Still I Rise

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may tread me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Digging' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise

Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise

Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise

I rise

I rise.

Maya Angelou

WOMEN EQUALITY

Hear Me Roar

Katherine Johnson 1918 –2020
NASA Mathematician

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park
1207 Emery Highway
Macon, Georgia 31217-4399

IN REPLY REFER TO:

5620-2020

Ref.: Women Equality

Dear Sir/Madame:

This booklet is being presented as part of the 2020 Black History Month programs presented at Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park. My plan is to do an interpretive program on a series of selected eras in American history associated to people of color, to enlighten and educate the public. A different program will be presented each weekend in the month of February. The first subject to be covered is Slavery in the United States culminating in it's abolishment after the Civil War. The second era to be covered is Reconstruction and the post Civil War activities of the newly freed slaves. The Third era to be covered is the period from 1896 to 1955 which has been called the "Jim Crow" era. The next era will be the Civil Rights Era and culminating with Women Equality.

These series of programs relating to the historical eras of American history will also included an interpretive program supplemented by a small booklet or document on each of the subjects to help the visitor to better understand these periods. I realize that all of these subjects are touchy when it come to American History. It is now the time that we quit avoiding the discussion of these topics and start having meaningful dialogues as a Nation.

Discrimination is not just based on religion and ethnic origin but also on gender. The female of human society has been discriminated against since the dawn of time. In the United States, Women Equality received it's biggest significant gain when the re-emergence of women rights movement in the 1960's which resulted in: the adoption of the 1963 Equal Pay Act, the prohibition of inequality based on gender in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the breaching of barriers to employment for women. These actions were just a down payment for the inequalities that women had and still face in society today. This document will help tell the story of the Equal Rights Movement, but it mostly going to concentrate on the plight of the "Woman of Color". These gains came from a fight that has been a long hard one, major accomplishments have been made, but the fight is not over.

Sincerely,

Lonnie J. Davis

Lonnie J. Davis
Ocmulgee Mounds National Historical Park
Cultural Resources Specialist/Historian

voyage made Jemison the first African American woman in space. The team made 127 orbits around the Earth and returned to the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on September 20, 1992.

Jemison left NASA in 1993 after serving as an astronaut for six years in total. She started The Jemison Group, a consulting company that encourages science, technology, and social change. She also began teaching environmental studies at Dartmouth College and directed the Jemison Institute for Advancing Technology in Developing Countries. After hearing that she was a fan of the *Star Trek* television show, actor LeVar Burton asked Jemison to appear in an episode. Jemison agreed and became the first real astronaut to be on an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation.* She played Lieutenant Palmer in the episode, "Second Chances." In 1994, Jemison created an international space camp for students 12-16 years old called The Earth We Share (TEWS). She has received multiple awards and honorary degrees including the National Organization for Women's Intrepid Award and the Kilby Science Award. She currently lives in Houston, Texas.

National Women History Museum

Front Cover (Photograph)

Katherine Johnson was exceptional from an early age, graduating from High School at 14 and College at 18. The following year she was one of three students chosen to integrate West Virginia's Graduate Schools. Continuing to challenge both racial and gender barriers, she was hired by the fore runner of NASA to check calculations. Early on in her career she received a temporary assigned to an all-male flight research division and managed to prove herself so invaluable that she stayed there permanently. Johnson quietly left her mark on the US space program from its inception until her retirement in 1986.

When asked to name her greatest contribution to space exploration, Johnson would talk about the calculations that helped synch Project Apollo's Lunar Module with the lunar-orbiting Command and Service Module. She also worked on the Space Shuttle and the Earth Resources Technology Satellite (ERTS, later renamed Landsat) and authored or coauthored 26 research reports. She retired in 1986, after 33 years at Langley. "I loved going to work every single day," she said. In 2015, at age 97, Johnson added another extraordinary achievement to her long list: President Barack Obama awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor.

She died on Feb. 24, 2020. NASA Administrator James Bridenstine said, "Our NASA family is sad to learn the news that Katherine Johnson passed away this morning at 101 years old. She was an American hero and her pioneering legacy will never be forgotten."

Black women have made important contributions to the United States throughout its history. However, they have not always been recognized for their efforts, with some remaining anonymous and others becoming famous for their achievements. These women of color that has been mentioned in this booklet is just only a few, so let's continue to tell their stories and Hear them Roar.

Mae Carol Jemison has always reached for the stars as a doctor, engineer, and NASA astronaut,. In 1992, Jemison became the first African American woman to travel in space. She has also written several books and appeared on many television programs including an episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. In addition to her many awards, Jemison has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame and the International Space Hall of Fame.

Mae Jemison
(National Aeronautics and Space Administration)

Mae Jemison was born on October 17, 1956 in Decatur, Alabama. The youngest of three children, her mother was an elementary school teacher and her father was a maintenance supervisor. A few years after she was born, Jemison and her family moved to Chicago, Illinois. In addition to her love for dance, Jemison knew that she wanted to study science at a very young age. Jemison grew up watching the Apollo airings on TV, but she was often upset that there were no female astronauts. However, Jemison was inspired by African American actress Nichelle Nichols who played Lieutenant Uhura on the Star Trek television show. Jemison was determined to one day travel in space. In 1973, she graduated from Morgan Park High School when she was 16 years old. Once she graduated, Jemison left Chicago to attend Stanford University in California.

As one of the only African American students in her class, Jemison experienced racial discrimination in school. She later served as president of the Black Student Union and choreographed a performing arts production called *Out of the Shadows* about the African American experience. Jemison graduated in 1977 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemical Engineering and a Bachelor of Arts degree in African and African-American studies. After graduating from Stanford University, Jemison attended Cornell Medical School. While in medical school, she traveled to Cuba to lead a study for the American Medical Student Association. She also worked at a Cambodian refugee camp in Thailand. Jemison graduated from Cornell with a Doctorate in Medicine in 1981. Shortly after her graduation, she became an intern at the Los Angeles County Medical Center, and then went on to practice general medicine. Fluent in Russian, Japanese and Swahili, Jemison joined the Peace Corps in 1983 and served as a medical officer for two years in Africa.

After working with the Peace Corps, Jemison opened a private practice as a doctor. However, once Sally Ride became the first American woman in space in 1983, Jemison decided to apply to the astronaut program at NASA. She applied in 1985, but after the Space Shuttle *Challenger* exploded in 1986, NASA took a break from accepting new people. However, Jemison applied again in 1987 and was one of the 15 people chosen out of over 2,000 applications. She was selected for NASA Astronaut Group 12, which was the first group chosen after the Challenger explosion. After being selected, Jemison trained with NASA and worked on projects at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida and the Shuttle Avionics Integration Laboratory. She received her first mission on September 28, 1989 when she was selected to join the STS-47 crew as a Mission Specialist. On September 12, 1992 Jemison and six other astronauts went into space on the space shuttle *Endeavor*. This

WOMEN EQUALITY

Hear Me Roar

Overview

Women Equality is a phrase to identify another form of discrimination that females have been fighting against since the dawn of time. Black women have made important contributions to the United States throughout its history. However, they are not always recognized for their efforts, with some remaining anonymous and others becoming famous for their achievements. In the face of gender and racial bias, African American women have broken barriers, challenged the status quo, and fought for equal rights for all. The accomplishments of black women historical figures in politics, science, the arts, and more continue to impact society.

(Chicago History Museum / Getty Images)

Background

To be able to tell the how African American women contributed to American history, we must first explain how these women of color arrived in North America. Slavery existed within sub-Saharan African Iron Age kingdoms long before the arrival of Europeans to the continent. Regardless of which group, Africans were subjected to several forms of slavery over the centuries, including chattel slavery under both the imperial Muslims with the trans-Saharan slave trade and imperial Christian Europeans through the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Between 1400 and 1900, close to 20 million individuals were taken from the African continent during four sizable and mostly simultaneous slave trading operations: Trans-Saharan, Red Sea (Arab), Indian Ocean, and Trans-Atlantic. According to Canadian economic historian Nathan Nunn, by 1800 Africa's population was half of what it would have been, had the slave trades not occurred. Nunn suggests his estimates based on shipping and census data probably represent about 80% of the total number of people stolen from their homes by the various slave operations.

Four Great Slave Trading Operations in Africa

Name	Dates	Number	Countries Most Impacted	Destination
Trans-Saharan	Early 7th–1960s	> 3 million	13 countries: Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, Sudan, Chad	North Africa
Trans-Atlantic	1500–1850	> 12 million	34 countries: Angola, Ghana, Nigeria, the	European colonies in the Americas
Indian Ocean	1650–1700	> 1 million	15 countries: Tanzania, Mozambique,	Middle East, India, Indian Ocean Islands
Red Sea	1820–1880	> 1.5 million	7 countries: Ethiopia, Sudan, Chad	Egypt and Arabian peninsula

Religion and African Slavery

Many of the countries who actively enslaved Africans came from states with strong religious underpinnings such as Islam and Christianity. The Qur'an prescribes the following approach to slavery: free men could not be enslaved, and those faithful to foreign religions could live as protected persons. However, the spread of the Islamic Empire through Africa resulted in a much harsher interpretation of the law, and people from outside the borders of the Islamic Empire were considered an acceptable source of slaves.

Naturally, Bates also worked with local Civil Rights organizations. For many years, she served as the President of the Arkansas chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Her work with the NAACP not only transformed the Civil Rights Movement but it also made Bates a household name.

Daisy Bates
(Photo: Black History Now)

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled segregated schools unconstitutional. After the ruling Bates began gathering African American students to enroll at all white schools. Often the white schools refused to let black students attend. Bates used her newspaper to publicize the schools who did follow the federal mandate. Despite the continuous rejection from many Arkansas public schools, she pushed forward.

When the national NAACP office started to focus on Arkansas' schools, they looked to Bates to plan the strategy. She took the reins and organized the Little Rock Nine. Bates selected nine students to integrate Central High School in Little Rock in 1957. She regularly drove the students to school and worked tirelessly to ensure they were protected from violent crowds. She also advised the group and even joined the school's parent organization.

Due to Bates' role in the integration, she was often a target for intimidation. Rocks were thrown into her home several times and she received bullet shells in the mail. The threats forced the Bates family to shut down their newspaper.

After the success of the Little Rock Nine, Bates continued to work on improving the status of African Americans in the South. Her influential work with school integration brought her national recognition. In 1962, she published her memoirs, *The Long Shadow of Little Rock*. Eventually, the book would win an American Book Award. Bates was invited to sit on the stage during the program at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963. Due to a last-minute change, Bates was invited to speak at the march.

Bates died on November 4th, 1999. For her work, the state of Arkansas proclaimed the third Monday in February, Daisy Gatson Bates Day. She was posthumously awarded the Medal of Freedom by President Bill Clinton in 1999.

Arlisha Norwood

Colored People (NAACP).

By the time Parks boarded the bus in 1955, she was an established organizer and leader in the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama. Parks not only showed active resistance by refusing to move she also helped organize and plan the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Many have tried to diminish Parks' role in the boycott by depicting her as a seamstress who simply did not want to move because she was tired. Parks denied the claim and years later revealed her true motivation:

Rosa Parks
(Photo: Library of Congress)

"People always say that I didn't give up my seat because I was tired, but that isn't true. I was not tired physically, or no more tired than I usually was at the end of a working day. I was not old, although some people have an image of me as being old then. I was forty-two. No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in."

Parks courageous act and the subsequent Montgomery Bus Boycott led to the integration of public transportation in Montgomery. Her actions were not without consequence. She was jailed for refusing to give up her seat and lost her job for participating in the boycott.

After the boycott, Parks and her husband moved to Hampton, Virginia and later permanently settled in Detroit, Michigan. Parks work proved to be invaluable in Detroit's Civil Rights Movement. She was an active member of several organizations which worked to end inequality in the city. By 1980, after consistently giving to the movement both financially and physically Parks, now widowed, suffered from financial and health troubles. After almost being evicted from her home, local community members and churches came together to support Parks. On October 24th, 2005, at the age of 92, she died of natural causes leaving behind a rich legacy of resistance against racial discrimination and injustice.

Arlisha Norwood

Daisy Bates was born Daisy Lee Gatson on the 11 November 1914 in Huttig, Arkansas and raised in a foster home. When Daisy Bates was three years old her mother was killed by three white men. Although Bates, was just a child, her biological mother's death made an emotional and mental imprint on her. The unfortunate death forced Bates to confront racism at an early age and pushed her to dedicate her life to ending racial injustice.

When she was fifteen, she met her future husband, Lucius Christopher Bates, and began travelling with him throughout the South. The couple settled in Little Rock, Arkansas and started their own newspaper. *The Arkansas Weekly* was one of the only African American newspapers solely dedicated to the Civil Rights Movement. The paper was circulated state wide. Bates not only worked as an editor, but also regularly contributed articles.

Before the Civil War, Christianity was used to justify the institution of slavery in the American south, with most clergy in the south believing and preaching that slavery was a progressive institution designed by God to affect the Christianization of Africans. The use of religious justifications for slavery is not confined to Africa by any means.

The African Slave Trade

Africa wasn't the only continent from which slaves were captured: but its countries suffered the most devastation. In many cases, slavery appears to have been a direct outgrowth of expansionism. The great maritime explorations driven by companies such as the Dutch East India Company (VOC) were financed for the specific purpose of adding land to European empires. That land required a labor force far beyond the men sent on exploratory ships. People were enslaved by empires to act as servants; as agricultural, mining, and infrastructure labor; as sex slaves; and as cannon fodder for various armies.

The Start of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade came about when the Portuguese first sailed down the Atlantic African coast in the 1430s, they were interested in one thing: gold. However, by 1500 they had already traded 81,000 Africans to Europe, nearby Atlantic islands, and to Muslim merchants in Africa.

For two hundred years, 1440 - 1640, Portugal had a monopoly on the export of slaves from Africa. It is notable that they were also the last European country to abolish the institution—although, like France, it still continued to work former slaves as contract laborers, which they called *libertos* or *engagés à temps*. It is estimated that during the 450 years of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Portugal was responsible for transporting over 4.5 million Africans (roughly 40% of the total). During the eighteenth century, however, when the slave trade accounted for the transport of a staggering 6 million Africans, Britain was the worst transgressor—responsible for almost 2.5 million. (This is a fact that is often forgotten by those who regularly cite Britain's prime role in the abolition of the slave trade.)

Colonial and Revolutionary America

August 20, 1619 - 20 men and women from Africa arrived on a slave ship and were sold in the first North American slave auction -- by British and international custom, Africans could be held in servitude for life, though white Christian indentured servants could only be held for a limited term. The question we must ask and begin to answer is "How did these African women contribute to the British colonies and eventually American history?" You must also ask, How have they been affected by historical events?

Black women have played many important roles in U.S. history since the days of the American Revolution. Many of these women are key figures in the struggle for civil rights, but they have also made major contributions to the arts, to science, and to civil society. Discover some of these women of color and the eras they lived in with this booklet.

Africans were brought to the North American British colonies as slaves as early as 1619. During this era, there were few people of African descent living in the British colonies as free men and women, and their civil rights were sharply limited in most states. It wasn't until 1780 that Massachusetts formally outlawed slavery, the first of the North American British colonies to do so.

Phillis Wheatley was one of the few black women to rise to prominence in colonial-era America. Born in Senegal, Africa 8 May 1753. She was sold by a local chief to a visiting trader in 1761, who took her to Boston located in the British colony of Massachusetts, on a ship called "*The Phillis*". John Wheatley, a wealthy Bostonian, on July 11 purchased her from the trader and gave Phillis to his wife, Sussana. The family needed a young female servant to help Susanna and her daughter Mary with the daily running of the household. As was the tradition those days, the family renamed her Phillis after the slave ship that brought her to North America, also giving her their surname Wheatley.

Phillis Wheatley
(Stock Montage / Getty Images)

There may have been something in Phillis' delicate and weak appearance that must have won the Wheatley's hearts as she performed the increasing burden of her household duties. Phillis Wheatley had fewer restrictions than most slaves experienced... but she was still a slave. The Wheatley's were a progressive Bostonian family who did not consider it immoral to educate a slave even though it was illegal in Massachusetts and other colonies. The Wheatley family taught Phillis English and Christianity, and, impressed by her quick learning, they also taught her some Latin, ancient history, mythology and classical literature.

Sometime around the age of twelve, encouraged by the Wheatleys', Phillis started writing poems. At thirteen, she wrote 'On Messrs. Hussey and Coffin', about two men, who nearly drowned in the sea. Published on 21 December, 1767 in the Mercury Newport, it became her first published work. As her talent became more and more apparent, the family absolved her of her domestic duties, allowing her to concentrate on her studies. She was also allowed to mingle with the distinguished guests who often came visiting the Wheatleys, slowly becoming a part of the family. Although many white Bostonians adored her, she was very much aware that she was still a slave, not their equal and so wrote nothing that would offend them. In every day behavior too, she would keep a respectful distance, never sharing a table, even if she was invited.

Phillis never spoke of her childhood in Africa with the Wheatley's, but she did however remember and talked about her teenage years. Her master's wife, Susanna Wheatley, saw that she had the potential of becoming a great and promising writer. During the years she had developed a strong Christian faith, became more educated and wrote a book.

"To the King's Most Excellent Majesty", written in 1768, is another of her major work of this period. In this poem, she praised King George III of England for repealing the Stamp Act. Later, as the American Revolution gained momentum, she started writing from the perspective of the colonist. Also in 1768, she wrote, "On Being Brought from Africa to America". It is her only published poem, which alluded to her slavery. In it,

screamed at for sitting in the empty white section of a city bus; the driver pulled over to yell at her and Robinson fled the bus, fearing that he would hit her. Disgusted by the incident, she began to mobilize against the segregated city bus system.

When Robinson became president of the WPC in 1950, she focused the organization's efforts on desegregating buses. Working with attorney Fred Gray as her adviser, she met with then mayor of Montgomery William A. Gayle. The city's leadership was not interested in integrating buses, however, so Robinson conceptualized a boycott.

Following the arrest of Rosa Parks on December 1, 1955, Robinson distributed a flyer that she'd written urging for Montgomery's African Americans to boycott city buses on December 5 of that year. With the help of John Cannon, chairman of Alabama State's business department at the time, and two students, Robinson distributed more than 50,000 flyers overnight calling for the boycott.

When the boycott proved successful, the Montgomery Improvement Association, led by Martin Luther King Jr., came to manage its continuation. Subsequently, Robinson was appointed to the MIA's executive board and produced the organization's weekly newsletter at King's personal request.

For her role as a leader of the boycott, Robinson was arrested and targeted with violence; police officers threw a rock into her window and poured acid on her car. The harassment became so bad that state police were requested to guard her home. The boycott continued until June 5, 1956, when a federal district court declared segregating seating unconstitutional. The boycott also established Dr. King as a figure of national prominence and ushered in an era of nonviolent civil rights protests.

Not long after the boycott ended, Robinson resigned from her position at Alabama State College and moved on to Grambling College in Louisiana, and later to public schools in Los Angeles, California.

Robinson published a memoir entitled *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Woman Who Started It* in 1987. She died in Los Angeles on August 29, 1992.

Our Biography

Rosa Parks, on December 1, 1955, boarded a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Instead of going to the back of the bus, which was designated for African Americans, she sat in the front. When the bus started to fill up with white passengers, the bus driver asked Parks to move. She refused. Her resistance set in motion one of the largest social movements in history, the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Rosa Louise McCauley was born on February 4th, 1913 in Tuskegee, Alabama. As a child, she went to an industrial school for girls and later enrolled at Alabama State Teachers College for Negroes (present-day Alabama State University). Unfortunately, Parks was forced to withdraw after her grandmother became ill. Growing up in the segregated South, Parks was frequently confronted with racial discrimination and violence. She became active in the Civil Rights Movement at a young age.

Parks married a local barber by the name of Raymond Parks when she was 19. He was actively fighting to end racial injustice. Together the couple worked with many social justice organizations. Eventually, Rosa was elected secretary of the Montgomery chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of

ride" and sometimes she would "stay overnight at Rosa's — she lived in the projects across the street." Parks exhibited a certain forcefulness and strictness with the young people. According to Colvin, Parks "was very kind and thoughtful; she knew exactly how I liked my coffee and fixed me peanut butter and Ritz crackers, but she didn't say much at all. Then when the meeting started, I'd think, Is that the same lady? She would come across very strong about rights. She would pass out leaflets saying things like 'We are going to break down the walls of segregation.'" Parks would make Colvin tell the story of her bus arrest over and over. "After a while they had all heard it a million times,' Colvin recalled, "They seemed bored with it."

Colvin would become one of the plaintiffs on the federal case, Browder v Gayle, filed in February 1956 during the boycott which ultimately led to the desegregation of Montgomery's buses.

Evette Dionne

Jo Ann Robinson was born on April 17, 1912, in Culloden, Georgia. After earning a master's degree, she moved to Montgomery, Alabama, to teach at Alabama State College. After a verbally abusive encounter on a segregated city bus, Robinson became an advocate for equal rights for African Americans. She led a successful city bus boycott that gained national attention and the support of Martin Luther King Jr.

Jo Ann Robinson
(Photo: History.com)

Born on April 17, 1912, in Culloden, Georgia, Jo Ann Gibson Robinson was the 12th child of her farmer parents, Owen Boston Gibson and Dollie Webb Gibson. Following her father's death, 6-year-old Jo Ann and her family relocated to Macon. Jo Ann was valedictorian of her high school graduating class and became the first college graduate of her family when she earned a bachelor's degree from Fort Valley Normal College (present-day Fort Valley State University) in 1934.

Following her graduation from Fort Valley Normal College, Jo Ann Robinson became a public school teacher in Macon, Georgia, a position that she would hold for the next five years. Also during this time, she earned a master's degree from Atlanta University and went on to study English at New York's Columbia University. After a year, she moved to Crocket, Texas, to teach at Mary Allen College.

In 1949, Robinson moved to Montgomery to teach English at Alabama State College. She also became active in the Montgomery community, becoming a member of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where Martin Luther King Jr. later served as pastor, and joining the Women's Political Council, a group designed to motivate African-American women to take political action.

Robinson experienced the prejudices underlying racial segregation firsthand in the late 1940s when she was

she chided the white colonists, saying, "Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain / May be refined, and join th' angelic train."

Although her writings were much appreciated in closed circle, she had to wait until 1770 to be nationally recognized. In that very year, she wrote an elegy, "On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield", which gained her national attention. By 1772, she had gathered a collection of twenty-eight poems to be published in book form. In February, with the help of Mrs. Wheatley, she ran advertisements for subscribers in Boston newspapers, but failed to receive any response.

Realizing that white colonists were not yet ready to support the literally aspiration of an African slave, they now turned to Great Britain, sending the 'Whitefield' poem to Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon. It may have been because Whitefield had been chaplain to her, she came forward to have Whitney's collection published. In 1772, she was also forced to defend her poems in court because most white colonists doubted their authenticity under the belief that an African slave could not have written them. She was examined by Boston luminaries like John Erving, Reverend Charles Chauncey, John Hancock, Thomas Hutchinson and Andrew Oliver, who later attested her works. She also gained support from Benjamin Rush.

In May 1773, she accompanied Nathaniel Wheatley on a business trip to England. There, with the help of Countess of Huntingdon, she had her only collection of poems, 'Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral', published on September 1, 1773. The trip was also socially successful, being welcomed by many famous abolitionists. The publication in London of her poems brought her fame both in England and the American colonies. Despite of that, she returned to Boston in the same month due the illness of her mistress, Sussana Wheatley who died on 3 March, 1774. But before that, Phillis was set free on October 18, 1773.

Although Phillis Wheatley had been a slave almost all her life, she never experienced the drudgery that was part of the typical slave life. Instead, she had led a protected a life in the Wheatley household. But the situation changed soon after she became free. With the death of her mistress in 1774, of her master, Mr. Wheatley and her daughter, Mary, in 1778, her life became more and more tenuous. It became worse, when against the advice of her close friends she married a free black, John Peters.

In spite of that, she continued to write. In 1775, she sent a copy of a poem, "To His Excellency, George Washington" to him. In the following year, he invited her to visit him at his headquarters in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She met him in March 1776 and in April the poem was republished in the Pennsylvania Gazette. In 1779, Phillis Wheatley tried to publish a second collection of her poems. By then, all her benefactors except Nathaniel were dead. He too had married and moved to England. Phillis Wheatley had expected help from her evangelical friends; but due to war situation and bad economic condition, nothing came of it.

Between 30 October and 18 December 1779, she ran six advertisements soliciting subscribers for a volume "Dedicated to the Right Hon. Benjamin Franklin, Esq.: One of the Ambassadors of the United States at the Court of France". But this time too, the white Americans refused to respond. The book would have included thirty-three poems and thirteen letters. But, as she failed to find a publisher, they remained with

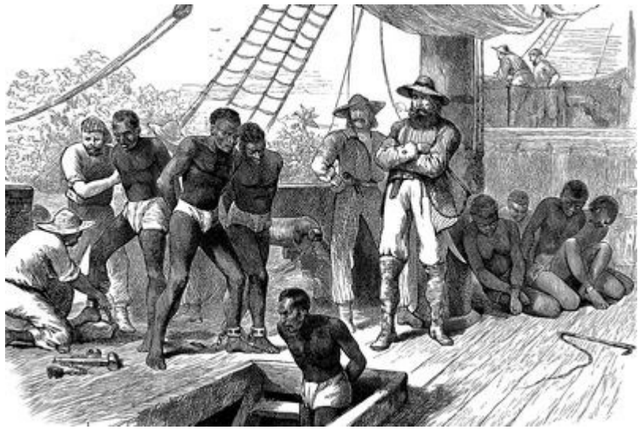
her. Ultimately, many of the poems were lost. However, some of the remaining poems were published two years after her death in newspapers and pamphlets. In last years of her life, she had to face acute poverty, having to maintain herself by working as a charwoman. In spite of that, she continued to write. The last poem that she was able to publish was 'Liberty and Peace' (1784); in it she congratulated America on her victory over England.

Soon after her marriage to John Peters, they moved to Wilmington, Massachusetts. Shortly returning to Boston they set up their home in the run-down section of the city. Despite trying his best, Peter could not find any job and their financial condition became worse day by day. To dodge creditors and also to find new jobs Peters left her on many occasions. During this lean period, Phillis began working as a charwoman, concurrently continuing to write poetries and trying to publish them. In 1784, Peters was imprisoned for his debts, leaving Wheatley to work as a scullery maid at a boarding house to feed herself and her surviving infant son. Although there is no record, it is possible that she bore Peter two more children, both of whom died in infancy. Phillis with her frail health was not accustomed to the hard work. She soon became ill and died on December 5, 1784, alone and uncared for among squalid poverty at the age of thirty-one. Her infant son also died at the same time.

National Women History Museum

Slavery and Abolitionists

By the end of the American Revolution, slavery had proven unprofitable in the North and was dying out. Even in the South the institution was becoming less useful to farmers as tobacco prices fluctuated and began to drop. The Atlantic slave trade slowed by 1783 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 outlawed slavery in the future states of Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. But slavery remained legal in the South, and Congress was repeatedly divided by the issue in the decades leading up to the Civil War. This was all due to Eli Whitney inventing the cotton gin in 1793; this device made it possible for textile mills to use the type of cotton most easily grown in the South. Cotton replaced tobacco as the South's main cash crop and slavery became profitable again.



American Slave Trade
(Photo: Encyclopedia Britannica)

The government of the New United States even passed a law, "The Embargo Act of 1803", prohibiting the importation of African slaves. The former colonies initially wanting to create a new Monarchy with George Washington as the newly appointed king. This idea was shot down because it was proposed to make a new style of government, a government of the people, for the people and by the people. A

Constitution…I knew I had rights" , she stated later in an interview.

The standing white woman refused to sit across the aisle from her. "If she sat down in the same row as me, it meant I was as good as her," Colvin noted. The driver yelled out again, "Why are you still sittin' there?" Colvin recalled. "A white rider yelled from the front, 'You got to get up!'" A girl named Margaret Johnson answered from the back, "She ain't got to do nothin' but stay black and die." There were thirteen students on the bus that day, most of them her classmates.

Two cops roughly arrested her and pulled her off the bus. Other black people on the bus said Colvin "fought like a little tigress", but Colvin maintained that she went limp and "didn't fight back." In the patrol car, the officers mocked her and made comments about parts of her body. Colvin worried they might try to rape her; she tried to cover her crotch and put her mind on other things. " I recited Edgar Allan Poe, Annabel Lee, the characters of Midsummer's Night Dream, the Lord's Prayer and the 23rd Psalm."

Various civil rights activists in Montgomery were outraged by the arrest and began to organize. Rosa Parks and white ally Virginia Durr began fundraising for young Colvin's case, and more than one hundred letters and a stack of donations streamed into Parks' apartment. Parks was hopeful that the young woman's arrest would embolden other young people to action and spark interest in the NAACP youth meetings. She encouraged Colvin to get active in the youth council.

Black community members met with the city, and various promises were made. At a second meeting with city officials, they took a petition to the bus company and city officials which asked for more courteous treatment and no visible signs of segregation on the bus. Tired of the city's "run-around", Parks refused to join them: "I had decided I would not go anywhere with a piece of paper in my hand asking white folks for any favors."

Colvin's case went to trial in May. Colvin had been charged with three crimes. The judge strategically dropped two of the charges (for disturbing the peace and breaking the segregation law) but found her guilty on the third for assaulting the officers who arrested her. Since Colvin had only been convicted of assault, appealing her case could not directly challenge the segregation law. The community was outraged. Some people stayed off the buses. But Colvin was young and seen as "feisty" and "uncontrollable" by many adults and lived on the wrong side of town. Ultimately, civil rights leaders deemed her not the right kind of plaintiff to organize around.

There is a myth, however, that they dropped her because she was pregnant. Colvin was not pregnant when the community decided not to pursue her case. Later in the summer, Colvin found out she had become pregnant by an older man. When this news came to light, many felt further convinced they had done the right thing in not pursuing her case. Over time, the stories would change so Colvin would be pregnant at the time of her arrest and trial — which was not the case.

According to Colvin, Mrs. Parks was the only adult leader who kept up with her that summer. Colvin had been a member of the NAACP Youth Council before the arrest and continued to attend Youth Council meetings. Parks made Colvin secretary of the council, trying to nurture the young woman's spirit and budding leadership. Claudette Colvin recalled that she only went to Youth Council meetings "if I could get a

run. A wrench became fouled in the plane's gears, causing it to go out of control and dive with the mechanic at the controls. Coleman was thrown out and fell to her death, while the plane crashed. Over 10,000 mourners paid their respects to this heroic figure, who (in the words of the resolution requesting the stamp in her honor) "continues to inspire untold thousands, even millions of young persons with her sense of adventure, her positive attitude, and her determination to succeed."

National Women History Museum

Civil Rights and African American Women

Between 1955 and 1968, acts of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience produced crisis situations and productive dialogues between activists and government authorities. Federal, state, and local governments, businesses, and communities often had to respond immediately to these situations, which highlighted the injustices faced by African Americans across the country. The lynching and mutilation of the body of Chicago teenager Emmett Till in Mississippi, and the outrage generated by seeing how he had been abused, when his mother decided to have an open-casket funeral, mobilized the African-American community nationwide.

Forms of protest and/or civil disobedience included boycotts, such as the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–56) in Alabama; "sit-ins" successful as the influential Greensboro sit-ins (1960) in North Carolina and successful Nashville sit-ins in Tennessee; marches, such as the 1963 Birmingham Children's Crusade and 1965 Selma to Montgomery marches (1965) in Alabama; and a wide range of other nonviolent activities. Most of these activities were planned by African American women and women also participated.

After Claudette Colvin was arrested for not giving up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus in March 1955, a bus boycott was considered and rejected. Later Mary Louis Smith refused to give up her seat and was arrested but when Rosa Parks was arrested in December, Jo Ann Gibson-Robinson of the Montgomery Women's Political Council put the bus boycott protest in motion. Late that night, she, John Cannon (chairman of the Business Department at Alabama State University) and others mimeographed and distributed thousands of leaflets calling for a boycott.

Claudette Colvin
(Photo: F Yeah History)

Claudette Colvin, on March 2, 1955, boarded a bus home from school. Fifteen years old, the tiny Colvin attended Booker T. Washington High School. She'd been politicized by the mistreatment of her classmate Jeremiah Reeves and had just written a paper on the problems of downtown segregation. On the bus home that day, the white section filled up. A white woman was left standing. The driver called out, and the three students sitting in Colvin's row got up but Colvin refused. "We'd been studying the

democratic society where there would be a governing body elected by the masses. This new government was addressing issues and among these was the issue of slavery. Southern patricians determined to maintain a privileged, slavery based agrarian order; lower and middle class southern whites generally committed to black slavery though resentful of the patricians' social pretense and ardent proponents of political equality whereas the Northern artisans dedicated to honest toil, political autonomy, and their own economic interest saw no need for slavery.

From the 1820s until the start of the U.S. Civil War, abolitionists called on the federal government to prohibit slave ownership in the Southern states. The practice of slavery is one of humankind's most deeply rooted institutions. Anthropologists find evidence of it in nearly every continent and culture dating back to ancient times and even the Neolithic period of human development.

In 1833, the same year Britain outlawed slavery, the American Anti-Slavery Society was established. It came under the leadership of William Lloyd Garrison, a Boston journalist and social reformer. From the early 1830s until the end of the Civil War in 1865, Garrison was the abolitionists' most dedicated campaigner. His newspaper, *The Liberator,* was notorious. It was limited in circulation but was still the focus of intense public debate. Its pages featured firsthand accounts of the horrors of slavery in the South and exposed, for many, the inhumane treatment of slaves on American soil. Garrison was a close ally of Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave whose 1845 autobiography became a bestseller. Two black women played pivotal roles in the fight against slavery during these years.

Sojourner Truth was born Isabella Bomfree, a slave in Dutch-speaking Ulster County, New York in 1797. She was bought and sold four times, and subjected to harsh physical labor and violent punishments. In her teens, she was united with another slave with whom she had five children, beginning in 1815. In 1827—a year before New York's law freeing slaves was to take effect—Truth ran away with her infant Sophia to a nearby abolitionist family, the Van Wageners. The family bought her freedom for twenty dollars and helped Truth successfully sue for the return of her five-year-old-son Peter, who was illegally sold into slavery in Alabama.

Sojourner Truth
(National Women History Museum)

Truth moved to New York City in 1828, where she worked for a local minister. By the early 1830s, she participated in the religious revivals that were sweeping the state and became a charismatic speaker. In 1843, she declared that the Spirit called on her to preach the truth, renaming herself Sojourner Truth.

As an itinerant preacher, Truth met abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass. Garrison's anti-slavery organization encouraged Truth to give speeches about the evils of slavery. She never learned to read or write. In 1850, she dictated what would become her autobiography—The

Narrative of Sojourner Truth—to Olive Gilbert, who assisted in its publication. Truth survived on sales of the book, which also brought her national recognition. She met women's rights activists, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, as well as temperance advocates—both causes she quickly championed.

In 1851, Truth began a lecture tour that included a women's rights conference in Akron, Ohio, where she delivered her famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech. In it, she challenged prevailing notions of racial and gender inferiority and inequality by reminding listeners of her combined strength (Truth was nearly six feet tall) and female status. Truth ultimately split with Douglass, who believed suffrage for formerly enslaved men should come before women's suffrage; she thought both should occur simultaneously.

During the 1850's, Truth settled in Battle Creek, Michigan, where three of her daughters lived. She continued speaking nationally and helped slaves escape to freedom. When the Civil War started, Truth urged young men to join the Union cause and organized supplies for black troops. After the war, she was honored with an invitation to the White House and became involved with the Freedmen's Bureau, helping freed slaves find jobs and build new lives. While in Washington, DC, she lobbied against segregation, and in the mid 1860's, when a streetcar conductor tried to violently block her from riding, she ensured his arrest and won her subsequent case. In the late 1860s, she collected thousands of signatures on a petition to provide former slaves with land, though Congress never took action on this proposal. Truth spent her final years in Michigan, nearly blind and deaf, she continued her activism until her death in 1883.

Black History Now

Harriet Tubman was born into slavery on Maryland's Eastern Shore in 1822, originally she was named Araminta by her enslaved parents, Ben and Rit Ross. Rit worked as a cook in the plantation's "big house," and Benjamin was a timber worker. Araminta later changed her first name to Harriet in honor of her mother.

Harriet had eight brothers and sisters, but the realities of slavery eventually forced many of them apart, despite Rit's attempts to keep the family together. When Harriet was five years old, she was rented out as a nursemaid where she was whipped when the baby cried, leaving her with permanent emotional and physical scars. Around age seven Harriet was rented out to a planter to set muskrat traps and was later rented out as a field hand. She later said she preferred physical plantation work to indoor domestic chores.

Harriet Tubman
(Photo: Library of Congress)

Harriet's desire for justice became apparent at age 12 when she spotted an overseer about to throw a heavy weight at a fugitive slave. Harriet stepped between the slave and the overseer, the weight struck her head. She later said about the incident, "The weight broke my skull … They carried me to the house all bleeding and fainting. I had no bed, no place to lie down on at all, and they laid me on the seat of the loom, and I stayed there all day and the next."

enough for secondary school and college. She was only able to complete one semester, and in 1915 joined her brother in Chicago. There she trained as a manicurist, became known as an exceptionally good one, and associated with many of Chicago's most successful African Americans. Her beauty also earned her admirers, including an older man named Claude Glenn whom she married but lived with for only a short period of time. Another early fan and supporter was Robert Abbott, publisher of the *Chicago Defender* newspaper and one of the first Black millionaires.

World War I veterans (including Coleman's brother) were returning from Europe with stories of aviation, and tales of French female flyers. Coleman found her defining challenge: she would become a pilot, despite the fact that female flyers were virtually non-existent in the United States and Black women could not hope to receive instruction. Indeed, a series of U.S. schools rejected Coleman. On the advice of Abbott (and with financial assistance from him and others), she learned French at a local Berlitz school, found a higher-paying job, and saved as much money as possible toward training in France. In 1920 she enrolled at the Ecole d'Aviation des Freres Caudron.

The only non-Caucasian in her class, she learned to fly over seven months in a 27-foot biplane of flimsy construction. Coleman saw a fellow student crash fatally, but persevered. She was the first Black woman to earn an international pilot's license from the Federation Aeronautique Internationale, in 1921. Over the next two months, she refined her technique with private lessons, and returned home.

Coleman's arrival in the U.S. was hailed by the Black press and aviation journals as a historic event. The Air Service News described her as "a full-fledged aviatrix, the first of her race." But she realized she would need training as a stunt flier in order to earn a living. She returned to Europe for instruction. Back in the U.S., in full command of her skills, confidence, beauty, and daring, she made her debut in an air show in 1922 in New York sponsored by Abbott and the *Chicago Defender*. She then performed in air shows countrywide, earning fans and exposure for her daring and skill.

Coleman worked selflessly to help other African Americans fulfill their dreams. She tried throughout her career to start a flying school, and refused to fly at locations that barred Blacks. And in a decision that would hurt her, she walked off a movie in which she had agreed to appear, produced and financed by African Americans, upon finding that the character presented (in her eyes) a derogatory image of Blacks. Now perceived as willful and unreliable, she had difficulty finding sponsors and support even within the African American community.

"Queen Bess," as she had come to be known, persevered. She managed enough occasional exhibition flights to purchase an aging plane to use for her flying school. It crashed days later, leaving her in the hospital for three months and recuperating in Chicago for another 18. Recovering her health and confidence, she announced to the *Houston Post-Dispatch* in 1925 that her goal was to turn "Uncle Tom's cabin into a hangar by establishing a flying school." Coleman began lecturing, spreading her message of inspiration. She started a beauty parlor to raise funds, and received assistance from a wealthy friend to purchase a World War I Army surplus plane.

The day before her first scheduled appearance in the plane, Coleman and her mechanic went up for a test

Her work continued with “A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892-1894.” This expanded on her earlier research using unimpeachable white sources, with similarly disturbing conclusions. Wells advanced the theory that lynching was, at root, based on deep white fears and an effort to prevent Blacks from attaining economic independence. At age 33, Wells married the Chicago activist, lawyer, and publisher Ferdinand L. Barnett in 1895. Barnett had founded the city’s first Black newspaper, the Conservator, and Wells now took over as editor. She continued touring and speaking through the birth and infancy of her first child, but with the birth of a second son the following year she began to spend more time at home devoted to their upbringing. Two daughters followed in 1901 and 1904.

By 1910, with Jim Crow, discrimination, and lynching still national problems, she returned to public life and formed the Negro Fellowship League. Wells was one of the founding organizers of the NAACP (one of only two African American women so involved), although her radical stance created conflict with the Association’s mainstream leadership. She founded the first Black women’s suffrage organization, the Alpha Suffrage Club, in 1913 and met with President McKinley that year. Wells reported on race riots nationwide in the period following World War I, and began writing her autobiography, “Crusade for Justice,” in 1928, stating “The history of this entire period which reflected glory on the race should be known.”

Although unsuccessful, her 1930 race for a seat in the Illinois state senate (one of the first Black woman to run for public office in the U.S.) was a fitting capstone to a life of bold action. For the remainder of her life, she focused her efforts on improving the living conditions in Chicago’s black ghetto. A public housing project there is named in her honor. Wells died at the age of 69 on March 25, 1931.

Black History Now

Bessie Coleman overcame an early life of hardship to become the first African American to earn an international pilot’s license, and the first Black woman to fly an airplane. The symbolic power of her achievement made her an iconic figure for African Americans in the early 20th century and an inspiration for Black aviators. In the words of Lt. William Powell (writing in the journal Black Wings), “Because of Bessie Coleman, we have overcome that which was much worse than racial barriers. We have overcome the barriers within ourselves and dared to dream.”

Bessie Coleman
(Photo: Black History Now)

Coleman was born and raised in rural Texas. She showed early enthusiasm for education, despite hurdles: one of 13 children, she devoted time to her siblings as well as to the fields during cotton picking season. Her father left for Oklahoma in 1891 to seek a less discriminatory environment. Her mother opted to keep the family rooted in Texas, relying on cotton picking and work as a laundress to support them.

Coleman finished eighth grade at the top of her class, and began working as a laundress, planning to earn

Harriet’s good deed left her with headaches and narcolepsy the rest of her life, causing her to fall into a deep sleep at random. She also started having vivid dreams and hallucinations which she often claimed were religious visions (she was a staunch Christian). Her infirmity made her unattractive to potential slave buyers and renters. In 1840, Harriet’s father was set free and Harriet learned that Rit’s owner’s last will had set Rit and her children, including Harriet, were to be freed. But Rit’s new owner refused to recognize the will and kept Rit, Harriett and the rest of her children in bondage.

Around 1844, Harriet married John Tubman, a free black man, and changed her last name from Ross to Tubman. The marriage was not good, and John threatened to sell Harriet further south. Her husband’s threat and the knowledge that two of her brothers, Ben and Henry, were about to be sold provoked Harriet to plan an escape. On September 17, 1849, Harriet, Ben and Henry escaped their Maryland plantation. The brothers, however, changed their minds and went back. With the help of the Underground Railroad, Harriet persevered and traveled 90 miles north to Pennsylvania and freedom.

Tubman found work as a housekeeper in Philadelphia, but she wasn’t satisfied living free on her own—she wanted freedom for her loved ones and friends, too. She soon returned to the south to lead her niece and her niece’s children to Philadelphia via the Underground Railroad. At one point, she tried to bring her husband John north, but he had remarried and chose to stay in Maryland with his new wife.

The 1850 Fugitive Slave Act allowed fugitive and free slaves in the north to be captured and enslaved. This made Harriet’s job as an Underground Railroad conductor much harder and forced her to lead slaves further north to Canada, traveling at night, usually in the spring or fall when the days were shorter. She carried a gun for both her own protection and to “encourage” her charges who might be having second thoughts. She often drugged babies and young children to prevent slave catchers from hearing their cries.

Over the next ten years, Harriet befriended other abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass, Thomas Garrett and Martha Coffin Wright, and established her own Underground Railroad network. It’s widely reported she emancipated 300 slaves; however, those numbers may have been estimated and exaggerated by her

biographer Sarah Bradford, since Harriet herself claimed the numbers were much lower. Nevertheless, it's believed Harriet personally led at least 70 slaves to freedom, including her elderly parents, and instructed dozens of others on how to escape on their own. She claimed, "I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger."

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Harriet found new ways to fight slavery. She was recruited to assist fugitive slaves at Fort Monroe and worked as a nurse, cook and laundress. Harriet used her knowledge of herbal medicines to help treat sick soldiers and fugitive slaves.

In 1863, Harriet became head of an espionage and scout network for the Union Army. She provided crucial intelligence to Union commanders about Confederate Army supply routes and troops and helped liberate slaves to form black Union regiments. Though just over five feet tall, she was a force to be reckoned with, although it took over three decades for the government to recognize her military contributions and award her financially.

After the Civil War, Harriet settled with family and friends on land she owned in Auburn, New York. She married former slave and Civil War veteran Nelson Davis in 1869 (her husband John had died 1867) and they adopted a little girl named Gertie a few years later.

Harriet had an open-door policy for anyone in need. She supported her philanthropy efforts by selling her home-grown produce, raising pigs and accepting donations and loans from friends. She remained illiterate yet toured parts of the northeast speaking on behalf of the women's suffrage movement and worked with noted suffrage leader Susan B. Anthony.

In 1896, Harriet purchased land adjacent to her home and opened the Harriet Tubman Home for Aged and Indigent Colored People. The head injury she suffered in her youth continued to plague her and she endured brain surgery to help relieve her symptoms. But her health continued to deteriorate and eventually forced her to move into her namesake rest home in 1911. Pneumonia took Harriet Tubman's life on March 10, 1913, She was buried with military honors at Fort Hill Cemetery, but her legacy lives on. Schools and museums bear her name and her story has been revisited in books, movies and documentaries.

Black History Now

African American Women and Reconstruction

Reconstruction was a nearly unprecedented period of transformation in American History. New constitutional amendments refashioned American citizenship and promised new rights. After the Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment established national citizenship, protected the federal debt from repudiation, and promised individuals equal protection and due process of law. The Fifteenth Amendment attempted to outlaw racial discrimination in the right to vote. However none of these radical changes made the life of African American women too much better, at the most it made it worse.

In the latter days of the Civil War, black men were given the right to fight in the Union Army and Navy. These men could now file pension claims for their contributions and participation in ending the war. Black

One of several seminal events in Wells' life took place on the train ride to Woodstock in 1884. At that time, railroads were required to offer equal treatment to Blacks, but many ignored this willfully. Wells was ordered by the conductor to leave the first-class car (for which she had paid) and to move to a Black "Jim Crow" car. She refused, resisted physically (even biting the conductor on the hand), and had to be carried out by three men to the applause of the all-white passengers. Wells sued the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad Company in the first such case in the South. She won the verdict in circuit court, but was reversed on appeal at the State Supreme Court level.

Wells wrote about the experience for a Black church publication, *The Living Way*, and received an immediate positive response. The editor asked her to continue. Her reputation spread, and her work appeared in prominent African American publications nationwide with insightful and scathing reviews of the conditions of Black life, discrimination, and inferior education. She accepted an offer in 1889 to become editor of *Free Speech and Headlight*, a small Memphis newspaper, where her bold editorials ultimately led to her dismissal by the Memphis School Board for criticizing the conditions in Black schools.

A second incident followed in 1892. With mob violence, lynching, and the Ku Klux Klan's "Reign of Terror" ascendant in the South, three friends of Wells opened a grocery store across the street from a white-owned shop. Angered by the competition, a white mob attacked and the Black men defended themselves, wounding three attackers for which they were jailed. A second mob formed the next day, forcibly removed the Blacks from their jail cells, and killed them. Wells responded with an editorial urging all Blacks to leave Memphis.

Reign of Terror Lynching
(Photo: Black History Now)

Six thousand heeded her advice, and Wells' anti-lynching crusade was born. Remaining in Memphis, she continued editorializing and organizing, and also began research into the causes of lynching. Her first publication on the subject, "*Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*," found that the charges against lynching victims were often trivial or discriminatory (e.g., theft of hogs, disrespecting whites) and, more sensationally, that one-third of all charges against Black men were for the rape of white women, often despite evidence of consensual relations between the parties. In response, an outraged white mob attacked her newspaper office, destroyed the printing presses, and threatened to kill her.

Wells relocated to Chicago, and began publishing articles in The New York Age while speaking throughout the Northeast. She traveled to England, Scotland, and Wales in 1893, learning from the civic activist groups of British women and using international opinion to pressure U.S. politicians. Returning to Chicago, she helped to establish the first Black women's civic clubs there and in Boston, as well as the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. Her interest in women's suffrage grew in parallel, bringing her into close contact with Jane Addams and Susan B. Anthony. Along with Addams, Wells blocked the creation of segregated schools in Chicago.

children. Charlotte E. Ray passed away in Woodside, New York on January 4, 1911.

Black Past

Jim Crow Era

African Americans used the Great War to show their patriotism and to prove they could contribute to the protection and advancement of this country. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People encouraged this spirit of Americanism to counteract racial tension and stereotypes. African Americans realized they would have to fight for racial equality on all fronts.

Racism was even experienced in the suffrage movement when African-American women like Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Alice Dunbar-Nelson supported the need for women's voting rights. During an organized women's suffrage march in 1913, the organizers of the National American Woman Suffrage Association asked black women to march separately. Although the 19th amendment was passed to grant the vote to women, it was not until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s that African-American women could exercise this right without discrimination.

Ida B. Wells devoted her life to social justice for Blacks and women. She became a world-famous writer and campaigner in support of these causes, published important treatises on the origins and nature of "mob rule" and the lynching of African Americans in the south, and helped to organize the women's suffrage movement and the NAACP.

Ida B. Wells
(Photo: Black History Now)

Wells was born on July 16, 1862 to two slaves in Holly Springs, Mississippi, the eldest of eight children, six months before the Emancipation Proclamation. Her father, James, was a skilled carpenter; her mother, Elizabeth, was an accomplished cook. Both embraced their freedom with a diligent love of learning, which they imparted to their children. Wells attended the newly-formed Shaw University with her mother.

While visiting her grandmother's farm in the country in 1878, a yellow fever epidemic killed Wells' parents and one sibling. Only 16 years old, she was urged to break up the family and pursue her own education but refused. By masquerading as an 18-year-old, Wells gained employment as a teacher in a nearby country school, spending weekends at home with her charges, "… washing, ironing, and cooking for the children." Five years later they joined an aunt in Memphis, Tennessee, and Wells found work in a school in nearby Woodstock. She spent her vacations taking training courses at Lemoyne Institute and Fisk University, which qualified her to teach in the Memphis city schools, where she had a seven-year tenure teaching first grade.

women had contributed to the war effort but only a select few such as Harriet Tubman, was identified by the Federal Government as being eligible for a pension and even she had to wait three decades before it was awarded. During Reconstruction there was one African American Woman that found a way to circumvent this gender discrimination.

Cathay Williams was born in September of 1844 in Independence, Missouri. Aside from this lone fact, details of her life up until her enlistment in the Army are unknown or based on rumor. It has been reported that, while her father was a free black man, her mother was a slave and Williams herself was born into slavery. She appears to have been considered the property of William Johnson, an affluent farmer. As a child, Williams was moved to Johnsons home in Jefferson City where she worked as a domestic servant. At the onset of the Civil War, Union soldiers seized the farm, and the 16-year-old Williams was absorbed into the migrations of the Union Army. She was taken to Little Rock, Arkansas, where she worked for the Army as a laundress and a cook.

Williams traveled with the Army throughout the south. After briefly working as a cook and laundress in Louisiana, she was placed in the service of General Phillip Sheridan. Under his charge, she experienced life on the front lines as his troops marched on the Shenandoah Valley. In her time as an Army servant, Williams witnessed several battles, and watched soldiers burn cotton fields and a Confederate gunboat in the Red River at Shreveport, Louisiana.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, Congress authorized the four all- black military units, which later came to be known as "Buffalo Soldiers." The audacious Williams traveled to St. Louis in 1866, and joined the Army under the guise of a man. Women were not allowed to join the Army at that time, although some had secretly fought in the Civil War. Prospects for black women at that time were grim, and because of her familiarity with the routine, posing as a man in the Army offered Williams a relatively secure existence.

When she registered for the 38th Infantry Regiment, she used the alias William Cathey. The misspelling of the surname was due to her own illiteracy. Her enlistment papers, some of the few written records of Williams' life, indicate that a medical exam determined her fitness for duty and gave her age as 22. Within her unit, no one knew she was a woman except a cousin and a close friend, both of whom guarded her secret with the utmost loyalty.

Cathay William
(Pencil Drawing: History.com)

While serving as a Buffalo Soldier, Williams learned to use a musket, and to perform garrison duty, guard duty, and scouting missions. Although no records imply that she was an exceptional soldier, every indication exists that she was perfectly capable. She never had cause to personally engage in combat during her enlistment. In April 1867, Williams and her 75-strong troop marched to Fort Riley in Kansas where along with 15 other privates, she was admitted to the hospital with "Itch," a term for the ailments that stemmed from camp life that included lice, scabies, and other skin disorders. During Williams' service in the Army, she spent time at four different post hospitals for various illnesses, and it was apparently never discovered that she was a woman.

Cathay William
(National Women History Museum)

After the hiatus at Fort Riley, Williams and her company marched 536 miles and arrived at Fort Union, New Mexico, on July 20, 1867. In October of the same year, they were dispatched to Fort Cummings in New Mexico where they served as protection from the Native American raiders on behalf of settlers and miners. Williams was stationed at Fort Cummings for eight months. During that time, many immigrants were traveling to California through New Mexico, and Cooke's Canyon in the Fort's territory was one of the most dangerous routes. There are records that a mutiny of some kind broke out within the ranks, but Williams is not listed among those involved in any insubordination.

In the winter of 1868, Williams was twice treated for rheumatism in the post hospital at Fort Cummings. By the time the regiment moved to Fort Baynard, New Mexico, in July of 1868, she was still suffering from some kind of illness and was frequently unable to report for duty. On October 14, 1868, she was honorably discharged by a surgeon for her disability for vague reasons and a nervous system disorder. She later implied that she might have admitted her gender to the surgeon in a bid to receive her discharge.

Williams dropped her alias and returned to dressing as a woman after her discharge from the Army. She began to work again as a cook and a laundress, first at Fort Union, then in Pueblo, Colorado, and later in Trinidad, Colorado. In 1875, it was discovered that Williams had been an African American woman solider. A journalist from St. Louis recorded her story as told in her own words, and published the tale of her deception and dutiful service the following year. After a brief tenure in Raton, New Mexico, Williams returned to Trinidad. She once again suffered serious illness in 1889. Poor, she petitioned for benefits as a veteran. Her pension and benefits were denied, however, after she was examined by an Army surgeon who found her fit, aside from several amputated toes. It was never denied that she had served as a Buffalo Soldier.

Williams does not appear on the Trinidad census after 1900, and it is widely assumed that she had died by then. Her story is one among many regarding the African Americans who served as Buffalo Soldiers. Williams exemplifies the myriad ways in which oppressed people, whether impoverished, Black, or both, found cunning ways to survive a difficult period of history. Though her career as a soldier was unremarkable, her courage as a black woman remains exceptionally inspiring.

Black History Now

Charlotte E. Ray, the first African American woman to practice law in the United States, was born on January 13, 1850, in New York City, New York. Her father, Reverend Charles Bennett Ray, was a prominent New York abolitionist and minister, who served as pastor of the Bethesda Congregational Church and was the owner of the *Colored American*, one of the leading African American newspapers of the antebellum era. Her mother, Charlotte Augusta Burroughs Ray, was raised in Savannah, Georgia. Charlotte Ray was the youngest of three girls.

Drawing of Charlotte Ray
(Public Domain Image)

Ray spent her first years in New York City, but by 1850 her parents had moved to Washington, D.C., where she entered the Institution for the Education of Colored Youth, the only school in the Washington, D.C. area that allowed African American girls to become pupils.

Ray graduated from the institution in 1869 at the age of 19. Howard University, then about four years old, hired her as a teacher for its Preparatory and Normal Department, the part of the university that trained school teachers. Ray, however, was not satisfied with training others to teach. Her ambition instead was to attend the university's law school. Howard University's Law School, however, discouraged women from enrolling and Ray was forced to apply under the name "C.E. Ray" to disguise her gender. University officials reluctantly accepted her application and she attended classes while continuing to teach in the Preparatory and Normal Department. Ray matriculated at the law school for three years, from 1869 to 1872 where she concentrated on commercial law. Upon completion of the program in 1872, Ray became the first black woman to graduate from an American law school and receive a law degree. In fact she was only the third American woman of any race to complete law school.

Ray achieved another first when on April 23, 1872 she was admitted to the bar in the District of Columbia which had recently removed the word "male" from its requirements. Afterwards Ray opened her own law office in Washington, D.C. but found it difficult to make a living as an attorney due to racial and gender bias. She returned to New York in 1879 and became a Brooklyn school teacher.

By this point, Ray had become an advocate for women's suffrage. She was a delegate to the 1876 conference of the National Woman's Suffrage Association. In 1895 Ray joined the newly formed National Association of Colored Women. In 1897 she moved to a suburban community on Long Island, Woodside, New York.

Little is known about Ray's personal life after she returned to New York. In 1886, at the age of 36, she married a man named Fraim, but it is not clear how long the marriage lasted. There were no