Scott Joplin
Composer and pianist. Scott Joplin is known as the “King of Ragtime.” With a lifetime repertoire of more than sixty compositions, Joplin’s creativity and virtuosity paved the way for the evolving American musical form of jazz, and for the widespread acceptance of African-American musicians as serious artists. Composer of the first opera by an African American, Joplin’s genius was not recognized in his lifetime. He was awarded a posthumous Pulitzer Prize for his contributions to American music in 1976.

Marion Anderson
One of the finest contralto singers of all time, Marion Anderson was also a key figure in the struggle of blacks for civil rights in the 20th century. She was banned by the Daughters of the American Revolution from performing at Constitution Hall, which led to the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt’s resignation from the DAR. Anderson instead gave a stunning and symbolic performance before 75,000 people at the Lincoln Memorial. Anderson was active in politics, and was honored with an appointment as goodwill ambassador to Asia, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, a Congressional Gold Medal, and the National Medal of Arts.

Hattie McDaniel
A gifted singer and prolific actress, Hattie McDaniel was the first African-American woman to sing on network radio. As star in the title role of the nationally broadcast radio program, The Beulah Show, Hattie McDaniel became the first African American to star in a sitcom and was honored with an appointment as goodwill ambassador to China. McDaniel was also a revered poet, editor and mentor during the Harlem Renaissance, a period of outstanding literary vigor and creativity that took place in the North along an elaborate secret network of safe houses. Ms. McDaniel’s extraordinary courage, ingenuity and persistence, gained more than 300 fugitive slaves their freedom.

James Weldon Johnson
A noted writer, lawyer, educator and civil rights activist, James Weldon Johnson is credited with authoring the song “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” long recognized as the African-American National Anthem. Johnson was also a renowned poet, editor and mentor during the Harlem Renaissance, a period of outstanding literary vigor and creativity that took place in the 1920s. He further served as a U.S. diplomat to Nicaragua and Venezuela, and an general secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

A. Philip Randolph
A trade unionist and civil rights leader, A. Philip Randolph was a dedicated leader in the struggle for justice and parity for the black American community. In 1922, he founded the Committee of 100, the predecessor of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Randolph organized the group of black workers and, at a time when half the affiliated members of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) barred blacks from membership, took his case to the AFL. He was the first president of the Negro Labor Council, which he devoted to fight discrimination within the AFL-CIO.

Abolitionists

Sojourner Truth
One of the most inspirational and well known African Americans of the 19th century, Sojourner Truth was born into slavery as Isabella Baumfree in New York in 1797. She gained her freedom in 1820 and began an evangelical life of traveling and preaching under the name Sojourner Truth. Her autobiography, The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave, was published in 1831 and her speeches against slavery and for woman’s suffrage drew large crowds. She was received by President Lincoln at the White House and spent her later years crusading former slaves as they started their new lives.

Harriet Tubman
Born into slavery, abolitionist Harriet Tubman was the first African-American woman to be honored on a United States postage stamp. Ms. Tubman was a conductor for the famed Underground Railroad during the Civil War, leading hundreds of slaves to freedom in the North along an elaborate secret network of safe houses. Ms. Tubman’s extraordinary courage, ingenuity and persistence, gained more than 300 fugitive slaves their freedom.

James Baldwin
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Ethel L. Payne
Journalist, publisher, civil rights leader, and educator Ethel L. Payne was often called the “First Lady of the Black Press.” Payne was a syndicated columnist and long-time reporter for the Chicago Defender, a leading African-American newspaper. She was the first African-American woman to receive accreditation as a White House correspondent, and in 1968 provided exclusive coverage on African-American troops in Vietnam. When hired by CBS in 1972, Payne became the first black female radio and television commentator at a national network organization.

Carter G. Woodson
Carter Godwin Woodson was an African American historian who first opened the field of black studies to scholars and popularized the field in schools and colleges. To focus attention on black contributions to civilization, he founded Negro History Week in 1926. This celebration and remembrance later evolved into Black History Month. Woodson was dean of the College of Liberal Arts and head of the graduate faculty at Howard University in Washington, D.C. and then at West Virginia State College. While there, he founded Associated Publishers, to publish and promote books on black life and culture.

Benjamin Banneker
Mathematician and astronomer Benjamin Banneker first achieved national recognition for his scientific work in the 1791 survey of the Federal Territory (now Washington, D.C.). In 1792, he built the first watch made in America, a wooden pocket watch. Twenty years later, Banneker began making astronomical calculations that enabled him to successfully forecast a 1789 solar eclipse. He is best known for his six Farmer’s Almanacs, published between 1792 and 1797, and has been referred to as the first African-American scientist.

Jan Matzeliger
Inventor and entrepreneur Jan Matzeliger is credited with creating the “ lasting” machine for the production of shoes. Matzeliger’s “shoe lasting” machine could produce up to 750 pairs a day. Matzeliger’s invention made it possible for ordinary citizens to purchase shoes.

Sugar Ray Robinson
The first African American to join modern Major League Baseball, Jackie Robinson had a 10 year career with the Brooklyn Dodgers, winning seven National League Pennants, and leading the team to their only World Series win over the New York Yankees. He was the first African American included into the Baseball Hall of Fame and his number (42) was retired by Major League Baseball in 1997. After retiring from the track, Robinson served as a teacher, a track coach, and a noted goodwill ambassador.

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