

George Washington Carver (1864?-1943)



George Washington Carver was born a slave and lived his early life on a farm near Diamond Grove, Missouri. Even as a young child, he loved plants and rocks. He would spend hours roaming the hillsides, studying all that he saw there. Because he knew so much about the vegetation that grew near his farm, he became known as the plant doctor.

George Washington Carver went to Simpson College in Iowa. He supported himself by taking in laundry, by cooking, and by working as a janitor. After his graduation from Iowa State College in 1894, he was employed there as a botanist. A botanist is a person who studies plants. Carver grew almost twenty thousand species of plants while he was at Iowa State College.

In 1896, Booker T. Washington asked George Washington Carver to come to Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, a new school for African Americans. While there, Carver noticed that the southern African-American farmers were depleting their soil by planting only cotton year after year. Carver tried to solve the problem by giving the farmers peanuts and sweet potatoes to plant. Carver knew, however, that the only way to get the farmers to grow these crops was to prove that the plants could be sold, so he set out to find uses for peanuts and sweet potatoes. He discovered over three hundred uses for peanuts, including making soap and ink. He created candy and flour from sweet potatoes. Soon the Alabama farmers were happy to plant these new products. George Washington Carver spent the rest of his life at Tuskegee Institute, helping to make it a quality academic institution.

The talents and accomplishments of George Washington Carver did not go unrecognized. He was awarded many honors during his lifetime. He received the Spingarn medal in 1923, and in 1916 he was asked to be a fellow in the Royal Society of Arts in London, England. By the time he died, nearly twenty schools around the country had been named after George Washington Carver.

1. Why are George Washington Carver's achievements considered important? _____

2. What challenges do you think botanists are faced with today?

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Dr. Daniel Hale Williams (1858–1931)

Dr. Daniel Hale Williams was born in Pennsylvania, but moved to Janesville, Wisconsin, when he was a young boy. One of his favorite pastimes was reading about science and medicine. Whenever he read, he kept a dictionary near him. When he came upon a word he didn't know, he would look it up and then try to use it so that he wouldn't forget its meaning.

After working for a doctor in his hometown, Williams took the entrance examination at Chicago Medical College. He passed the test and graduated from the college when he was only twenty-five years old.

Dr. Williams is best known as the first person to successfully perform open-heart surgery. This happened in 1893 while Dr. Williams was working at Provident Hospital in Chicago. A man came into the emergency room with a stab wound, and Dr. Williams saved him by operating on the sac that surrounded the man's heart.

Dr. Williams is also famous for other reasons. In 1891 he helped found the first hospital to train African Americans to be nurses. It was called Provident Hospital and Training School for Nurses. Dr. Williams was also the only African-American doctor to become a founding member of the American College of Surgeons.



1. Number the events below in order of their occurrence.

- _____ Williams performs open-heart surgery.
- _____ Williams spends his free time reading about science and medicine.
- _____ Williams passes the entrance Examination at Chicago Medical College.
- _____ Williams attends medical school.
- _____ Williams works for a doctor in Wisconsin.
- _____ Williams helps found Provident Hospital and Training School for Nurses.
- _____ Williams graduates from medical school.

2. What characteristics do you think Dr. Williams had that helped him to accomplish so much during his lifetime? _____
- _____
- _____

Mary McLeod Bethune (1875–1955)

Mary McLeod Bethune was born on a farm in Mayesville, South Carolina. She had sixteen brothers and sisters. She was the youngest child in her family and the only one to be born out of slavery.

As a young child, Mary was a good student. She loved to learn and didn't mind walking many miles to the first school she attended. When it became clear that Mary was ready to move on to a more advanced education, her family didn't have enough money to send her to another school. Mary stayed on the farm and picked cotton with the rest of the family.



Finally, Mary's family heard of a scholarship being offered for a bright young African American. They felt that surely this described their child Mary. Not surprisingly, Mary was given the scholarship and went on to study at Scotia Seminary and the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.

After her graduation, Mary felt it was time to share what she had learned with others. She decided that the best way to do this was to found a new school for African-American children. In 1904 she chose Daytona Beach, Florida, as the site. Because the new school didn't have much money, Bethune worked tirelessly raising funds to support her school.

Eventually, the tiny school became Bethune College. In 1923, it merged with Cookman College and became Bethune-Cookman College. Mary Bethune served as its president for almost twenty years.

1. What events in Mary McLeod Bethune's life might have made an education seem very precious to her? _____

2. Write three adjectives that describe Mary McLeod Bethune.

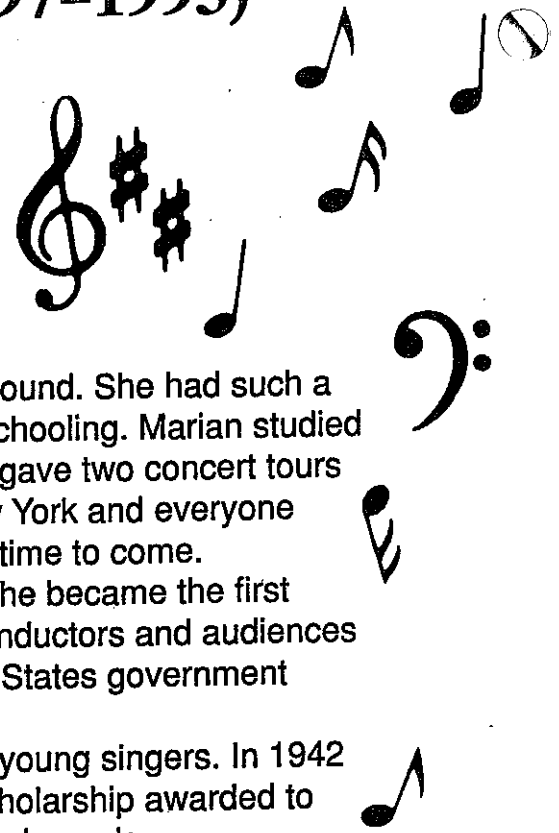
Marian Anderson (1897-1993)

Marian Anderson was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1897. She began singing in public when she was eight years old, as a member of her church choir. She had a deep, rich voice and would later become a world renowned contralto. Contralto is the lowest female tone in music. It is below a soprano and just above a male tenor's voice.

Everyone who heard young Marian sing was spellbound. She had such a beautiful voice that people began raising money for her schooling. Marian studied music and voice in the United States and in Europe. She gave two concert tours in Europe, then returned home. In 1935, she sang in New York and everyone agreed that her beautiful voice would be heard for a long time to come.

Anderson's accomplishments continued. In 1955, she became the first African American to sing with the Metropolitan Opera. Conductors and audiences all over the world praised her talents. In 1958, the United States government appointed her as a delegate to the United Nations.

Marian Anderson was very interested in promoting young singers. In 1942 she established the Marian Anderson Award, a \$1,000 scholarship awarded to the winner of a singing competition each year. In 1956, Anderson's autobiography, entitled *My Lord, What a Morning*, was published.



1. People raised money to help Marian Anderson receive her musical schooling. How did she help others in the same way?

2. What was Marian Anderson the first African American to do?

3. Marian Anderson's autobiography was called *My Lord, What a Morning*. It, of course, contained a great deal of information about her life. Based on what you have read about Marian Anderson here, create two other appropriate titles that she might have given to her autobiography.

Name _____

Dr. Charles Drew (1904–1950)

Charles Drew was raised in Washington, D.C. As a young student at Amherst College, in Massachusetts, he was an outstanding track star. He was also a star halfback on the football team and was awarded a trophy for bringing the most honor to his school. But Drew's most significant contribution was in the field of blood plasma preservation.

Dr. Drew received his medical degree from McGill University in Montreal. He continued to set track records while there and also won first place in physical anatomy. He went on to teach at Howard University and later became head of the surgery department. He was also the chief surgeon at the hospital located on Howard University's campus.

Dr. Drew had been conducting blood plasma research for many years when in 1940 the British asked him to help them set up a blood plasma program. Before this time, there had been no way to preserve blood for use in transfusions. When medical emergencies occurred or when wartime wounded needed blood, they were not able to be helped. But Dr. Drew's research had shown that it was possible to set up a blood bank. His contributions in Britain provided the model for later blood banks in the United States and Europe. Then, in 1943, he received the Spingarn medal for his promotion of African-American progress.

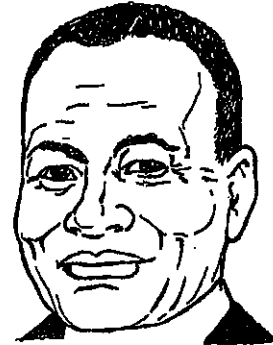
Ironically, Dr. Charles Drew died from loss of blood following a car accident in 1950. His short life was spent helping young African-American doctors and working in the surgical and blood plasma fields.

1. What are blood banks and why are they important?

2. Write a paragraph to support this statement: Charles Drew was a man of many talents.

Ralph Bunche (1904–1971)

Ralph Bunche was a statesman of international standing. He was born in Detroit, Michigan, but soon moved to New Mexico. After his parents' deaths, he and his sister moved to California and were raised by their grandmother. Ralph Bunche always remembered his grandmother's hard work and many sacrifices that allowed him to receive a good education.



Ralph was a very good student and athlete. He graduated at the top of his class in high school and went on to get his master's degree. He then became the first African American to receive a Ph.D. in political science at Harvard University.

After receiving his doctorate, he went to work for the United States government. He traveled around the world studying various cultures and governments. He became very active in the struggle for peace in the world. He participated in the founding of the United Nations, and in 1949 was a member of the United States negotiating team that helped bring peace to the Israelis and Arabs. In 1950, he became the first African American to win the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts towards peace in the Middle East.

1. Peace was very important to Ralph Bunche. What role does the United Nations play in achieving peace? _____

2. How can negotiating help to bring about peace? _____

3. How do you think Ralph Bunche's work for the government helped him in his work for peace? _____

Thurgood Marshall (1908–1993)

Thurgood Marshall was the son of a train porter and the great-grandson of a slave. He became the first African American to sit on the Supreme Court. He began his career as a dentistry major in college, but soon changed his mind. After graduating with a bachelor of arts degree from Lincoln University, he went on to Howard University Law School. He graduated in 1933 at the top of his class.



As a lawyer, Thurgood Marshall was most interested in cases that involved the rights of African Americans. He was one of the lawyers who took part in the famous Supreme Court decision on desegregating schools in 1954. Then, in 1961, he became a federal judge.

After spending four years as a federal judge, Thurgood Marshall was appointed the Solicitor General of the United States. This is the lawyer who represents the United States in cases argued before the Supreme Court. Two years later, when he was fifty-nine years old, Thurgood Marshall was appointed as an associate justice of the United States Supreme Court. He retired in 1991.

1. What does *desegregation* mean? _____

2. What is the role of the Supreme Court? _____

3. Why might a law career be a good choice for someone who is interested in civil rights? _____

Barbara Jordan (1936-)



Barbara Jordan was born and raised in Texas. Though her family was poor, she was determined to receive a good education. In 1956 she graduate from Texas Southern University. In fact, she graduated *magna cum laude*, with high honors. She went on to get her law degree from Boston University in 1959, and then returned to Houston and began practicing law.

Law was not Barbara Jordan's only interest. She was also interested in politics and in serving her country. She started campaigning for John F. Kennedy in the 1960 presidential election and became a very active democrat. Then she ran for office herself.

In 1966 she was elected to the state senate. This was the first time that an African American had held a seat in the Texas senate since 1883 and the first time ever for an African-American woman. Jordan was unanimously elected as president *pro tempore* of the Texas senate in 1972.

In 1972, Barbara Jordan became the first African-American woman elected to the United States Congress by a southern state. While in Congress, she became a very practical legislator known for getting results. President Jimmy Carter recognized her talents and appointed her to his advisory board on ambassadorial appointments.

Barbara Jordan delivered the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention in 1976—the first African American to do so. Then, in 1979, she retired from public office to teach at the University of Texas.

1. Choose one adjective that could be used to describe Barbara Jordan, then tell why that adjective is appropriate.

2. During her lifetime, Barbara Jordan achieved many "firsts." List them below.

Jesse Jackson (1941-)

Jesse Jackson was born in Greenville, South Carolina, on February 8, 1941. His family was poor, so he worked hard during his school years to help support the family. Jesse was a star athlete in high school. He played basketball and baseball, but his first love was football. He was the quarterback on his high school team.

Because of his athletic abilities, the University of Illinois gave Jackson a football scholarship. Soon, however, Jackson learned that because he was African American, he would not be allowed to quarterback the team. He quickly transferred to North Carolina Agricultural and Technical School where he was an outstanding student and star quarterback. He graduated and eventually went on to become an ordained Baptist minister after attending the Chicago Theological Seminary.

Jesse Jackson went to work for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., helping organize nonviolent civil rights protests throughout the United States. Dr. King asked Jesse to head up Operation Breadbasket in Chicago. This project brought African-American businessmen and members of the clergy together to help promote jobs for African Americans in Chicago. Jesse was so successful he became the national director of Operation Breadbasket from 1967-1971.

Jesse Jackson has traveled around the world speaking for racial equality for all. His efforts proved essential to the release of a pilot shot down in Lebanon and to the release of other political prisoners.

In 1971 Jackson founded PUSH (People United to Save Humanity). He headed this project until 1983. Then, in 1984, Jackson ran for the Democratic nomination for the presidency of the United States. He formed the famous "Rainbow Coalition" which united many minority groups in support of him. Though he lost, his political aspirations continued. He ran again in 1988 and won 6.6 million votes in the primaries. Again the Rainbow Coalition played a major role in the Democratic primary race. Jesse Jackson had won 92% of the African-American vote and 20% of the white vote by the time the primaries were over. Jackson's national and international work for equality continues today.

1. On the lines below, summarize what character traits you feel Jesse Jackson possesses. Be sure to tell what facts about his life make you think he has these traits. _____
