

Mary McLeod Bethune

1875-1955

“Be calm, be steadfast, be courageous.”

Daughter of former slaves, Mary McLeod Bethune became a college president, founder of the National Council of Negro Women, and a prominent government official.



Mary McLeod Bethune

Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture / New York Public Library / Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

In the late 1800s, Mary McLeod Bethune walked five miles to attend a one-room school – one of South Carolina’s few schools for black children. In 1904, with just \$1.50, she opened a school for girls in Daytona Beach, Florida. The six students used crates for desks and charcoal for pencils. The school eventually merged

with a boys’ school to become Bethune-Cookman College. Bethune was its president for 22 years.

This visionary educator was a tireless activist for equal rights. Bethune served as president of the 800,000-member National Council of Negro Women – which she founded – for 14 years. As director of the National Youth Administration’s Division of Negro Affairs, she shaped U.S. government policy. One of the most influential black women of her time, she used her power to help hundreds of thousands of African Americans expand their power.

Major accomplishments

1923: Founded Bethune-Cookman College

1935: Created National Council of Negro Women

1936: Organized Federal Council on Negro Affairs, advisory body to Franklin D. Roosevelt

1939: Appointed Director, Division of Negro Affairs, National Youth Administration

She was a close friend of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.



Shirley Chisholm

1924-2005

Our country needs women's idealism and determination, perhaps more in politics than anywhere else."

Declaring herself "unbought and unbossed," Shirley Chisholm made history as a presidential candidate and the first black woman elected to Congress.



Shirley Chisholm runs for the Presidential nomination in 1972.
Library of Congress

Shirley Chisholm was born to immigrant parents in Brooklyn, New York, where she excelled in school. After graduating from college, she taught nursery school and earned a master's degree in elementary education. Driven to help the disadvantaged, she became involved in politics in her Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. She and others formed the United Democratic Club to support black candidates.

In 1964, Chisholm herself became a

candidate – winning a seat in the New York State Assembly. In 1968, she was the first African American woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where she served for seven consecutive terms. In 1972, she ran for President as “the candidate of the people.”

Chisholm was a gutsy congresswoman. She spoke out against the Vietnam War and served as a strong advocate for children, women, and the urban poor. She remained a catalyst for change, teaching politics at Mt. Holyoke College and supporting Jesse Jackson's presidential campaigns.

Major accomplishments

1968: Elected to U.S. House of Representatives

1970: Published *Unbought and Unbossed*

1971: Was founding member of Congressional Black Caucus

1972: Became first African American to run for President

1973: Published *The Good Fight*

1977: Was founding member of Congressional Women's Caucus

1984: Co-founded National Congress of Black Women

As a young girl, she lived with her grandmother on a Caribbean island and attended British schools.



Septima Poinsette Clark

1898-1987

"The greatest evil in our country today is not racism, but ignorance... We need to be taught to study rather than to believe..."

This passionate educator taught thousands of African Americans how to achieve personal and political empowerment.



Septima Clark
Highlander Research and Education Center Archives

A young widow and teacher, Septima Clark began her crusade for racial equality by helping the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) force a South Carolina school system to pay black and white teachers equally.

In 1956, after 40 years as a South Carolina schoolteacher, Clark was fired for

her NAACP membership. Not giving up, she took a job as director of education at Tennessee's Highlander Folk School, a civil rights training center. There, she started the Citizenship Schools, which taught adults reading and writing skills necessary to pass voter literacy tests. Clark's schools spread across the South – enabling thousands of African Americans to vote for the first time.

Clark continued to fight injustice, speaking out for women's rights, organizing daycare centers, and inspiring others through award-winning books.

Major accomplishments

1919: Led Charleston, South Carolina, petition drive to allow black teachers in black schools

1961: Appointed director of education and teaching for Southern Christian Leadership Conference

1974: Became first black female member of Charleston School Board

1979: Accepted Living Legend Award from President Jimmy Carter

1987: Received American Book Award for *Ready from Within*

She learned courage from her mother and honesty from her father.



Kathleen Cleaver

1945-

"No one ever asks what is a man's role in the revolution."

This dedicated activist improved the lives of countless African Americans – first as a radical revolutionary, later as a respected scholar and educator.



Kathleen Cleaver, circa 1995

Johnathan Eubanks

As a 21-year-old honor student, Kathleen Cleaver discovered she was more interested in activism than school and left college to work for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. There, she met her future husband, Black Panther Party minister of information Eldridge Cleaver.

Captivated by his fiery speeches and radical approach to social change, she joined the Black Panthers and married Cleaver. As communications secretary, she organized a campaign to free the party's jailed minister of defense, Huey Newton.

In 1969, Cleaver joined her husband in Algeria, where he fled due to legal

problems. There, the Cleavers formed a new party: the Revolutionary People's Communication Network. Returning to the U.S. in 1975, the mother of two finished college and graduated from Yale Law School.

After Cleaver's divorce in 1987, she earned a reputation as an educator and expert in African American history. She now teaches law at Emory and Yale Universities.

Major accomplishments

1968: Became first woman to serve as national communications secretary and Central Committee member for Black Panther Party

1970: Co-founded international wing of Black Panther Party

1993: Named to Georgia's Supreme Court Commission on Racial and Ethnic Bias in the Courts

1993: Member of Board of Directors of Atlanta-based Southern Center for Human Rights

2001: Produced and directed International Black Panther Film Festival

She left America in support of her husband, and had one child in Algeria and one in North Korea.



Myrlie Evers-Williams

1933-

"I understand the pain and the challenges, and my attitude is one of standing up with open arms to meet all of them."

Widow of a prominent activist, Myrlie Evers-Williams built her own legacy – eventually becoming chair of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.



Myrlie Evers-Williams, 1995
AP Images

MMyrlie Evers-Williams met civil rights activist Medgar Evers on her first day at college in Mississippi and married him in 1951. Living under constant death threats, they organized voter registration drives and civil rights demonstrations. On June 12, 1963, Medgar Evers was assassinated in their driveway.

To help her family heal, Evers-Williams moved to California. She completed her

bachelor's degree, worked as a corporate executive, and became involved in politics. As commissioner of public works in Los Angeles, she managed 6,000 employees and a budget of \$400 million. In 1995, when the NAACP was experiencing difficult times, she took over as chair. Within three years, she improved the organization's image and turned a budget deficit into a surplus.

For 30 years, Myrlie Evers-Williams fought to bring Medgar Evers' assassin to justice. In 1994, a jury convicted him of murder and sentenced him to life in prison.

Major accomplishments

1967: Co-authored *For Us, The Living*

1990: Became first black female commissioner of public works in Los Angeles

1995: Elected second female chair of NAACP Board of Trustees

1998: Established Medgar Evers Institute

1999: Published *Watch Me Fly: What I Learned on the Way to Becoming the Woman I Was Meant to Be*

2005: Published *The Autobiography of Medgar Wiley Evers*

She named one son in honor of Jomo Kenyatta, the former president of Kenya, Africa.



Fannie Lou Hamer

1917-1977

"I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired."

Nothing – not even a brutal beating in jail – stopped this determined wife and mother from fighting to secure black people's constitutional right to vote.



Fannie Lou Hamer at Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, 1964
Library of Congress / Warren K. Leffler

The twentieth child of Mississippi sharecroppers, Fannie Lou Hamer grew up poor and oppressed. Not until 1962, when she was 44 years old, did she discover she had a right to vote. But unfair laws and harassment by white racists made voting nearly impossible for black Mississippians.

Despite the danger, Hamer decided to claim the right.

Hamer volunteered to help the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee register Southern black voters. She and other volunteers were threatened, jailed, and beaten. Some were murdered. Hamer drew strength from her religious beliefs and often led hymns and freedom songs during marches.

Hamer's powerful televised testimony about how she and other black people were mistreated influenced passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It guarantees every American an equal right to vote. Hamer spent the next 12 years fighting for human rights.

Major accomplishments

1964: Helped organize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

1969: Founded the Freedom Farm Cooperative, where 5,000 people grew their own food

1971: Helped found the National Women's Political Caucus

1972: Served as delegate to the Democratic National Convention

Her favorite song was "This Little Light of Mine."



Charlayne Hunter-Gault

1942-

"If people are informed they will do the right thing. It's when they are not informed that they become hostages to prejudice."

In 1961, Charlayne Hunter-Gault made headlines when she integrated the University of Georgia. Today, this award-winning journalist writes her own headlines.



Charlayne Hunter-Gault
Justin Ide

Charlayne Hunter-Gault wanted to be a journalist since childhood. Her heroine was comic strip reporter Brenda Starr. But when Hunter-Gault and another black student applied to the University of Georgia's journalism school, they were denied admission. They went to court, won their case, and became the first black

students in the university's 175-year history.

After reporting for *The New Yorker* magazine and *The New York Times*, Hunter-Gault signed on as national correspondent for PBS-TV's "McNeil/Lehrer Report." For 20 years, she covered world events and interviewed famous people. She won two Emmy Awards and two Peabody Awards, broadcast journalism's highest honor. One Peabody was for her documentary "Apartheid's People." The award was presented by the University of Georgia, which once turned her away.

Hunter-Gault now lives in South Africa, where she reports on Africa's problems and promise.

Major accomplishments

1986: Named Journalist of the Year by National Association of Black Journalists

1995: Published *In My Place* about growing up in the segregated South

1999: Became South African Bureau Chief for CNN

2006: Published *New News Out of Africa: Uncovering Africa's Renaissance*

All through school – from elementary to college – she had perfect attendance.



Inspire Times

Dorothy Irene Height

1912-

"We are not a problem people; we are a people with problems. We have historic strengths; we have survived because of family."

A prominent civil rights leader for nearly half a century, Dorothy Height fought for equal rights for both African Americans and women.



Dorothy Height
Sophia Smith Collection / Smith College

When Height was growing up, her mother often told her, "You're a smart girl. And there are many things you can do."

Sure enough, this young woman from Pennsylvania went on to earn bachelor's and master's degrees within four years and to lead several major women's organizations. As president of the National

Council of Negro Women (NCNW), Height was often the only woman at top civil rights movement meetings, paving the way for other women.

Under Height's half century of leadership, NCNW improved the lives of millions of women and their families through health, education, and economic programs in the U.S. and Africa. A champion of African American communities, she organized the first Black Family Reunion Celebration in 1986. This annual festival reminds African Americans to take pride in their enduring strengths and traditional family values.

Major accomplishments

1938: Began 33 years of global service to Young Women's Christian Association

1947: Elected national president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, among the oldest of African American sororities

1957: Elected president of National Council of Negro Women

2004: Awarded Congressional Gold Medal

When she was little, she gave music lessons to other kids for 25 cents.

Barbara Charline Jordan

1936-1996

"If the society today allows wrongs to go unchallenged, the impression is created that those wrongs have the approval of the majority."

High moral standards, dedicated public service, and galvanizing speeches made this U.S. congresswoman an inspiration to all Americans.



Barbara Jordan – Keynote address at Democratic National Convention, 1976
Library of Congress

Confrontation wasn't Barbara Jordan's style. Shrewd and ethical, her talent was consensus building. She improved people's lives through legislation – first as state senator, later as a Texas congresswoman.

Throughout her political career, Jordan fought for constitutional rights. She wrote Texas' first successful minimum wage bill and worked to amend the Voting Rights

Act of 1965 to protect Hispanic, Native, and Asian Americans.

In 1974, Jordan's moral courage and extraordinary speaking skills gained national recognition. As a member of the House Judiciary Committee considering impeachment of President Richard Nixon, she delivered an electrifying speech declaring her dedication to the Constitution and her outrage at its abuse.

When Jordan's health made it impossible to continue in politics, she inspired others by teaching. Her ethics course at the University of Texas was so popular that students entered a lottery to enroll.

Major accomplishments

1966: Became first African American woman elected to Texas State Senate

1972: Became first African American congresswoman from the South

1976: Became first African American to deliver a keynote address at a national convention

1994: Awarded Presidential Medal of Freedom

She was chosen Girl of the Year in high school.



Coretta Scott King

1927-2006

“Struggle is a never-ending process. Freedom is never really won; you earn it and win it in every generation.”

Wife of Martin Luther King, Jr., this courageous woman was a leader in her own right – the “First Lady” of the civil rights movement.



Coretta Scott King, 1969
Flip Schulke / Corbis

As a girl in Alabama, Coretta Scott King dreamed of becoming a singer. Then, while attending the New England Conservatory of Music, she met Martin Luther King, Jr. Sharing his vision for a better world, she married him and joined his crusade for freedom and justice.

A devoted wife and mother, King marched and gave speeches at her husband's side. She lectured, read poetry, and sang at her popular Freedom Concerts

to raise money and awareness for the civil rights movement.

After her husband's assassination in 1968, King kept his dream alive. She led protest marches and advised freedom movements around the world. From her basement, she started the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1983, the Center gathered 800 civil and human rights organizations in Washington, D.C., to commemorate her husband's "I Have a Dream" speech.


Major accomplishments

1969: Published *My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr.*

1974: Organized Full Employment Action Council, a coalition of more than 100 organizations dedicated to equal economic opportunity

1980: Named founding president and CEO of Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc.

1983: Won 15-year battle to make her husband's birthday a national holiday



As a girl, she walked three miles to school every day after feeding chickens and milking a cow.

Constance Baker Motley

1921-2005

"As the first black and first woman, I am proving in everything I do that blacks and women are as capable as anyone."

After winning nearly every landmark civil rights case of the 1950s and 1960s, this intrepid attorney became a high-ranking judge.



Constance Baker Motley, 1965
Library of Congress

A single incident sparked 15-year-old Constance Motley's interest in the civil rights movement – she was banned from a Connecticut beach because she was black. From then on, she was determined to become a lawyer.

One of 12 children of West Indian immigrants, Motley finished college in less than three years with financial help from a local businessman. After graduating from New York University, she earned a degree from Columbia Law School.

Motley worked for Thurgood Marshall at the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People. She quickly moved up the ranks, becoming a key attorney in groundbreaking school desegregation cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education*. Later, Motley successfully argued her own pioneering cases, including James Meredith's long battle for admission to the previously segregated University of Mississippi.

Motley's accomplishments drew her into politics, where she defended justice as a state senator and, later, federal judge.

Major accomplishments

1964: Became first African American woman elected to NY State Senate

1965: Named first female African American Manhattan borough president

1966: Became first female African American federal judge

1982: Appointed chief judge of Southern District of New York

1986: Appointed senior U.S. district judge

1988: Published *Equal Justice Under Law: The Life of a Pioneer for Black Civil Rights and Women's Rights*

In 1965, she was the highest-ranking, best-paid black woman in U. S. government.



Rosa Louise McCauley Parks

1913-2005

"I would like to be known as a person who was concerned about freedom, equality, justice and prosperity for all people."

Rosa Parks broke a law when she refused to give up her bus seat – a courageous act that changed the law and brought international attention to the civil rights movement.



Rosa Parks
Bettman / Corbis

Growing up in Alabama, Rosa Parks tried to avoid the indignity of riding in segregated buses. Their front rows were reserved for white people. As those rows filled, black people had to stand in the rear.

At the end of a long workday in 1955, Parks refused to relinquish her seat to a

white man. She was arrested. Led by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., the black community boycotted the bus system for 381 days. In 1956, the U.S. Supreme Court declared bus segregation illegal. Parks became known as the mother of the modern civil rights movement.

After moving to Detroit, Parks became an aide to U.S. Representative John Conyers and continued to push for racial equality. She was the first woman to lie in state in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda.

Major accomplishments

1943: Became secretary of Montgomery, Alabama, chapter of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

1987: Founded Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development

1996: Awarded Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Bill Clinton

1999: Received Congressional Gold Medal

Dropping out of school to care for her grandmother, she finally earned her diploma at age 21.



Inspire Lives

Sonia Sanchez

1934-

"...that has propelled me, that love of language that came from listening to my grandmother speak black English."

As a child, Sonia Sanchez was shy and spoke with a stutter, but she found her voice in poetry and influenced a generation of writers.



Sonia Sanchez
Marion Ettlinger

Sanchez began to write at age six, after the death of her beloved grandmother. When she moved from Alabama to Harlem, the rhythms, sounds, and language of the streets captivated her. She became a powerful voice of the 1960s'

Black Power movement and joined a group of radical poets called the Broadside Quartet. Using urban black English, unusual spellings, and creative structures, they redefined poetry and gave passionate expression to African American culture.

Recipient of many prestigious awards, Sanchez has published more than 16 poetry books since her first – *Homecoming* – in 1969. She has written plays, anthologies, and children's books. She has experimented with many poetic forms, including haiku. In addition, Sanchez has had a distinguished career as a university professor and has given poetry readings around the world.

Major accomplishments

1969: Offered first course on literature of African American women at University of Pittsburgh

1985: Received American Book Award for *Homegirls and Handgrenades*

1997: Her poetry appeared in feature film *Love Jones*

2001: Received Poetry Society of America's 2001 Robert Frost Medal

She wrote her first poem when she was six years old.



Inspire Lives

Betty Shabazz

1936-1997

“Nothing is insurmountable; there is always a will and a way.”

After witnessing her husband’s assassination, Betty Shabazz raised six children alone, earned a Ph.D., and built a career in health services and education.



Betty Shabazz
Corbis Sygma

Raised in a middle-class Detroit family, Betty Shabazz went to college in Alabama and studied nursing in New York. There she met and married the well-known Nation of Islam leader, Malcolm X.

In 1965, while giving a speech in Harlem, Malcolm X was gunned down – in front of his children and pregnant wife.

Shabazz was devastated, but refused to be bitter. She nurtured her children and carried on her husband’s work. After earning master’s and doctoral degrees, she built a distinguished career in health care and education. She also hosted a radio program for women and earned respect as a community activist.

Thirty years after her husband’s murder, Shabazz gave a moving speech at the Million Man March in Washington, D.C. – reaffirming their shared vision of human dignity and social justice.

Major accomplishments

1980: Named Director of Institutional Management, Medgar Evers College

1990: Received New York Urban League’s Frederick Douglass Award

1994: Elected chair of 41st National Council of Negro Women Convention

1995: Received an honorary law degree from Lincoln University

In 1965, she traveled to Mecca on a spiritual pilgrimage with other Muslims.

Mary Church Terrell

1863-1954

“Keep on moving, keep on insisting, keep on fighting injustice.”

This gifted orator marched for women’s rights and forced Washington, D.C., restaurants to open their doors to black people.



Mary Church Terrell, circa 1895
Library of Congress

Born the year of the Emancipation Proclamation, Mary Church Terrell was among the first black women to earn a college degree. Although she had a privileged upbringing and did not have to work, she chose to teach and become a professional lecturer – speaking out against racial violence and for women’s right to vote.

Fluent in three languages, Terrell delivered a powerful speech in German on

African American achievements at the 1904 International Congress of Women in Berlin. As the first president of the National Association of Colored Women, she established Mothers’ Clubs to help black women with housing, unemployment, and child-rearing issues.

When Terrell was 87 years old, she ordered a meal in a Washington, D.C., restaurant and was asked to leave. She filed a lawsuit and organized picket lines. In 1953, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Terrell’s favor, and the nation’s capital finally began to desegregate.

Major accomplishments

- 1892:** Founded the Colored Women’s League
- 1895:** Became first black woman elected to Washington, D.C., Board of Education
- 1896:** Co-founded National Association of Colored Women
- 1909:** Founded executive committee of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- 1941:** Published her autobiography, *A Colored Woman in a White World*

She spoke three languages – German, English and Italian.



Harriet Ross Greene Tubman

Circa 1820-1913

"I had reasoned this out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a right to – liberty or death."

Born into slavery, Harriet Tubman escaped in 1849 and immediately vowed to lead her family and other enslaved black people to freedom.



Harriet Ross Greene Tubman
Ohio Historical Society

Soon after her escape from slavery, Tubman made the dangerous trip back south to guide her sister and two children north. She went on to rescue her entire family, including her elderly parents. Over the next decade, she made 19 trips into slave territory – freeing as many as 70 people.

Tubman was the most daring conductor on the Underground Railroad – a network of “stations” where enslaved black people hid as they fled north. Slaveholders offered up to \$40,000 for Tubman’s capture. She was never caught. Nor were any of her passengers. Tubman became known as the “Moses of Her People,” after the biblical story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt.

During the Civil War, Tubman worked for the Union Army as a nurse and a spy. Afterwards, she spoke out for women’s rights and supported others who needed help, especially children and the elderly.

Major accomplishments

1863: First American woman to command a military raid, during Civil War

1896: Served as delegate to first convention of National Federation of African American Women

1903: Founded home for elderly African Americans



She often disguised herself as a man while leading escaped slaves on the Underground Railroad.

Inspire Lives

C. Delores Tucker

1927-2005

"Never again will black women be disregarded. We will have our share and parity in American politics."

After co-founding the National Congress of Black Women, this longtime civil rights advocate led a campaign against offensive lyrics in hip-hop music.



C. Delores Tucker
Pennsylvania State Archives

In 1965, Philadelphia-born C. Dolores Tucker marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Selma, Alabama. She had become involved in the civil rights movement in her 20s and remained active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and other civil rights organizations for more than 50 years.

A woman of many firsts, Tucker became Pennsylvania's secretary of state in 1971 – the first female and first African American

in the nation to hold that position. In 1984, with Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, she founded the National Congress of Black Women to promote the interests of the African American community, particularly women.

During the 1990s, Tucker spoke out against lyrics in gangsta rap and other hip-hop music that she considered obscene and demeaning to women. She received both praise and criticism. But on this, as on all issues, she stood her ground.

Major accomplishments

1968: Appointed chair of Pennsylvania Black Democratic Committee

1971: Became first female and first black secretary of state, in Pennsylvania

1975: Elected first black female vice president of Penn. Democratic Party

1976: Named first black president of National Federation of Democratic Women

1984: Elected chair of Democratic Party's National Black Caucus

1984: Co-founded and chaired National Congress of Black Women

1991: Founded and became president of Bethune-DuBois Institute, Inc.



Her state license plate – 3 – said she was the third most powerful person in Pennsylvania government.

Frances Watkins Harper

1825-1911

"...no nation can gain its full measure of enlightenment...if one-half of it is free and the other half is fettered."

This internationally acclaimed author and lecturer used stirring poetry and prose to inspire social activism and integrity.



Frances Ellen Watkins Harper
Emory University

Frances Harper was born to free parents in the slave state of Maryland. Orphaned before the age of three, she was raised by her uncle and aunt in an atmosphere of social and political activism.

As a young adult, the budding activist moved north. In Pennsylvania, a free state, she helped runaway slaves along the Underground Railroad. The experience convinced her to dedicate her life to ending slavery and improving society.

In 1854, Harper was hired by the Maine Anti-Slavery Society and became one of the

first women abolitionist speakers. She was already an accomplished poet and author, and her lyrical prose captivated audiences. Harper spent nearly 50 years traveling across the U.S. and Canada, speaking out against racism, sexism, and immorality. Through more than 12 books and writings, she taught the value of social service and integrity.

Major accomplishments

1845: Published first book of poems, *Forest Leaves*

1850: Became first woman teacher at Union Seminary (now Wilberforce University), Wilberforce, Ohio

1857: Published *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, which sold over 10,000 copies

1859: Edited and contributed to *Anglo-African Magazine*, the first African American literary journal

1883: Became director of Northern United States Temperance Union

1892: Published best-known novel, *Iola Leroy, Or Shadows Uplifted*

1896: Co-founded National Association of Colored Women

She was a longtime friend and colleague of Sojourner Truth.



Ida B. Wells-Barnett

1862-1931

"We must educate the white people out of their 250 years of slave history."

This fearless investigative journalist risked her life to expose the evils of lynching.



Ida B. Wells-Barnett
University of Chicago Library

Ida B. Wells-Barnett learned self-reliance after her parents died when she was a teenager. At age 16, she taught school in rural Mississippi to support her siblings. Her crusade for justice began in 1884, when she was removed from a Tennessee train for refusing to ride in the car for black people. She sued the railroad and won. The decision was overturned, but Wells-Barnett wrote editorials about the

case that gained her recognition as an accomplished journalist.

In 1892, a white mob lynched three of Wells-Barnett's friends in Memphis, Tennessee. Now a full-time journalist and co-owner of the black newspaper *Free Speech*, she wrote a scathing editorial about the murders. Her office was ransacked, and she was forced to leave town.

Nevertheless, Wells-Barnett continued to investigate lynch mobs, publish her findings, and speak worldwide about lynching and other social injustices. This fiery journalist became one of the nation's most respected women.

Major accomplishments

1892: Published *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*

1893: Published *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*

1909: Co-founded National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

She read Shakespeare and loved classical music.

