, 336
Cooke, Henry, 128
Cooke, Jay, 128
Coolidge, Calvin, 158
Cooper, Iris, 225–226
Copeland, Misty, 355–356
Copeland, Raniyah, 229
Corbett, Kizzmekia "Kizzy," 250
The Corner (film), 436
Cornish, Samuel E., 93, 94
Corporate Restitution Movement, 28
Corrie, William, 105
Cortés, Hernán, 41
The Cosby Show (TV show), 430–431
Cosgrove, Myles, 21, 251
Cotton, Tom, 27
cotton gin, 71
cotton plantations, 65, 71–72
Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), 212
Coushatta, murders in, 131
COVID-19, 249–250, 253–256
Cox, Laverne, 237
crack cocaine, 226–228
Creating Black Americans (Painter), 14
Crenshaw, Kimberlé, 219
The Creole Show (musical theater), 335
crime and the criminal justice system, 20–22, 156
The Crisis (magazine), 153
A Critique of the Slave Trade (de Mercado), 43
Crittenden, John J., 110
Crittenden-Johnson Resolution, 110, 121
Cromwell, Oliver, 60
Crosby, Peter, 131
Crowley, James, 238
Crummell, Alexander, 149
Crump, Benjamin, 239
Crusade for Justice, 141
Cuffe, Paul, 95–96
Cullen, Countee, 11, 319
Cullors, Patrisse, 22, 241, 242
cultural contributions, 15–18
cultural tourism, 24–26
Cumming, Elijah, 248
curse of Ham, 88
cycling, 477

D

Dabney, John, 105–106
Dabney, Robert Lewis, 88
The Dahomean (Yerby), 321
Daley, Richard, 202
dance, 17, 351–356
Darden, Christopher, 230
Dark Alliance (Webb), 228
Dark Matter (Butler), 326
Darktown Follies (musical), 351
Davies, Ronald N., 167–168
Davies, Samuel, 263
Davis, A.K., 129
Davis, Angela, 210, 219, 237
Davis, Calvin P., 144
Davis, Jefferson, 108, 110, 115, 118, 129, 133
Davis, Miles, 374
Davis, Ossie, 345
Davis, Sammy, Jr., 353
Davis, Viola, 425
Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, 166
de Albornoz, Bartolomé, 43
de Balboa, Vasco Núñez, 41
de Boré, Jean Étienne, 71
De La Beckwith, Byron, 184
de la Matosa, Francisco, 47
de Mercado, Fray Tomás, 43
de Montúfar, Alonso, 43
de Vaca, Alvar Núñez Cabeza, 41
Declaration of Independence, 60, 61
The Declaration and Confession of Jeffrey, a Negro, 309
Def Comedy Jam, 419
A Defence of Virginia (Dabney), 88
DeLaine, Joseph A., 165
Delany, Martin R., 96, 118, 127, 312
Delany, Samuel R., 326
DeLarge, Robert, 130
Delaware, 110, 113
Delta blues, 365
Delta Sigma Theta, 306
Demings, Val, 253
"Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators" (Johnson), 77
Denmark Vesey's Uprising, 76–77
Denny, Reginald, 230
Denton, Vachell, 53
DePriest, Oscar, 220
Derby, Doris, 344
Derham, James, 481–482

desegregation, 167–169, 183–184, 303
Desire (slave ship), 50
Devil in a Blue Dress (Mosley), 328
Devine, Annie, 193
Devoe, Ronnie, 23
DeVos, Betsy, 19, 295
Diallo, Amadou, 229
Diallo, Ayuba Suleiman, 53
Diary of a Mad Black Woman (musical), 346
A Different World (TV show), 431
Diffrent Strokes (TV show), 429
Diggs, Daveed, 24
Dinkins, David, 2, 219
Diop, Cheikh Anta, 37
Diouf, Sylvanie A., 80
discriminatory policies, inequalities in, 20
Divine, Father, 283–284
Divine Nine, 304–306
DMX, 414
DNA testing, 9
Doctor, Depayne Middleton, 244
Dollar, Creflo, 274
Dollar, Taffi, 275
Don King (film), 436
Dorsey, Decatur, 117
Dorsey, Thomas Andrew, 274, 375–376
double consciousness, 61
"Double V" campaign, 161
Doughty, Charles, 270
Douglas, Aaron, 483, 495–496
Douglas, Stephen A., 103, 105
Douglass, Frederick, 12, 19, 79, 89, 91–93, 103, 116, 123, 129, 130, 139, 147, 268, 288, 311, 482, 488
Douglass, H. Ford, 118
Dreamgirls (musical), 345–346
Dretzin, Rachel, 199
Drew, Charles, 18
Drew, Howard, 471
Drexel, Katharine, 282
drivers, 73
drug trafficking, 228
Drumgo, Fleeta, 210
Du, Soon Ja, 230
Du Bois, W.E.B., 13, 37, 61, 146–150, 152–154, 158, 219, 299–302, 313, 326, 340, 489
du Sable, Jean Baptiste Pointe, 25
Dumas, F.E., 118
Dunbar, Paul Laurence, 148, 314, 329, 336
Dunbar-Nelson, Alice, 325
Dunham, Katherine, 17, 354
Dunmore, Lord, 59
Dunn, Oscar J., 129
Durham, William Howard, 272
Durr, Clifford, 174
DuSable Museum of African American History, 25
Dutchman (play), 322
DuVernay, Ava, 22, 194, 408–409
Dwight, Ed, 77
Dylan, Bob, 185

E

East St. Louis riots (1917), 143
Eastern Colored League, 452
Eaton, John, 127
Ebony Film Corporation, 395
Echo (ship), 105
economic empowerment, 222–226
Edison, Thomas, 18
education, 19, 124, 285–306
Edwards, Jonathan, 263
Egerton, Douglas R., 76
Egypt, 37
Eisenhower, Dwight D., 168, 291
election, 2020, 253–258
Election Day, 219
Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), 294–295
Eliot, John, 262–263
Ellington, Edward Kennedy "Duke," 17, 373
Elliott, Robert Brown, 130, 165
Ellison, Ralph, 319–321, 491
Elmina Castle, 39
emancipation, pre-, 11–12
Emancipation Proclamation, 30, 113–116
Emanuel, Rahm, 243
Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, 29, 244
Emerson, John, 106
emigration (colonization) movement, 94–96
Emmett Till Antilynching Act, 146
The Emperor Jones (play), 339
empires, African, 34–38
empowerment zones, 224
Encinia, Brian, 244–245
Enforcement Act (1870), 133
England, 114, 115
equal education, 19
Equal Rights Association, 130
equality, strategies for achieving, 147–149
Erving, Julius "Dr. J.," 460
escape, from slavery, 46
The Escape; or, a Leap of Freedom (play), 337
Essay on Civil Disobedience (Thoreau), 172
Ethiopian minstrelsy, 333
Ethnic Notions (documentary), 337
Europe, James Reese, 373

European slave trade, 39–40
Eventide (poem), 484–485
Evers, Medgar, 184, 191, 203
Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), 294–295
Executive Order 8802, 160, 161
Executive Order 9981, 160
Exodus (film), 37
Exoduster Movement of 1879, 138–139
explorers, first Black, 483–484
Eyes on the Prize II, 212

F

The Fabric of a Man (play), 346
face vessels, 495
The Facts of Life (TV show), 429
The Facts of Reconstruction (Lynch), 129
Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), 160
Fair Fight, 257
Fair Housing Act, 205
Fairbanks, Calvin, 99
Fairfield, John, 100
family life, 45, 227
Fard, Wallace D., 280
Farmer, James, 179, 185
Farmer-Paellmann, Deadria, 28
Farrakhan, Louis, 280
Farrow, Lucy, 272
fashion designer, first Black, 485
Faubus, Orval, 167–169
Faulkner, William, 24
Fauset, Jessie Redmon, 318, 325
Federal Theater Project (FTP), 342–343
Felton, Rebecca, 142
fencing, 477–478
Ferguson, Missouri, 242
Fetchit, Stepin, 400
field slaves, 72–73
Fifteenth Amendment, 130, 146, 190, 195, 217
films
  about, 393–394
  all-Black casts, 395–398
  awards, 426
  Black actors/actresses, 412–414, 421–425
  Black directors, 406–412
  early Black roles, 398–400
  hood films, 404–405
  Lee, Spike, 403–404
  1940s-1960s, 401–402
  1960s-1970s, 402–403
  non-hood genre, 405–406
Finding Your Roots (Haley), 9
The Fire Next Time (Baldwin), 321
First Baptist Church of Williamsburg, 26
Fisher, Mel, 55
Fisher, Rudolph, 316
Fisk Jubilee Singers, 361
Fitzgerald, Ella, 372
Flake, Floyd, 277
Flanagan, Hallie, 342
The Flip Wilson Show (TV show), 428
Flood, Curt, 455
Florida, 125–126
Florida v. George Zimmerman, 240
Floyd, George, 1, 10, 18, 21, 233–234, 251–252, 302
folktales, 308
food and food rations, 124, 225–226
football, 467–470
Ford, Henry, 155
Forman, James, 179
Forrest, Nathan Bedford, 118
Fort Pillow Massacre, 118
Fortune, T. Thomas, 150
Foster, Andrew "Rube," 452
Foster Photoplay Company, 397
Four Little Girls (film), 189
Fourteenth Amendment, 146, 147, 190
The Foxes of Harrow (Yerby), 321
Foxx, Jamie, 417
Frank Silvera Writers' Workshop (FSWW), 344
Franklin, Aretha, 383–384
Franklin, Benjamin, 86
Franklin, John Hope, 14
Franklin, Kirk, 378–379
fraternities, 304–306
Frazier, Darnella, 21
Frederick Douglass' Paper (newspaper), 93
Free African Society, 61, 267
Free African Union Society, 95
"free" Black Americans, 81–84
Free Black Haitians, 60
free jazz, 371
Free Southern Theater (FST), 344
Freedman's Bank, 128–129
Freedman's Bureau Bill (1866), 12
Freedmen's Bureau, 123–124, 127, 133, 289, 296, 298
Freedmen's Bureau Act, 125
freedom, from slavery, 45–47, 58–60, 82, 150–154
Freedom Rides, 179–180
Freedom Summer, 190–193
Freedom Vote, 191
Freedom's Journal (newspaper), 93
Freelon, Philip, 26
Freeman, Michael E., 278–279
Freeman, Morgan, 423
Freeman-Wilson, Karen, 247–248

The Free Speech (newspaper), 141
French and Indian War, 58
The Fresh Prince of Bel Air (TV show), 432
From Slavery to Freedom (Franklin), 14
Fruitvale Station (film), 241
Frye, Marquette, 201–202
Fugitive Slave Act (1793), 97, 104
Fugitive Slave Clause, 96–97
Fuhrman, Mark, 230
Fulton, Sabrina, 239
The Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina (Locke), 60
funk, 385
F.W. Woolworth Company, 177–178

G

Gabriel's Rebellion, 76
Gabriel's Rebellion (Egerton), 76
Gage, Thomas, 58
Gaines, Clarence "Big House," 458
Gaines, Ernest, 24
Galpin, George, 266
Gamble, Kenneth, 387
Gandhi, Mahatma (Mohandas), 15, 172–173
Gantt, Harvey, 221
Gardner, James Daniel, 117
The Garles and Their Friends (Webb), 312
Garmback, Frank, 243
Garner, Eric, 10, 21, 242, 278
Garnet, Henry Highland, 89, 106, 107
Garrett, Thomas, 99
Garrison, William Lloyd, 86, 89, 90–91, 93
Garrisonism, 90
Garvey, Marcus, 13, 22–23, 156–158, 265, 279–280
Garza, Alicia, 22, 241
Garza, Malachi, 241
Gates, Henry Louis, 9, 126, 238, 312
The Genius of Universal Emancipation (newspaper), 93
George, David, 266
George III, King of England, 58
Georgetown University, 68
Georgia, 125–126
Ghana, 35
Gibson, Bob, 455
Gibson, Josh, 453
Giddings, Paula, 14, 219
Gilpin, Charles, 339
Gilpin Players, 341
Ginsburg, Ruth Bader, 217
Giovanni, Nikki, 322–323
Gleaves, Richard H., 129
Glory (film), 118
Glover, Savion, 353
Go Tell It on the Mountain (Baldwin), 321
Goldberg, Whoopi, 9, 419
Golden Boy (musical), 345
Goldman, Ron, 230
Goldsberry, Renée, 24
golf, 475–476
Good Times (TV show), 429
Goode, Wilson, 221
Goodell, Roger, 247
Goodman, Andrew, 192
Gordon, Nathaniel, 113
Gorée Island, 56
Gospel music, 375–379
Gottschalk, Louis Moreau, 362
Gragston, Arnold, 101
grandfather clauses, 133
Granny Moumee (play), 338
Grant, Oscar, 241
Grant, Ulysses S., 120, 127, 130, 131, 132
grants, 45–46
Gray, Fred, 174
Gray, Freddie, 243–244, 245
Gray, John, 278–279
Gray, Victoria, 193
Grayson, Mary, 126
Great Awakenings, 263–264
Great Depression, 158–161, 290
Great Dismal Swamp, 80
Great Exodus, 138–139
Great Jamaican Slave Revolt, 46
Great Migration, 154–156, 315–316
Greeley, Horace, 108
Green, Benjamin T., 140
Green, Ernest, 168
Greene, Lorenzo, 14
The Green Pastures (play), 339
Gregory, Wilton D., 282
Grier, Pam, 403
Guerrero, Vicente, 47
Guinn v. United States, 153
Gurira, Danai, 350
gymnastics, 477

H

Haddish, Tiffany, 420–421
Haitian Revolution, 46, 77
Haley, Alex, 9, 491
Haley, Nikki, 29
Hall, Anne Marie Becraft, 68
Hall, Arsenio, 416–417
Hall, Isaac Hawkins, 68
Hall, Prince, 62, 95
Hamer, Fannie Lou, 191, 193, 216
Hamilton (show), 24
Hamilton, Alexander, 86

Hamlin, Larry Leon, 351
Hammer and Hoe (Kelley), 14
Hammon, Jupiter, 308–309
Hammond, Henry, 88
Hampton, Fred, 211–213, 222
Hancock, John, 309
Handy, W.C., 364
Hankison, Brett, 21, 251
Hannah-Jones, Nikole, 27–28
Hanrahan, Edward, 212
Hansberry, Lorraine, 345
hard bop, 371
Harlan, John Marshall, 147
Harlem (play), 341
Harlem Renaissance, 314–319
Harlin, Latasha, 230
Harmon, William E., 318
Harmon Foundation, 318
Harper, Douglas, 67
Harper, Frances E.W., 89, 130, 151, 313, 325
Harper v. Virginia Board of Elections, 195
Harpers Ferry, 106–107
Harris, E. Lynn, 328
Harris, Jeremy O., 350
Harris, Joel Chandler, 314
Harris, Kamala, 234, 253–258, 292
Harris, Leslie M., 27
Harris, Michael W., 376
Harris, Wynonie, 17
Harrison, Benjamin, 30, 139
Hart, Kevin, 418
Harvey, Steve, 329, 418
Hatcher, Richard B., 220
Hayes, Rutherford B., 133
Haynes, Edmund, 154
HBCUs, 304
healthcare, 20, 156
Healy, Patrick Francis, 281
Hearn, Lafcadio, 368
Height, Dorothy, 216
Hemings, Sally, 312
Hendrix, Jimi, 381
Henrietta Marie (slave ship), 55
Henry, Aaron, 191
Henry the Navigator, 39–40
Henson, Matthew Alexander, 483–484
Herenton, W.W., 222
"Heritage" (poem), 11
Heritage Act (2000), 29
Heston, Charlton, 185
Hewlett, James, 332
Hidden Figures (film), 1, 23
The Hidden Cost of Being African American (Shapiro), 223
Higher Education Act (1965), 304
higher learning, 295–306
Highley, D.L., 417
Hill, Abram, 343
Hill, Andre Maurice, 251
Hill, Anita, 218
Hill, James, 129
Hill, Jemele, 246–247
Himes, Chester, 319
Hine, Darlene Clark, 219
Hines, Gregory, 353
hip-hop, 386–388
historians, 13–14
Historical Roots icon, 4
History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880 (Washington), 13
HIV, 228–229
Hoffman, Abbie, 209
Hogan, Ernest, 362
Holder, Eric, 240
Holiday, Billie "Lady Day," 371–372
Home (Morrison), 327
homeownership, 222–223
Homestead Act, 128
hood films, 404–405
hooks, bell, 219
Hooks, Robert, 344
Hoover, J. Edgar, 158, 159, 189
Hopkins, Harry, 160
Hopkins, Pauline E., 313, 335
Horne, Lena, 345
horse racing, 476–477
Hoskins, Michele, 225
hospitals, 124
House, Callie, 31
house slaves, 72–73
housing, 156
Houston, Charles Hamilton, 164
Houston riots (1917), 143–144
Howard, Jacob M., 100
Howard, Oliver, 125
Howard, T.R.M., 191
Howard University, 297
The Howard Players, 340–341
Howell, Adam Clayton, Jr., 220
H.R. 40 Bill to Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act, 30
Hudson, Cheryl and Wade, 329
Huff, Leon, 387
Huggins, Ericka (Jenkins), 213
Hughes, Cathy, 224
Hughes, Langston, 237, 316, 317, 318, 323, 341, 483
Humphrey, Hubert, 204
Humphreys, Richard, 295
Hunt, William, 53
Hurd, Cynthia Marie Graham, 244
Hurricane Katrina, 232
Hurst, E.H., 191

Hurston, Zora Neale, 24, 105–106, 139, 314, 316, 317–319, 325, 342, 483, 490
Hutton, Bobby, 209
Hyers, Emma Louise, 335

I

Ice Cube, 253–254, 414
icons, explained, 4
Ida (Giddings), 14
If God Is Willing and da Creek Don't Rise (docuseries), 232
If I Did It (Simpson), 231
Ike, Reverend, 284
Imperialism, 157
imprisonment, cocaine and, 227
In Abraham's Bosom (play), 339
In Dahoney (musical), 336
In Living Color (TV show), 432
In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens (Walker), 325
In Their Own Words icon, 4
Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (Jacobs), 311
income inequalities, 20
Industrial Revolution, 65
Innis, Roy, 223
The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vasa, 311
International Sweethearts of Rhythm, 374
interracial relationships, as a theme in films, 401
Intimate Apparel (play), 349
inventors, 18
Invisible Life (Harris), 328
Invisible Man (Ellison), 321, 491
Iola Leroy (Harper), 313
Iota Phi Theta, 305
Isham, John W., 335
Iverson, Allen "Al," 461

J

Jack, Sam T., 335
Jackson, George, 210
Jackson, Jesse, 16, 20, 219, 221–222, 235, 277
Jackson, Jimmie Lee, 194
Jackson, Mahalia, 17, 185, 274, 376
Jackson, Maynard, 221
Jackson, Michael, 37, 353
Jackson, Natalie, 239
Jackson, Rebecca Cox, 274
Jackson, Reggie, 455–456
Jackson, Samuel L., 424
Jackson, Susie, 244
Jacob-Jenkins, Branden, 350
Jacobs, Harriet, 311
Jakes, T.D., 273
Jamaica (musical), 345
"the Jamaica train," 71
James, Joe, 143
James, LeBron, 18, 21, 253, 461, 462
James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Act, 231
Jay, John, 86
Jay-Z, 15
jazz, 17, 352, 367–375
Jazz (Morrison), 327
Jeantel, Rachel, 239
Jefferson, Lemon, 365
Jefferson, Thomas, 61, 77, 84, 89, 94, 309, 312
The Jeffersons (TV show), 429
Jeffries, Herb, 398
Jeffries, Jim, 336
Jehovah's Witnesses, 282–283
Jelly's Last Jam (musical), 346
Jenkins, Barry, 27, 237, 409
Jeremiah, Thomas, 59
Jeter, J.A., 271
Jim Crow
  about, 12–13, 17, 20, 30, 137, 146–147
  Black Exodus, 138–139
  Black towns, 139–140
  Great Depression, 158–161
  Great Migration, 154–156
  lynchings, 140–146
  organizations, 150–154
  Plessy v. Ferguson, 146–147
  post-Reconstruction, 137–146
  riots/massacres, 140–146
  strategies for achieving equality, 147–149
  World War II, 161
John III, King of Portugal, 44
John III, Pope, 43
Johns, Barbara Rose, 166
Johns, Vernon, 166
Johnson, Amelia E., 329
Johnson, Andrew, 121, 122, 123, 125, 204
Johnson, Bill, 336, 369
Johnson, Bob, 32
Johnson, Charles S., 315, 318
Johnson, Columbus M., 139
Johnson, Earvin "Magic," 224–225, 228, 460–461
Johnson, Edna, 247–248
Johnson, Georgia Douglas, 342
Johnson, Harvey, Jr., 222
Johnson, Jack, 336, 464–465
Johnson, James Weldon, 316
Johnson, Joshua, 494
Johnson, Lyndon B., 189–190, 193, 195, 214, 215
Johnson, Michael, 77, 472
Johnson, Robert, 224, 366
Johnson, Rosamond, 336
Johnson, William, 23, 83
Jones, Absalom, 61, 267
Jones, Charles Colock, 264

Jones, Charles Price, 271
Jones, Ella, 256
Jones, Jasmine Cephas, 24
Jones, Jerry, 247
Jones, LeRoi, 322
Jones, Loïs Mailou, 497
Jones, Marion, 472
Jones, Samuel L., 144
Joplin, Scott, 363
Jordan, Louis, 379
Jordan, Michael, 18, 461
Journal of African American History, 10
Joyner, Florence "Flo Jo," 472
Joyner, Tom, 224
Joyner-Kersee, Jackie, 472
Judas and the Black Messiah (film), 212
Julia (TV series), 428

K

Kaepernick, Colin, 18, 245–247, 469
Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), 105
Kappa Alpha Psi, 305
Kelley, Robin D.G., 14
Kellogg, William, 131
Kelly, Patrick, 485
Kelly, Sharon Pratt, 222
Kemp, Brian, 249, 256, 257
Kendi, Ibram X., 22
Kennedy, Jacqueline, 204
Kennedy, John F., 179, 189, 203, 214
Kennedy, Robert F., 179, 181–182, 184, 191, 204, 205
Kentucky, 110, 113
Kentucky Derby, 482
Keyes v. Denver School District N. 1, 291
Killen, Edgar Ray, 192
King, A.D., 182, 183
King, B.B., 367
King, Coretta Scott, 25, 204–205
King, Don, 467
King, J.L., 229
King, John William, 229, 231
King, Marion, 181, 276
King, Martin Luther, Jr.
  about, 14–15, 23, 25–26, 171–172, 173–174
  Albany Movement, 180–181
  Birmingham, Alabama, 187–189
  Chicago Freedom Movement, 202
  death of, 203–205
  Freedom Rides, 179–180
  March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 185–186
  as a minister-activist, 277, 278
  Montgomery Bus Boycott, 174–177
  philosophy of nonviolence, 172–173
  Project Alabama, 193–194
  sit-ins, 177–178
  Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), 173
  Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), 179
  Where Do We Go From Here, 258
King, Rodney, 230
King, Slater, 181
King, Woodie, Jr., 344
King Center, 25
King Taylor, Susie, 117
kitchenettes, 156
kneeling, for the National Anthem, 245–247
Knight, Etheridge, 322–323
Knorr, Nathan Horner, 282
Komunyakaa, Yusef, 27
Krauthamer, Barbara, 126
Krebs, Christopher, 256
Krigwa Players, 340
Ku Klux Klan, 142–143, 183–184
Kueng, J. Alexander, 251
Kyles, Billy, 203

L

L.A. riots, 230
labor, 69–72, 124
Lackawanna Blues (film), 437
The Lafayette Players, 338
Lafon, Thomy, 83
Lake, Howie, 245
Lamar, Charles, 105
Lane, Thomas, 251
Lane, William Henry, 334, 351
Larsen, Nella, 316, 325
Las Casas, Bartolomé de, 43
Latifa, Queen, 413–414
Latimer, Lewis, 18
Latin America, slavery in, 41–47
law, first Black people practicing, 482
Lawrence, Jacob, 498
Lawrence, Martin, 417
Lee, Don L., 322–323
Lee, George, 169–170
Lee, Jarena, 274
Lee, Robert E., 114, 120
Lee, Sheila Jackson, 30
Lee, Spike, 144, 189, 232, 403–404, 406–407
Lee, Trymaine, 27
Legacy Museum From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, 25
Legend, John, 23
Lemon, Don, 237

Leo X, Pope, 43
Leon, Kenny, 348–349
Leonard, Sugar Ray, 465
Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ), 237, 440–442
Let That Be the Reason (Stringer), 328
Levin, Richard, 68
Lewis, Carl, 472
Lewis, Cudjo, 105–106
Lewis, David Levering, 14
Lewis, Edmonia, 494
Lewis, Jane, 101
Lewis, John, 21, 25, 179, 185, 194, 256
Lewis, Oliver, 482
Lewis, Reginald F., 225
Lewis, Samella, 499
Liberator (newspaper), 90, 93
Liberty Party Paper (newspaper), 93
Liele, George, 266
Lift Up Thy Voice (song), 23
Liggins, Alfred, 224
Lil Nas X, 237
Lil Wayne, 254
Lilith's Brood *(Butler),* 326
Lincoln, Abraham, 30, 107–108, 110, 112, 113, 118, 119–120, 121, 125, 153, 235, 296
Lincoln, C. Eric, 265
Lincoln Motion Picture Company, 397
Lincoln University, 296
literacy test, 195
literary classics, 487–492
literature, contributions in, 17
Live Free, 250
Living Single (TV show), 432
LL Cool J, 2, 414
Locke, Alain, 315, 318, 483
Locke, John, 60
Loeffler, Kelly, 256
Loehmann, Timothy, 243
Logan, Rayford, 138
Long, Jefferson, 130
Longvie, Texas, 144
Looby, Z. Alexander, 178
Lord Dunmore's Proclamation, 59
Lott, Trent, 146
Louis, Joe, 465
Louisiana Purchase (1803), 97
Lousiana Separate Car Act (19890), 147
L'Ouverture, Toussaint, 77
love stories, as a theme in films, 401
Lovecraft Country (TV show), 1
Lowe, Jim, 334
Lowery, Joseph E., 256
Lundy, Benjamin, 93
Lyell, Charles, 269
Lyles, Aubrey, 340
Lyles, Vi, 247–248
Lynch, John Roy, 129, 130
lynchings, 140–146, 231
Lyrics of a Lowly Life (Dunbar), 314

M

Mabley, Moms, 237
Mac, Bernie, 417
Madah, Anna, 335
made-for-TV movies, 436–437
mainstream music, 379–388
Malcolm X, 15, 197–199, 276, 280, 491
Mali, 35–36
Malone, Annie Tumbo, 152, 225
Mama, I Want to Sing! (musical), 346
Mama Day (Naylor), 324
Mamiya, Lawrence H., 265
Manley, Effa, 455
Manly, Alex, 142
Mansa Musa, 35–36
The Man from Dahomey (Yerby), 321
manumission, 60
Marable, Manning, 22, 31
March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963), 185–186
maroon communities, 46, 79–80
marriage, 45, 68
Marsh, Henry L., 221
Marshall, Andrew Cox, 269
Marshall, Paule, 325
Marshall, Thurgood, 164, 165, 204, 217, 218
Martin (TV show), 432
Martin, Sallie, 376
Martin, Tracy, 239
Martin, Trayvon, 3, 21, 22, 233, 238, 239–240
Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, 25–26
Maryland, 84, 110, 113
Masks for the People, 250
Mason, Charles Harrison, 271
Mason, Charlotte Osgood, 318
Mason, John, 101
Mason-Dixon line, 98
Massachusetts, 52, 60
Massacre at Colfax Courthouse, 131
massacres, 140–146
Mather, Cotton, 286
Matthews, W.D., 118
Mattingly, Jonathan, 21, 251
Mays, Willie, 455
McBride, Dwight, 1
McBride, Michael, 250

McCabe, Edwin T., 139
McClain, Franklin, 177–178
McClellan, George B., 114
McClendon, John B., 457–458
McCraney, Tarell Alvin, 237, 348–349
McCulloch, Bob, 21
McDaniel, Hattie, 398–399
McDonald, Laquan, 1, 243
McDonald, Susie, 174–175
McDonald's, 224
McDowell, Calvin, 141
McKay, Claude, 145, 319
McKenzie, Vashti Murphy, 275
McKesson, DeRay, 242
McKissick, Fred, 200
McLaurin, George W., 164
McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents, 164
McMillan, Terry, 328
McNair, Denise, 188
McNeil, Joseph, 177–178
Me Too movement, 218
Meaher, Burns, 105–106
Meaher, Timothy, 105–106
media, black-owned, 224–225
medicine, first Black people practicing, 481–482
megachurches, 273–274
Megan Thee Stallion, 21
Meharry Medical College, 297
Mehserle, Johannes, 241
Meredith, James, 181, 200
Meridian (Walker), 324
The Messenger, 161
Metzl, Jonathan, 238
Mexican-American War, 103
Micheaux Film Corporation, 397
Middle Passage, 52–57
Milam, J.W., 170, 171
militant abolitionism, 90
military, 214
Militia Act (1862), 112
Miller, Flournoy, 340
Miller, William, 283
Milliken's Bend, 117
Million Dollar Productions, 397–398
Milner, Denene, 329
Mind of My Mind (Butler), 326
minister-activists, 277–278
minister-politicians, 276–277
minstrelsy, 333–334
Miranda, Lin-Manuel, 24
The Mis-Education of the Negro (Woodson), 489–490
Miss Evers' Boys (film), 436
Mississippi, 120, 140, 181–182, 192
Mississippi Burning (film), 192
Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), 193
Mississippi Plan, 132
Missouri, 110, 113
Missouri Compromise (1820), 98, 103, 105, 106
Mitchell, Arthur, 355
Mitchell, Loften, 337
Mitchell, W.M., 101
modernism, 319
Molinar, Moe, 55
Mo'Nique, 420
Monroe, James, 76, 96
Montgomery, Isaiah T., 140
Montgomery Bus Boycott, 172, 174–177
Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), 175, 176
Moore, Amzie, 191
Moore, Antonio, 30
Moore, Darnell, 242
Moore, David, 55
Moore v. Dempsey, 153
Moorish Science Temple, 279
Moors, 37
Morga, Garrett A., 18
Morial, Ernest Nathan, 221
Morrill, Justin, 298
Morrill Acts, 298–299
Morris, Robert, Jr., 482
Morris, Wesley, 27
Morrison, Toni, 17, 24, 319, 324, 325, 327, 492
Morrisseau, Dominique, 350
Morse, Samuel F.B., 86
Morse code, 86
Morton, Jelly Roll, 368
Mos Def/Yaslin Bey, 414
Mosby, Marilyn, 243–244
Moses, Bob, 190, 191
Moses, Edwin, 472
Moskowitz, Henry, 153
Mosley, Walter, 328
Moss, Thomas, 141
Motown, 381–382
Mound Bayou, 140
Muhammad, Elijah, 197, 198, 199, 280
Muhammad, Khalil Gibran, 27
Muhammad, Warith Deen, 280
Mulatto (play), 341
multiple-effect evaporator, 71–72
Murphy, Eddie, 37, 415–416
Murphy, Isaac, 482
Murray, Anna Pauline (Pauli), 217, 218
Muse, Clarence, 398–399
music, 17, 265–266, 274, 359–392
music videos, 407–408
Musk, Elon, 16
Muslims, 279–280
My Bondage, My Freedom (Douglass), 103

My Brother's Keeper, 238
My Face is Black is True (Berry), 31
My Name Is Pauli Murray (documentary), 217
Myers, Walter Dean, 329

N

NAACP Legal Defense Fund, 164, 165
nadir, 138
Nagin, Ray, 232
Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (Douglass), 24, 92, 288, 311, 488
Nash, Diane, 179
Nashville, 178
Nat Turner's Rebellion, 78–79, 287
Nation of Islam (NOI), 196–197, 279–280
National Afro-American Council, 150
National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA), 151
National Anthem, kneeling for the, 245–247
National Anti-Slavery Standard, 90
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), 16, 149, 153
National Association of Colored Women (NACW), 151
National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NACWC), 217
National Black Feminist Organization, 218
National Black Theater Festival (NBTF), 351
National Civil Rights Museum, 25
National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), 29
National Council of Colored People, 482
National Council of Negro Women, 217
National Ex Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association, 31
National Federation of Afro-American Women, 151
National Football League (NFL), 467–469
National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), 159
National Labor Union, 128
National League for the Protection of Colored Women, 154
National Negro Business League (NNBL), 150–151
National Negro Labor Union, 128
National Organization for Women (NOW), 218
National Rainbow Coalition, 222
National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, 24
National Urban League (NUL), 154, 156
National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), 217
National Youth Administration, 160
Native Son (Wright), 320, 490
naturalism, 319
Naylor, Gloria, 319, 324
Neal, Larry, 322, 323
"Negro," as a term, 16
Negro Act (1740), 287
Negro American League, 452
Negro Factories Corporation, 157
Negro History Week, 1, 13
Negro Leagues, 450–454
Negro National League, 451
Negro World (newspaper), 156
The Negro Ensemble Company (NEC), 344
The Negro in American Life and Thought (Logan), 138
The Negro in Our History (Woodson and Wesley), 14
The Negro Wage Earner (Woodson and Greene), 14
neighborhood violence, cocaine and, 226–227
Nelson, Stanley, 212
Netflix, 252
New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, 278
New Deal, 13, 159–160
New England, 52
New England Anti-Slavery Society, 86, 90
New Georgia Project, 257
New Negro Movement. *See* Harlem Renaissance
New World, 41
New York Manumission Society, 86
Newsome, Bree, 29
The New Federal Theater, 344
The New Jim Crow (Alexander), 22
Newton, Huey, 199–200, 208, 209, 211, 213
Niagara Movement, 149, 152
Nicholas, Fayard, 2–3
Nicholas V, Pope, 43
The Nicholas Brothers, 352
Nichols, Ray, 292
"nigger," as a term, 16
Nigger Heaven (Van Vechten), 318
Nineteenth Amendment, 195
Niño, Pedro Alonso, 41

Nixon, E.D., 174, 177
Nkrumah, Kwame, 39
No Child Left Behind, 19, 293–294
No Strings (musical), 345
Nobel Peace Prize, first Black recipient of, 484
nonviolence, 172–173, 213
nonviolent direct action, 171
normal schools, 297
northern churches, 267–268
northern education, 288–289, 291–292
northern slavery, 66–69
Northrup, Solomon, 92
The North Star (newspaper), 93
Northwest Ordinance (1787), 97
Notes of a Native Son (Baldwin), 321
Notes on the Origin and Necessity of Slavery (Brown), 88
Nottage, Lynn, 27, 348–349
novels, 311–314
Noyes Academy, 297
Nuestra Señora de Atocha (ship), 55

O

O' Neal, Frederick, 343
Obama, Barack, 3, 11, 15, 23, 26, 39, 146, 219, 234–238, 240, 294–295. *See also* Black Lives Matter
Obama, Michelle, 23, 234
Oberlin Collegiate Institute, 296
O'Brien, Soledad, 232
Ocasio-Cortez, Alexandria, 248–249
O'Connor, Sandra Day, 292
The Octoroons (musical theater), 335
Odom, Leslie, Jr., 24
Oglethorpe, James, 53
O.J. (documentary), 231
Okeh Records, 365
Oklahoma, 139
Ole Miss, 181–182
O'Leary, Hazel, 222
Oliver, Joseph "King," 369
Olympics, 463, 473
Omar, Ilhan, 248–249
Omega Psi Phi, 305
On Her Own Ground (Bundles), 152
On Striver Row (play), 343
On the Down Low (King), 229
O'Neal, John, 344
O'Neal, William "Bill," 212
O'Neill, Eugene, 339
Opelousas, attacks in, 131
opposing slavery, 42–44
organizations, for freedom, 150–154
Oriental America (musical theater), 335
Orta, Ramsey, 242
Ossoff, Joe, 256, 257
Osteen, Joel, 273–274
Otis, James, 86
Our Nig (Wilson), 312
Out of Bondage (musical theater), 335, 337
overseers, 73
Ovington, Mary White, 153
Owens, Jesse, 18, 471

P

Pace Phonograph Company, 365
Page, Thomas Nelson, 314
Paige, Satchel, 453
Painter, Neil Irvin, 14
Palacio, Vicente Riva, 47
Pamphlet, Gowan, 269
pan-Africanism, 13
Pantaleo, Daniel, 242
Parham, Charles Fox, 272
Parker, Charlie "Bird," 374
Parks, Rosa, 174–177, 194
Parks, Suzan-Lori, 348–349
passing, 316, 401
Passing (Larsen), 316
Patrick, Deval, 129
Patterson, Frederick P., 302
Patton, Charley, 366
Paul, Rand, 146
pay, for Union soldiers, 117
Payne, Larry, 203
Peary, Robert E., 483–484
Peele, Jordan, 410
Pekin Stock Company, 338
Pence, Mike, 249
Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS), 86, 89
Penrice, Ronda Racha, 1
People United to Save Humanity (PUSH), 221–222
People's Party, 138
The People v. O.J. Simpson (TV series), 231
PepsiCo, 252
Perdue, David, 256
Perry, Andre M., 252
Perry, Tyler, 445–447
Peters, Jesse, 266
Petry, Ann, 319, 325
Pettiford, William, 151
Phi Beta Sigma, 305
The Philadelphia Negro (Du Bois), 301
The Philanthropist (newspaper), 93
Piersen, William, 219
Pike, Stephen, 53

Pinchback, P.B.S., 118, 129, 130
Pinckney, Clementa, 244
Pinkney, Andrea Davis, 329
Pinkney, Brian, 329
pioneers, 18
Pippin, Horace, 496
Pius II, Pope, 43
plantation missions, 264
plantations, 69–72
Pleasant, W.S., 271
Plessy v. Ferguson, 146–147, 163–164, 165, 174, 289, 290, 298
Poage, George, 471
Poems on Various Subjects (Wheatley), 309
poets, 308–310
Poitier, Sidney, 185, 421–422
police killings, 21, 239–245, 251–252, 278
political office, 129–130, 219–222, 247–248
politics, church and, 275–279
poll tax, 195
Poor People's March, 203, 205, 222, 278
pop culture, BLGOs in, 306
Populist Party, 138
Porgy (play), 339
Porgy and Bess (play), 339
post-Civil War
post-World War II, Black Literature from, 319–321
Powell, Adam Clayton, Jr., 276
Powell, Colin, 18
Pratt, Geronimo, 213
Pratt, Tanya Walton, 236
Prayer Pilgrimmage for Freedom, 173
presidency, 234–238
Presidential Reconstruction, 121
Pressley, Ayanna, 248
Primus, Pearl, 354
Pritchett, Laurie, 180
Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC), 278
Project 100,000, 214
Project Alabama, 193–194
Project C, 182
Promised Land, 13
prophets, 13–14
Proposition 209, 19
proslavery politics, effects of, 96–98
prosperity gospel, 274
Prosser, Gabriel, 76, 77
Prosser, Thomas, 76
Pryor, Richard, 415
public charter schools, 292–293
public vouchers, 292–293
Pullitzer Prize, first Black recipient of, 484–485
Punch, John, 11, 50
Purlie (musical), 345

Q

Quakers, 86. *See also* Underground Railroad

R

race relations, in the north, 201–203
racial distinctions, 44–45
racial divide, 229–232
racial pride, 157
racism, as a theme in films, 401
racist taboos, as a theme in films, 401
Radical Republicans, 121, 123
Radio One, 224
radio shows, during 2020 election, 254
ragtime, 362–363
rainbow coalition, 212
Rainey, Gertrude "Ma," 237, 365, 366
Rainey, J.H., 130
A Raisin in the Sun (play), 345
Ramsey, Peter, 410
Randall, Dudley, 322–323
Randolph, A. Philip, 161, 185
Rangel, Charles, 276
Ransier, Alonzo J., 129
rap music, 388–392
rappers, 253–254
Rashad, Phylicia, 345, 431
Rawlings-Blake, Stephanie, 243–244
R&B, 379
reading and writing, 92–94
Reagan, Ronald, 210
realism, 319
reality TV shows, 436
Reconstruction, 12, 121–123, 131–134, 137–146, 270–271, 289–290
Reconstruction Act (1967), 123
Red Summer (1919), 144–145
Redeemers, 131
Redmond, Sarah Parker, 89
Redmong, Charles Lenox, 89
Reeb, James, 194
Reeves, Tate, 29
Reid, Eric, 246
relief rates, 159
religion. *See* church
Remember icon, 4
Renaissance, 40
Reol Productions, 395
reparations, 30–32
re-segregating, 293
restaurants, 225–226
Revels, Hiram, 129, 276
Revenue Act (1764), 58

revolts and rebellions, 73–74. *See also specific revolts and rebellions*
Revolutionary Suicide (Newton), 208
Reynolds, Diamond, 245
Rhimes, Shonda, 435
Rhode Island, 52, 60
Rhodes Scholar, first Black, 483
rhythm, in music, 266, 361
Rice, Condoleezza, 18, 222
Rice, Norm, 221
Rice, Tamir, 10, 243, 278
Rice, Thomas, 333, 351
rice plantations, 70–71
Richard, Little, 17
Richardson, George, 143
Richardson, Willis, 341
Richmond, David, 177–178
The Rider of Dreams (play), 339
Riggs, Marlon, 337
The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved pamphlet, 86
Rillieux, Norbert, 71–72
ring shout, 265, 360
riots, 140–146. *See also specific roits*
The Rise of Gospel Blues (Harris), 376
Rivera, Geraldo, 240
Roberts, John G., Jr., 292
Roberts, Robin, 237
Robertson, Carole, 188
Robertson, Oscar, 460
Robinson, Amelia Boynton, 1
Robinson, Jackie, 18, 215, 454
Robinson, Jo Ann, 175
Robinson, June, 275
Robinson, Kenneth O., 275
Robinson, Sugar Ray, 465
Rock, Chris, 225, 417
rock and roll, 380–381
Rolfe, John, 49–50
Romer, Carl, 252
Roof, Dylan, 244
Roosevelt, Eleanor, 160
Roosevelt, Franklin Delano, 13, 158–161
Roosevelt, Theodore, 140, 148
Roots (Haley), 9
Roots (TV show), 438
The Roots, 23
Rosa Parks (Parks), 174
Rosewood Massacre (1923), 145
Ross, Clyde, 28
Ross, Rick, 228
rowing, 478
Rowland, Dick, 145
Rucker, Holcombe, 457
Rucker Park, 457
Rudd, Daniel, 281
Rudolph, Wilma, 18, 471
Ruined (play), 350
running away, from slavery, 79–81
Rush, Bobby, 211
Russell, Bill, 460
Russell, Charles T., 282
Russwurm, John B., 93, 94
Rustin, Bayard, 185, 215, 237

S

Salamoni, Blane, 245
Salem, Peter, 59
Sam Sharpe Rebellion. *See* Baptist War
Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, 278
San Juan Bautista (slave ship), 49
San Lorenzo de los Negros, 47
Sanchez, Sonia, 322–323
sanctioning slavery, 42–44
Sanders, Bernie, 253
Sanders, Sarah Huckabee, 247
Sanders, Tywanza, 244
Sandra Bland Act, 245
Sanford and Sons (TV show), 429
"Sankofa," 9
satagraha, 172
Saturday Night Live (TV show), 431
Saunders, Charles R., 326
Saxton, Rufus, 124–125
Say Her Name (documentary), 245
Schlegel, Friedrich von, 13
Schmoke, Kurt, 221
Schwerner, Michael, 192
Scott, Dred, 106
Scott, Jill, 23
Scott, MacKenzie, 304
Scott, Rick, 239
Seale, Bobby, 199, 208–209
Search of Sisterhood (Giddings), 14
A Second Visit to the United States of North America (Lyell), 269
Security Act, 75
Seitz, Collin, 166
Seize the Time (Newton and Seale), 209
Selma, Alabama, 193–194
Sentencing Project, 20
Sertima, Ivan Van, 38
Servin, Dante, 245
Seventh-Day Adventists, 283
The Sex Chronicles (Zane), 328
sexual assault, slavery and, 68
Seymour, William Joseph, 272
Shakur, Afeni, 210
Shakur, Assata, 211
Shanahan, Kyle, 247

Shapiro, Thomas M., 223
sharecropping, 127–128, 290
Sharp, Granville, 95
Sharpton, Al, 277
Shaw, Robert Gould, 118
Sheftall, Beverly Guy, 219
Sherman, William, 31
Sherman, William T., 125
A Short Account of That Part of Africa, Inhabited by the Negroes (Benezet), 89
Shuffle Along (musical), 340, 352
Shuttlesworth, Fred, 182
Sierra Leone, 95–96
Sigma Gamma Rho, 306
Silver Bluff Baptist Church, 266
Simmons, Daniel L., 244
Simmons, Robin Sue, 32
Simmons, Ruth, 68
Simon the Cyrenian (play), 339
Simpkins, Modjeska Monteith, 165
Simpson, Nicole Brown, 230
Simpson, O.J., 229, 230–231
Singleton, Benjamin "Pap," 138–139
Singleton, John, 37, 145, 227, 303
Sissle, Noble, 340
SisterLove Inc., 229
sit-ins, 177–178
1619 Project, 27–28
Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, 188
Sklarek, Norma Merrick, 18
Slave Codes, 74–75, 122
Slave Culture (Stuckey), 14
slave narratives, 310–311
slave patrols, 112
Slave Songs of the United States, 362
slave trade, illegal, 113
slaveholders, northern, 67
slavery
  about, 65
  on African continent, 38–39
  as an institution, 28
  arguing against, 87–88
  arguing for, 88
  Civil War and, 110–111
  continuation of, 105–106
  European, 39–40
  "free" Black Americans, 81–84
  in Latin America and Caribbean, 41–47
  life enslaved, 44–45
  lucrative nature of, 66
  marriage, 68
  northern, 66–69
  official abolition of, 47
  opposing, 42–44
  pre-, 11
  revolts and rebellions, 73–81
  sanctioning, 42–44
  seeking freedom, 45–47
  sexual assault, 68
  smoking, 70
  southern, 69–73
  statistics on, 66
  universities and, 68
Slavery in the North (website), 67
Slavery's Exiles (Diouf), 80
Slaves' Escape (musical theater), 335, 337
The Slave Community (Blassingame), 14
Smalls, Robert, 130
Smith, Adam, 87
Smith, Bessie, 363, 365, 366
Smith, James McCune, 481–482
Smith, Lamar, 170
Smith, Mamie, 365
Smith, Mary Louise, 174–175
Smith, Robert, 26, 302
Smith, Will, 3, 413
Smith, Willie Mae Ford, 377
Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC), 25, 26
Smock, Ginger, 374
smoking, 70
Snipes, Wesley, 423–424
Snowfall (TV series), 227
soap stars, 434
social paternalism, 88
Society for the Relief of Free Negroes, 86
Society of Friends, 86
Sojourner Truth (Painter), 14
Soledad Brother (Jackson), 210
Solomon, Job ben, 53
Some Historical Account of Guinea (Benezet), 89
Some Memoirs of the Life of Job (Bluett), 53, 309
Song of Solomon (Morrison), 327
Songhai, 36
songs and singing, 103
Soninke, 35
Sonni Ali, 36
sororities, 304–306
soul music, 382–384
The Souls of Black Folk (Du Bois), 146, 148, 313, 489
The Soul Stirrers, 377
Southeastern Conference (SEC), 29
Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), 173, 188, 277
southern churches, 268–270
Southern Cross, 28–29
southern education, 287–288, 291

Southern Homestead Act (1876), 125–126
southern slavery, 69–73
Southwest, 224
Spanish Crown, 43
Special Field Order No. 15, 125
"sperate but equal," 147
Spingarn, Arthur, 153
spirituals, 361–362
sports, 18, 449–478
The Sport of the Gods (Dunbar), 314
Springfield Baptist Church, 266
Springfield Race Riot (1908), 153
Springfield riots (1908), 143
St. Louis Woman (musical), 345
Stamp Act (1765), 58
Stamped from the Beginning (Kendi), 22
Stanford, Ala, 250
Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, 130
Staupers, Mabel K., 161
Sterling, Alton, 245
Stevens, Thaddeus, 12, 122
Stevenson, Bryan, 22, 25, 27
Stewart, Henry, 141
Stewart, Maria W., 217, 311
Still, William, 101
Stokes, Carl B., 220
Stokes, Carrie, 166
Stokes, Louis, 220
Stono Rebellion, 75, 287
Stowe, Harriet Beecher, 104, 333
A Street in Bronzeville (Brooks), 485
The Strength of Gideon and Other Stories (Dunbar), 314
Stringer, Vickie, 328
Stuckey, Sterling, 14
Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), 15, 25, 177–178, 179, 200–201
Sugar Act (1764), 58
sugar plantations, 71–72
Sula (Morrison), 327
Sullivan's Island, 56
Sumanguru, 35
Sumner, Charles, 121
Sundiata Keita, 35
The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America (Du Bois), 13, 301
The Supremes, 382
Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education, 291
Sweat (play), 350
Sweatt v. Painter, 164
Sweet Daddy Grace, 284
swimming, 478
swing jazz, 369
Sykes, Wanda, 237, 420
Symoné, Raven, 237
systemic racism, 22

T

Talbert, David E., 346
Talented Tenth, 149
Talley, Leon, 237
Tallmadge, James, 98
Tanner, Henry Ossawa, 495
tap dance, 352–353
Tappan, Arthur, 296
task system, 70
Taylor, Breonna, 1, 10, 18, 21, 234, 251–252
Taylor, Elizabeth, 37
Taylor, George Edwin, 221
Taylor, Henry, 55
Taylor, Ivy, 247–248
Taylor, John "Doc," 471
Taylor, Major, 18
Taylor, Ollie, 247–248
teacher's college, 297
Technical Stuff icon, 4
Teer, Barbara Ann, 323
television personality, first Black, 484
Ten Point Plan, 215
Tenkamenin, 35
Tennent, Gilbert, 263
Tennessee, 141
tennis, 474–475
terminology, 16
Terrell, Mary Church, 151, 216
Terry, Lucy, 308, 309
texture, in music, 361
Tharpe, Rosetta, 274
Tharpe, Sister Rosetta, 377
theater, 323, 331–351
Their Eyes Were Watching God (Hurston), 318, 490
Theron, Charlize, 16
They Came Before Columbus (Sertima), 38
The Third Life of Grange Copeland (Walker), 324
Thirteenth Amendment, 100, 119–120, 147
Thomas, Angie, 329
Thomas, Clarence, 218
Thompson, Allen C., 184
Thompson, Garland Lee, 344
Thompson, Jacqueline, 275
Thompson, Myra, 244
Thoreau, Henry David, 172
Thurman, Wallace, 319, 341
Tilden, Samuel, 133
Till, Emmett, 14–15, 169–171, 238
Till, Mamie, 170
Tillmon, Johnnie, 217
Timbuktu, 36
Time Warner, 224
Tindley, Charles, 376
Tlaib, Rashida, 248–249

TLC Beatrice, 225
To Make Our World Anew (Kelley), 14
tobacco plantations, 70, 71
Toll, Robert, 334
Tolsey, Alexander, 53
Tolton, Augustus, 281
Tometi, Opal, 22
Toomer, Jean, 317
Torrence, Ridgely, 338–339
Towns, William, 252
Townshend Act (1767), 58
track and field, 470–474
tragic mulatto, 312
Trail of Tears, 126
transatlantic slave trade, 38–41, 66
Travis, Joseph, 78
Treasurer (slave ship), 49–50
Treaty of 1866, 126
Treaty of Alcáçovas (1479), 39
Triangular Trade, 51–52
A Trip to Coontown (musical), 336
Trotter, William Monroe, 149, 152, 153
True Colors Theater Company, 348
True to the Game (Woods), 328
Truman, Harry S., 160, 214
Trump, Donald J., 23, 233, 238, 245–251, 253–258, 273, 278–279, 294–295, 303
Truth, Sojourner, 89, 217, 268, 274, 311
Tubman, Harriet, 79, 89, 101–102, 268
Tucker, Chris, 9, 418
Tucker-Worgs, Tamelyn, 273
Tulsa Massacre (1921), 1, 145
Tupac, 391
Ture, Kwame. *See* Carmichael, Stokely
Turner, Benjamin, 130
Turner, Henry McNeil, 265
Turner, Ike, 17
Turner, Nat, 78–79, 90
Tuskegee Airmen, 161
TV, 427–447
Twain, Mark, 16
Twelve Years a Slave (Northrup), 92
12 Million Black Voices (Wright), 320
Twenty-Fourth Amendment, 195
Tyler Perry Studios, 446–447
Tyson, Cicely, 422
Tyson, Mike, 466

U

Uncle Tom's Cabin (play), 337
Uncle Tom's Cabin (Stowe), 104, 333
Uncle Tom's Children (Wright), 320
Underground Railroad, 12, 79, 98–103
The Underground Railroad, 101
The Under-ground Railroad (Mitchell), 101
unemployment, cocaine and, 226–227
Union, Gabrielle, 237
Union soldiers, 112, 116–118
United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 36
United Negro College Fund (UNCF), 302
United States National Slavery Museum, 26
United States v. Cruikshank, 133, 146
United States v. Reese, 133, 146
Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), 22–23, 156
universities, 68
university funding, 238
The Untold Story of Emmett Till (documentary), 171
Up from Slavery (Washington), 313, 488–489
urban blues, 365
U.S. Bureau of Colored Troops, 116
U.S. Capitol riot, 256–258
U.S. Colored Troops, 116–117

V

vaccines, 250
Van Dyke, Jason, 243
Van Vechten, Carl, 318
Vance, Courtney B., 231
Vance, Ethel Lee, 244
Vann, Robert L., 159–160
Varick, James, 268
Vashon, George Boyer, 296
Vaughan, Sarah, 372
Vaughan, William R., 31
Vermont, 96
Vesey, Denmark, 76–77
Viacom, 224
Vietnam, 214–215
Virginia Slave Codes (1705), 51
visual artists, 493–500
Vivian, C.T., 256
vocality, 360
volleyball, 478
voting, in Mississippi, 190–193
Voting Rights Act (1965), 195–196, 219

W

Wade, Dwayne, 237
Wade, Richard C., 77
Wade, Zaya, 237
Waite, Morrison Remick "Mott," 133
Waiting to Exhale (McMillan), 328
Walk Together Chilun (play), 343
Walker, A'Lelia, 318
Walker, Alice, 17, 24, 219, 318, 324–325, 492
Walker, David, 16, 90, 106
Walker, George, 336–337
Walker, Madam C.J., 152, 225, 318
Walker, Wyatt Tee, 182, 188
Walker's Appeal (Walker), 90, 106
Wall, O.S.B., 118
Wall Street Project, 223
Wallace, George, 184
Walling, William English, 153
Walls, Josiah T., 130
Walters, Lemuel, 144
Wanderer (ship), 105
War of 1812, 95
Ward, Clara, 377
Ward, Douglas Turner, 344
Ward, Jesmyn, 27
Ward, Val Gray, 323
Warmoth, Henry C., 129
Warnock, Raphael, 256, 257, 277
Warren, Lovely, 247–248
Washington, Booker T., 19, 147, 148, 150, 151, 222, 299–300, 301, 313, 488–489
Washington, Denzel, 3, 422–423
Washington, George, 58, 59, 97
Washington, Harold, 2, 219
Washington, Sarah Spencer, 225
Washington, Walter, 221
Watchmen (TV show), 1
Waters, Ethel, 484
Waters, Maxine, 248
Waters, Muddy, 366–367
Waters, Vincent, 282
Watkins, Frances Ellen, 217
Watts riots, 201–202
"We Wear the Mask" (poem), 148
wealth inequalities, 20
The Wealth of Nations (Smith), 87
Weaver, Karen, 247–248
W.E.B. Du Bois (Lewis), 14
W.E.B. Du Bois, 1919-1963 (Lewis), 14
Webb, Frank J., 312
Webb, Gary, 228
Webb, Wellington, 222
Weber, Carl, 328
Webster (TV show), 430
Weeksville Heritage Center, 25
Wells-Barnett, Ida B., 13, 140, 141, 216
Wesley, Charles H., 14
Wesley, Cynthia, 188
Wesley, John, 89, 267–268, 270
West, Ben, 178
West, Dorothy, 319, 325
West, Kanye, 232
West Virginia, 110
Wheatley, Philip, 17
Wheatley, Phillis, 309
When and Where I Enter (Giddings), 14
When Harlem Was in Vogue (Lewis), 14
When the Levees Broke (docuseries), 232
Where Do We Go From Here (King), 258
Whiney, Eli, 71
Whipple, Prince, 60
White, Deborah Gray, 219
White, Paula, 273
White, Viola, 174
White, Walter, 143
White Citizens' Council (WCC), 169, 188
White Lion (slave ship), 49
white supremacist groups, 122
Whitefield, George, 263
Whitney Plantation Historic District, 24
Who Killed Malcolm X (docuseries), 199
Why Should White Guys Have All the Fun? (Lewis), 225
Wilberforce, William, 296
Wilberforce University, 296
Wild Seed (Butler), 326
Wilder, Douglas, 26, 129
Wilentz, Sean, 27
Wilkins, Roy, 185
William Johnson's Natchez, 83
Williams, Bert, 336–337
Williams, Brian, 235
Williams, George Washington, 13
Williams, Hosea, 194
Williams, Myrlie Evers, 184
Williams, Spencer, 398
Williams, Venus and Serena, 18, 475
Williams, William F. "Bill," 225–226
Williamson, Ansel, 482
Willkins, Roy, 200–201
Willmott, Kevin, 144
Wilmington Massacre (1898), 141–142
Wilmington's Lie (Zucchino), 257
Wilmot Proviso, 103

Wilson, August, 346–347, 348
Wilson, Charlie, 329
Wilson, Darren, 21, 242
Wilson, Deborah, 212
Wilson, Harriet E., 312, 325
Wilson, Lionel, 221
Wilson, Phil, 229
The Winans, 378
Winfrey, Oprah, 9, 19, 21, 26, 444–445
Wings for This Man (film), 161
winter sports, 477
Winthrop, George, 67
Witherspoon, Evelyn, 143
The Wiz (musical), 345
WNBA, 463–464
Wofford, Harris, 179
Wolfe, George C., 331, 347–348
womanism, 219, 325
women
  in basketball, 462–464
  Black comedians, 434–435
  Black literature and, 324–327
  in the church, 274–275
  film directors, 411–412
  film roles for, 396
  HIV/AIDS and, 229
  in the Negro Leagues, 451
  rap and, 390–392
women's rights, 213, 216–219
The Women of Brewster Place (Naylor), 324
Woods, Teri, 328
Woods, Tiger, 18, 476
Woodson, Carter G, 317, 489–490
Woodson, Carter G., 1, 10, 13–14
Woodson, Jacqueline, 27, 329
Woolman, John, 60
work contract agreements, 127
Works Progress Administration (WPA), 126, 160
World War II, 161
The World and Africa, 37
Wright, Jeremiah, 235
Wright, Mose, 170
Wright, Richard, 17, 319, 320, 490
Wright, Silas P., 142
Wright, Simeon, 170
Wu-Tang's Method Man, 414
Wyche, Steve, 246

X

Xenogenesis (Butler), 326

Y

Yale University, 68
Yanga, 47
Yerby, Frank, 321
Yoon, Nicola, 329
Young, Andrew, 221
Young, Coleman, 221
Young, Kevin, 472
Young, Whitney, Jr., 185, 201
Young Jeezy, 235
Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), 156
Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), 156

Z

Zeta Phi Beta, 306
Ziegfeld Follies, 336–337, 352
Zimmerman, George, 22, 239–240
Zucchino, David, 257

About the Author

Ronda Racha Penrice is a self-proclaimed Chissippian (Chicago native with deep Mississippi roots) who has worked with various publications, including *The Quarterly Black Review of Books*, *Rap Pages*, *Essence.com*, *Medium's Zora and Momentum*, *NBC THINK*, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Upscale Magazine*, and *UptownMagazine.com*, among others. The Columbia University alumna, who also attended the M.A. program in Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi, is a lifelong student of Black American history and culture. She currently resides in Atlanta.

Dedication

I humbly dedicate this book to my grandparents, Dessie Ree Shannon Stapleton Beard (1925–1998) and Willie Beard (1920–2002),who taught me honor, integrity, pride, and humanity by example. Because of their unconditional love and support for me and my love of reading and writing, I am here today, always striving to make them proud.

I also dedicate this book to my great aunt, Ada Beard Humphries (1918–2000). In her frequent retellings of transporting me from Chicago to Mississippi when I was just 6 weeks old, she made my humble beginnings appear almost as magical as the birth of Jesus Christ and convinced me that I could do and be anything.

With this book, I also love and honor my mother, Tyrethis "Geanette" Beard Penrice (1947–2020). Without her, I wouldn't be as courageous, opinionated, or driven. Only looking back am I fully realizing all that she gave me. Rest well, Mama! I love and thank you!

In Memoriam: my uncle, John Curtis Beard (1957–1978) and his son, Curtis Rodriguez Beard (1977–1999); Dr. Endesha Ida Mae Holland (1944–2006); my aunt Alberta Bennard Ford (1949–2017); my dear friend Kimberly Ward (1973–2017); and my cousin Kerwin Allen Holman (1966–2020).

Author's Acknowledgments

All thanks go to God first. I haven't always been the most faithful servant, but He's blessed me anyway.

Tonya Bolden, I owe you so much. You exemplify the values my grandparents deemed most important. You've always been supportive and have never hesitated to share an opportunity, including this amazing one. Keep blessing the world with your incredible books sharing Black history and culture with young readers.

I can't say enough about my agent, Matt Wagner of Fresh Books, who championed me every step of the way. Thank you, Lindsay Lefevre at Wiley, for granting me another great opportunity with this title, as well as for your patience. Chad Sievers, I also thank you for your patience, which is unrivaled. Your ability to keep calm in the most threatening of storms is so appreciated. It's impossible to overexpress my gratitude for your confidence and your willingness to pick up the balls whenever I dropped them.

I also have to thank my village because, without them, I would be lost: My former employer, surrogate mother, and frequent sponsor, Roz Stevenson (along with her husband Robert), has been my angel on earth; my brothers, Raefeael Tylin Penrice and Darryl Russell Penrice; my aunts Willie Ann Beard Benjamin and Carolyn Beard Humphries, their husbands and my uncles Lawrence and Kirby, my aunt Dorethen Beard Holman, and my uncle Lawrence Lee Beard, who has literally been here for me from the moment I was born, and his wife and my aunt Nellie; first cousins Cedric Beard, Dwayne Beard, James Beard, LaShawnda Benjamin, Kristy Holman Dixon, Sharletha Smith Beard Gayten, Trelva Humphries Harvey, Kendall Holman, and their families; and guardian cousins Ora Beard, Stanley Smith, and M.H. Stapleton. I also thank my paternal aunts Dr. Angela Wellman and Lori Wellman, and my many friends: Joane Amay, Jana Hicks, Gil Robertson, Rasheena Nash (and Angelica), Sheree Renée Thomas (and Jackie and Jada), Wilson Morales, Kenya Byrd, Cantranette McCrimon, Jevalier Jefferson, Chianti Phillips, Ebonette Bates, Tony Murphy (and his lovely Norma Intriago), Raqiyah Mays, Darralynn Hutson, Deborah Cook, Jina DuVernay, Seve Chambers, David F.A. Walker, Chris and Erika Webber, Napoleon Johnson Jr., Janet Smith, Odell Hall, Nicole Smith, Karu F. Daniels, Landras Mitchell, Sonya (Soni) Ede, Nashé Scott, Karu F. Daniels, Sheila Eldridge, Evelyn Coleman, Jawn Murray, A.R. Shaw, Errol Wilks, Dayo Adebiyi, Sharon Collins, Annika Harris, Kym A. Backer, Mariellen Ballier (and Wyatt), Paras Griffin, Jolon Martin, Trent Tate, Patrik Henry Bass, and Jocelyn Coley; my beloved AAFCA (African American Film Critics Association), BWFN (Black Women Film Network), and BAMG (Black Automotive Media Group) families; my extensive Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram network; and the many, many others I didn't name.

Publisher's Acknowledgments

Executive Editor: Lindsay Lefevere
Project Editor: Chad R. Sievers
Copy Editor: Danielle Ridgway
Technical Editor: Carolyn Toliver Bennett
Production Editor: Tamilmani Varadharaj
Cover Image: © Lightspring/Shutterstock

Take dummies with you everywhere you go!

Whether you are excited about e-books, want more from the web, must have your mobile apps, or are swept up in social media, dummies makes everything easier.

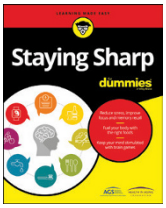


Find us online!

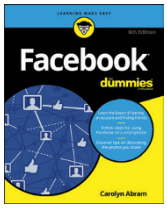
dummies.com

dummies®
A Wiley Brand

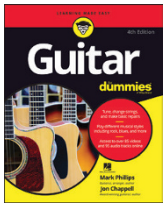
PERSONAL ENRICHMENT



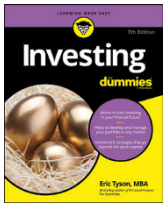
9781119187790
USA $26.00
CAN $31.99
UK £19.99



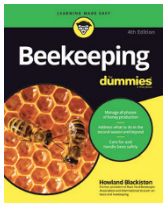
9781119179030
USA $21.99
CAN $25.99
UK £16.99



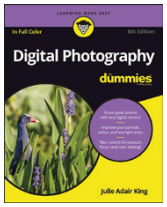
9781119293354
USA $24.99
CAN $29.99
UK £17.99



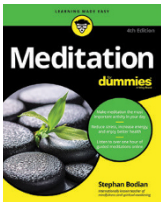
9781119293347
USA $22.99
CAN $27.99
UK £16.99



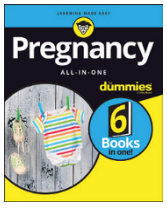
9781119310068
USA $22.99
CAN $27.99
UK £16.99



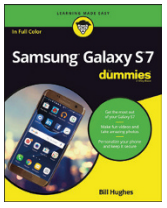
9781119235606
USA $24.99
CAN $29.99
UK £17.99



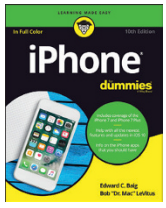
9781119251163
USA $24.99
CAN $29.99
UK £17.99



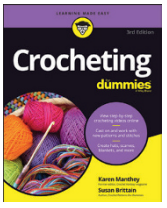
9781119235491
USA $26.99
CAN $31.99
UK £19.99



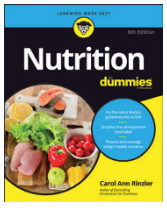
9781119279952
USA $24.99
CAN $29.99
UK £17.99



9781119283133
USA $24.99
CAN $29.99
UK £17.99

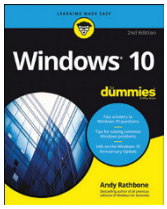


9781119287117
USA $24.99
CAN $29.99
UK £16.99

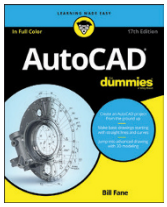


9781119130246
USA $22.99
CAN $27.99
UK £16.99

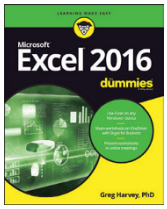
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



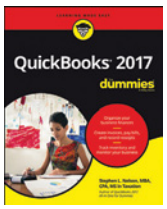
9781119311041
USA $24.99
CAN $29.99
UK £17.99



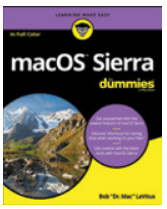
9781119255796
USA $39.99
CAN $47.99
UK £27.99



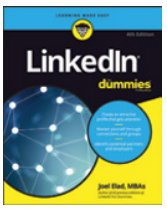
9781119293439
USA $26.99
CAN $31.99
UK £19.99



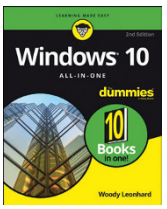
9781119281467
USA $26.99
CAN $31.99
UK £19.99



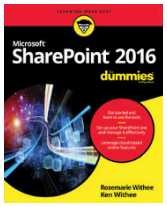
9781119280651
USA $29.99
CAN $35.99
UK £21.99



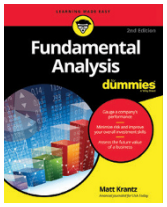
9781119251132
USA $24.99
CAN $29.99
UK £17.99



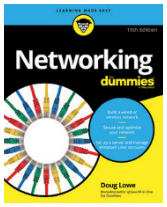
9781119310563
USA $34.00
CAN $41.99
UK £24.99



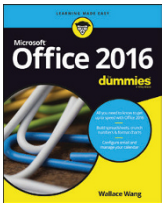
9781119181705
USA $29.99
CAN $35.99
UK £21.99



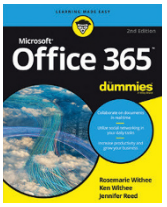
9781119263593
USA $26.99
CAN $31.99
UK £19.99



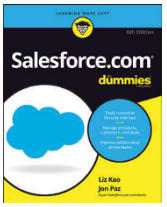
9781119257769
USA $29.99
CAN $35.99
UK £21.99



9781119293477
USA $26.99
CAN $31.99
UK £19.99



9781119265313
USA $24.99
CAN $29.99
UK £17.99



9781119239314
USA $29.99
CAN $35.99
UK £21.99



9781119293323
USA $29.99
CAN $35.99
UK £21.99

WILEY END USER LICENSE AGREEMENT

Go to www.wiley.com/go/eula to access Wiley’s ebook EULA.