

# African Americans have played a vital role in the history and culture of their country since its founding. Here are some biographical sketches of several key figures in African American history.

## Benjamin Banneker

1731-1806



Although he spent nearly his entire life on one farm, Banneker had an important influence on how African Americans were viewed during the Federalist and Jeffersonian periods of American history. Born in Baltimore County, Maryland, Banneker was the child of a free black father. He had little formal education, but he became literate and read widely. At 21, he built a clock with every part made of wood—it ran for 40 years. After the death of his father, he lived on his father's 100-acre farm, largely secluded from the outside world, with his sisters. Self-taught in the fields of astronomy and surveying, he assisted in the survey of the Federal Territory of 1791 and calculated ephemerides and made eclipse projections for Benjamin Banneker's Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia Almanack and Ephemeris, published during the years 1792-1797. He retired from tobacco farming to concentrate wholly upon his studies. He corresponded with Thomas Jefferson and urged Jefferson to work for the abolition of slavery.

## Sojourner Truth

1797-1883



Sojourner Truth, a nationally known speaker on human rights for slaves and women, was born Isabella Baumfree, a slave in Hurley, New York, and spoke only Dutch during her childhood. Sold and resold, denied her choice in husband, and treated cruelly by her masters, Truth ran away in 1826, leaving all but one of her children behind. After her freedom was bought for \$25, she moved to New York City in 1829 and became a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. In 1853, she helped form a utopian community called "The Kingdom," at Sing Sing, New York, which was soon disbanded following the death and possible murder of its leader. Truth was implicated in the scandal but courageously fought the falsehoods aimed at her.

After the death of her son, she took the name Sojourner Truth to signify her new role as traveler telling the truth about slavery. She set out on June 1, 1843, walking for miles in a northeasterly direction with 25 cents in her pocket, and rested only when she found lodging offered by either rich or poor. First she attended religious meetings, then began to hold meetings herself that would bring audience members to tears. As she logged mile after mile, her fame grew and her reputation preceded her. Truth's popularity was enhanced by her biography written by the abolitionist Olive Gilbert, with a preface written by William Lloyd Garrison. In 1864, she was invited to the White House, where President Abraham Lincoln personally received her. Later she served as a counselor for the National Freedman's Relief Association, retiring in 1875 to Battle Creek, Michigan.

## Harriet Jacobs

1813-1897

Known primarily for her narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*: Written by Herself, Harriet Jacobs was a reformer, Civil War and Reconstruction relief worker, and antislavery activist. In *Incidents*, Jacobs describes her life as Southern slave, her abuse by her master and involvement with another white man to escape the first, and the children born of that liaison. Also described is her 1835 runaway, her seven years in hiding in a tiny crawlspace in her grandmother's home, and her subsequent escape north to reunite with her children and freedom. During the war, Jacobs began a career working among black refugees. In 1863 she and her daughter moved to Alexandria, where they supplied emergency relief, organized primary medical care, and established the Jacobs Free School—black led and black taught—for the refugees. After the war they sailed to England and successfully raised money for a home for Savannah's black orphans and aged. Moving to Washington, D.C., she continued to work among the destitute freed people and her daughter worked in the newly established "colored schools" and, later, at Howard University. In 1896, Harriet Jacobs was present at the organizing meetings of the National Association of Colored Women.

## Alexander Crummell

1819-1898



Alexander Crummell, clergyman and author, was born in New York City to free parents. Crummell was a descendant of West African royalty since his paternal grandfather was a tribal king. He attended Mulberry Street School in New York, and in 1831 he was enrolled briefly in a new high school in Canaan, New Hampshire, before it was destroyed by neighborhood residents. In 1836 Crummell attended Oneida Institute manual labor school. He was received as a candidate for Holy Orders in 1839 and applied for admission to the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church, but was not admitted because of his color. He was eventually received in the diocese of Massachusetts and ordained to the diaconate there. After study at Queen's College, Cambridge, England, he went to Africa as a missionary, becoming a professor of mental and moral science in Liberia. While there, Crummell became widely known as a public figure; in 1862 he published a volume of his addresses, most of which had been delivered in Africa. After spending 20 years on that continent, Crummell returned to the United States and became rector of St. Luke's Church, Washington, D.C., and later founded the American Negro Academy.

## Harriet Tubman

1821-1913

Heralded as the "Moses" of her people, Underground Railroad conductor Harriet Tubman became a legend during her lifetime, leading approximately 300 slaves to freedom during a decade of freedom work. Denied any real childhood or formal education, Tubman labored in physically demanding jobs as a woodcutter, a field hand, and in lifting and loading barrels of flour. Although she had heard of kind masters, she never experienced one, and she vowed from an early age that she would strive to emancipate her people. In 1844, at age 24, she married John Tubman, a freeman, and in the summer of 1849 she decided to make her escape from slavery. At the last minute, her husband refused to leave with her, so she set out by herself with only the North Star to serve as her guide, making her way to freedom in Pennsylvania. A year later, she returned to Baltimore to rescue her sister, then began guiding others to freedom. Travel became more dangerous with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, but she was not deterred, despite rewards offered by slaveowners for her capture totaling \$40,000.

Tubman's heroism was further highlighted by her activities between 1862 and 1865, when she was sent to the South to serve as a spy and a scout for the Union Army. Her gift for directions and knowledge of geography remained an asset as she explored the countryside in search of Confederate fortifications. Although she received official commendation from Union officers, she was never paid for the services she rendered the government.

After the war she returned to Auburn, New York, working to establish a home for indigent aged blacks, and in 1869 she married her second husband, a Union soldier. She became involved in a number of causes, including the women's suffrage movement. Her death brought obituaries that demonstrated her fame throughout the United States and in Europe. She was buried with military rites, with Booker T. Washington serving as funeral speaker.

## Booker T. Washington

1856-1915



Born into slavery, Booker T. Washington was the most prominent spokesperson for African Americans after the death of Frederick Douglass. Much more conciliatory than Douglass, Washington sought—but never demanded—social betterment for African Americans through economic progress. As a boy, he picked Washington as his last name. After emancipation his mother and stepfather moved to West Virginia, where Washington worked in the coal mines but attended school whenever possible. In 1871, Washington returned to Virginia and enrolled in the Hampton Institute. After graduation in 1875, he first taught in West Virginia and then studied at the Wayland Seminary before returning to teach at Hampton. In 1881 he left Hampton to begin the single most important undertaking of his life: founding the Tuskegee Normal School in Alabama. Washington, his small staff, and their students worked as carpenters to build Tuskegee. In its first year of operation Tuskegee had 37 students and a faculty of three; when Washington died in 1915, Tuskegee had 1,500 students, a faculty of 180, and an endowment of \$2,000,000.

African Americans have criticized Washington for what they saw as his overly-deferential attitude to his white benefactors and for his position that university education was basically irrelevant for blacks, who should concentrate on vocational training. This, along with his acceptance of segregation, increasingly led W.E.B. Du Bois and other leaders to speak out against Washington. In October 1915 Washington collapsed while delivering a speech in New York City and was hospitalized. He asked to be returned home to die and was taken back to Tuskegee, where he died the next day at home on his beloved campus.

## George Washington Carver

1860-1943

One of the best known agricultural scientists of his generation, Carver was born into slavery near Diamond Grove, Missouri. Slave raiders kidnapped Carver and his mother when he was a six-week old infant, but his owner allegedly ransomed back the boy with a \$300 prize race horse. Although Carver had to work and live on his own while still a boy, he managed to finish high school and became the first African American student to enroll at Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa. He then put himself through the Iowa Agricultural College by working as a janitor, earning a B.S. in 1894 and an M.S. in 1896 in agricultural science. The same year, Carver joined Booker T. Washington at the Tuskegee Institute, directing Tuskegee's agricultural research department continuously until his death in 1943. At Tuskegee, Carver concentrated on persuading Southern farmers to end their virtually exclusive reliance on the cotton farming that had leached the soil of nutrients, producing increasingly poor crops. Carver encouraged farmers to diversify and plant sweet potatoes and peas. In order to make these crops more profitable, Carver did extensive research, producing more than 300 derivative products from the peanut and 118 from the sweet potato. In 1923 Carver won the Spingarn award, the highest annual prize given by the National Association for Colored People. In 1938 he took \$30,000—virtually his entire life's savings—and founded the George Washington Carver Foundation to continue his work after his death. When he died in 1943 the rest of his estate went to the foundation. He was buried beside his great friend and mentor, Booker T. Washington, on the Tuskegee campus.

## Ida Wells-Barnett

1862-1931



Born to a slave cook and a slave carpenter, Ida Wells was a prominent antilynching leader, suffragist, journalist, and speaker. At age 16 she took over the raising of her siblings after the death of her parents to smallpox. With the help of the black community, Wells attended Rust College, afterward finding employment as a teacher.

In May 1884 Wells sued and won a case against a railroad for forcefully removing her from a segregated ladies' coach. The incident served as a catalyst to a more militant Wells. As part owner and editor of the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight*, she spent much of her time writing about the poor conditions for black children in local schools. After the 1892 lynching of three of her friends, she was diligent in her antilynching crusade, writing *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*. In 1893 Wells carried her fight for equality to the Chicago World's Fair, then remained in Chicago and helped spawn the growth of numerous black female and reform organizations. Wells marched in the 1913 suffrage parade in Washington, D.C., and was one of two African American women to sign the call for the formation of the NAACP. She married Ferdinand Barnett, owner of the *Chicago Conservator*, in 1895, and continued her "crusade for justice" until her death in 1931.

## W.E.B. Du Bois

1868-1963



Born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, W.E.B. Du Bois became the most respected and effective spokesperson for the full rights of African Americans in the decades before World War II. In 1888 Du Bois earned an A.B. at Fiske University, where he had his first experience of overt racial prejudice. Returning to Massachusetts, he earned his M.A. at Harvard and then spent two years studying at the University of Berlin before becoming the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard. Du Bois taught at Wilberforce University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Atlanta University. Throughout his life Du Bois combined an illustrious academic career with his work for full rights for African Americans. He is perhaps best known for his work in founding the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909 and helping it to become the country's single most influential organization for African Americans.

Du Bois argued for the creation of a black elite which would win social equality for African Americans by winning the respect of powerful educated whites. Frustrated by the slow progress in civil rights at home, he increasingly looked abroad, espousing the cause of Pan-Africanism, for which he won the NAACP's highest honor, the Spingarn award, in 1920. But in 1934 he resigned from the NAACP to protest their goal of accommodation with white society. Increasingly disillusioned with life in the United States, he visited Europe and the Soviet Union, where he was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize in 1959. In 1961 he announced that he had joined the Communist Party and emigrated to Accra, Ghana, at age 93. He died there two years later.

## Mary McLeod Bethune

1875-1955



One of the most widely known African American women of the twentieth century, Mary McLeod Bethune was an educator, political advisor, and civil rights leader. After graduation from the Scotia Seminary in 1895, she taught at the Haines Institute in Augusta, Georgia, then at Kendall Institute in Sumter, South Carolina, where she met and later married Albertus Bethune. In October 1904, Bethune founded the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Negro Girls in a small rented cabin, and continued to develop the school over the next two decades. When white hospitals denied service to black patients and training for black residents and nurses, Bethune founded McLeod Hospital to serve the community and to provide training for black physicians and nurses. By 1922, the school had over 300 students and a staff of 25, later becoming the Bethune-Cookman College. As well as working for education, Bethune founded the Circle of Negro War Relief in New York City during World War I, was vice president of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, and served as president for two terms in the National Association of Colored Women, advising the Coolidge and Hoover administrations on African American issues. In 1935, Bethune founded the National Council of Negro Women and served as president until 1949. She retired from public life on her seventy-fifth birthday in 1950, settling in her home on the campus of Bethune-Cookman College, and over the next five years received 12 honorary degrees.

## Jessie Fauset

1882-1961

Jessie Fauset, essayist, editor, and novelist, displayed in her work the complexities of life for literary artists during the Harlem Renaissance and the Great Depression. Her career as a teacher provided the stability of income and permanence that allowed her to write her novels and essays.

As a college student at Cornell University, Fauset had started corresponding with W.E.B. Du Bois, editor of the NAACP's journal *The Crisis*, and later submitted articles to the journal. After completing her master's degree in French in 1920, she was invited to become *The Crisis*'s literary editor, holding the job until 1923 and afterward becoming the managing editor. As both a foster mother to and a product of the Harlem Renaissance, Fauset wrote more novels than any other black writer from 1924 to 1933. The black characters in her novels reflect the "Talented Tenth" and her own experiences with the hard-working, self-respecting black middle class. Fauset left *The Crisis* in 1927 to achieve a more ordered life as a French teacher at De Witt Clinton High School. She continued to teach in New York until 1944 and later taught as a visiting professor in the English Department at Hampton Institute.

## Zora Neale Hurston

1891-1960



Born in the small all-black town of Eatonville, Florida, Zora Neale Hurston was to become, for 30 years, the most prolific African American female author in the United States. Despite this, Hurston and her work drifted into obscurity until her rediscovery in the 1970s. Much of this neglect can be attributed to the controversy that always seemed to surround this independent and free-spirited woman.

Protected from racial prejudice as a child and inspired by her mother, Hurston grew into an outspoken, eccentric, and racially proud woman, one who chose to write about the positive side of black Americans. After moving to Washington, D.C., she attended Howard University and first published her writing in 1921. Hurston moved to New York City in 1925 and became one of the members of the Harlem Renaissance. After attending Barnard College on a scholarship and completing her undergraduate work in 1927, she returned to Florida to collect black folklore and was awarded a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship in 1934 for her collection of folklore. During the 1930s, her novels *Jonah's Gourd Vine* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* were published. Her career produced seven books and more than fifty shorter works from autobiography to folklore to music and mythology. After World War II, her fortunes declined until her death in 1960, a penniless inmate at the Saint Lucie County Welfare Home. Although she was believed married three times, she died alone, and her grave remained unmarked until novelist Alice Walker located it in an overgrown Florida cemetery.

## E. Franklin Frazier

1894-1962

Sociologist and educator, E. Franklin Frazier was born in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1916 he graduated cum laude from Howard University with a B.A. degree and accepted a position as mathematics instructor at Tuskegee Institute. He received his M.A. degree from Clark University in 1920 and his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1931. A grant from the American Scandinavian Foundation enabled him to go to Denmark to study "folk" schools. From 1922 to 1924, Frazier taught sociology and African studies at Morehouse College in Atlanta, then served as director of the Atlanta School of Social Work until 1927. He was on the faculty at Fisk University from 1931 until 1934, after which he became head of Howard University's department of sociology, a post he held until named professor emeritus in 1959. Frazier was a prolific writer; he was the author of several books including the controversial *Black Bourgeoisie*. His numerous awards included a 1940 Guggenheim Fellowship and the John Anisfield Award.

## James Langston Hughes

1902-1967



One of the original writers of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri. In 1921 he began studies at Columbia University but left after a year, going off to work on a freighter and traveling that way to Africa, then living in Paris and Rome. Returning to the U.S., he graduated from Lincoln University in 1926, publishing his first book of poetry, *The Weary Blues*, that same year. Also in 1926, Hughes published a critical essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," which became a defining piece for the Harlem Renaissance movement. During the next four decades he continued to write in a number of forms—novels, poetry, short stories, plays, autobiography, and nonfiction. In 1942 he began a column in a Chicago newspaper that introduced his character, "Simple," an African American Everyman who wittily comments on the ironies besetting black people's lives. He eventually published five volumes of his "Simple Stories." Amazingly prolific, admirably versatile, and a man capable of hearty humor as well as bitter criticism, he fell in and out of favor with the public, but the best of his work promises to survive.

## Charles Drew

1904-1950

The man who discovered the modern processes for preserving blood for transfusions, Charles Drew grew up in a solid but poor family in a Washington, D.C. ghetto. His intelligence and athletic skill won him a scholarship to Amherst College, where he was captain of the track team, starting halfback on the football team, and an honors student. For two years following graduation, Drew taught and coached at Morgan College in Baltimore, earning money to attend the medical school at McGill University in Montreal. There he became increasingly interested in the general field of medical research and in the specific problems of blood transfusion. After graduation from McGill in 1932, Drew did his three-year residency at Montreal General Hospital before joining the faculty of Howard University, where he was eventually appointed head of surgery.

During the last decade of his life, Drew continued his pioneering research into the separation and preservation of blood. When the U.S. entered World War II, he was appointed head of the National Blood Bank program. Furious at the official government policy that mandated whites' and African Americans' blood would be given only to members of their respective races, he resigned from his post and returned to Howard. In 1944 he became chief of surgery at Freedmen's Hospital in Washington, D.C., where his presence encouraged other young African Americans to enter the field of medicine. Drew died in a car crash in 1950.

## Margaret Walker

Born 1915

Poet, novelist, and teacher Margaret Walker spent a culturally rich southern childhood that influenced her poetic and artistic vision. Her father, a scholar and lover of literature, instilled in his daughter a love of American and English classics, the Bible, and poetry. Her mother played music, especially ragtime, and read poetry. The family household included her maternal grandmother, who told the children folktales. One story stayed in Walker's consciousness and became a part of her famous novel, *Jubilee*.

The Depression served as the context for the 1934 publication of her first poem, and the beginning of her association with the WPA Writer's Project, where her experience was enriched by her contact with other writers and artists. In 1939, Walker finished her first novel, *Goose Island*, which was never published. A collection of poetry was published by Yale University Press in 1941, also winning the Yale Younger Poet's Award. The same year, Walker began teaching, and her long career took her to Livingstone College, West Virginia State College, and Jackson State University. Since her retirement from teaching, Walker has continued to write and has undertaken rigorous speaking tours.

## Malcolm X

1925-1965

One of the most controversial figures in the civil rights movement, Malcolm X's career was cut short by an assassin. Born Malcolm Little, his minister father died when he was 6. After a childhood spent in institutions and foster homes, Malcolm headed east, settling in Boston and supporting himself with odd jobs and pimping. In 1943 he moved to New York where he began to lead an increasingly marginal life. After receiving a 10-year sentence for burglary in 1946, he was transformed in prison, becoming a follower of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam movement. Paroled in 1952, he was ordained as a minister, taking the name Malcolm X. His militant stance and depiction of whites as "blue-eyed devils" won him considerable press coverage and a good deal of suspicion from the white community; in many ways he seemed the antithesis of Martin Luther King, Jr., who preached non-violence. In 1963 he formed the Organization of Afro-American Unity, and in 1964 he made a pilgrimage to Mecca and converted to orthodox Islam.

At the time of his death, Malcolm X seemed to be moderating his hostile view of whites. Nonetheless, he spoke in the months before his death of his fear that he might be assassinated by opponents in the Nation of Islam or by the U.S. government. His assassin was apparently a member of a dissident black group, though mystery still remains about the event.



## Martin Luther King, Jr.

1929-1968



The most influential leader in modern civil rights, Martin Luther King, Jr. was born in Atlanta, Georgia. His father was a Baptist minister, providing a strong religious tradition for King. He attended the Atlanta public schools and was graduated with his A.B. from Morehouse College in 1948 when he was 19 years old. He went on to Crozer Theological Seminary and graduated in 1951 at the top of his class, going from there to Boston University for his Ph.D. There he met and married Coretta Scott in 1953. By then an ordained minister, King took the pastorate of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, and quickly became involved in the civil rights movement. He soon found himself in the forefront of a boycott of Montgomery's segregated buses, which led to a Supreme Court decision in 1956 against Alabama's segregation laws. Following this triumph King was made president of the newly formed Southern Christian Leadership Conference, committing his life to nonviolent activism and bringing the civil rights movement to the forefront of American public life.

Between 1960 and 1965, King continued to lead numerous demonstrations and protests on behalf of civil rights, leading the 1963 March on Washington where he delivered his most quoted speech, "I have a dream. . . ." In 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot and killed on April 3, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee; he was there to support striking sanitation workers. His death devastated the nation.

## Lorraine Hansberry

1930-1965

Lorraine Hansberry's life as celebrated playwright and activist artist earned her the title of "Warrior Intellectual." When she died at age 34, her testimonial was demonstrated by the number of eulogies given by prominent figures in government, the arts, and the civil rights movement.

Born into an affluent family in Chicago, Hansberry grew up among such family friends as Paul Robeson, Duke Ellington, and Jesse Owens. Her interest in theater was sparked during her years at the University of Wisconsin, but in 1950 she left college for New York and "an education of a different sort." She worked as a writer for *Freedom*, Paul Robeson's radical black newspaper, and covered such issues as colonial freedom, equal rights for blacks, the conditions of Harlem schools, and variants of racial discrimination. She married Robert Nemiroff, a white student whom she met on a picket line at New York University, where he was a student.

Lorraine Hansberry left *Freedom* in 1953 to concentrate on her play writing, earning her position in American letters with the production of *A Raisin in the Sun* in 1959, becoming the first black woman to have a play on Broadway and the first African American to win the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. Her success revitalized black theater, enabling other blacks to get their plays produced. Politically active throughout her short life, Hansberry worked to abolish the House Un-American Activities Committee, served on a panel to meet with Attorney General Robert Kennedy about the racial crisis, and was instrumental in civil rights.

## Colin Powell

Born 1937



Born and raised in New York City, Colin Powell would go on to become one of the country's best known figures during Operation Desert Storm, the U.S.-led United Nations offensive against Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1990-1991. Upon graduation from City University of New York in 1958, Powell received a second lieutenant's commission and became a career army officer, serving with distinction in Vietnam. Rising through the ranks and increasingly responsible commands, from 1987 to 1989 he was a presidential assistant for national security in the Reagan administration. As such, he was the highest ranking African American in the administration. In 1988 he was nominated to become one of only ten four-star army generals. His responsibilities included the command of all army personnel serving in the mainland United States and the defense of the mainland in the event of enemy attack. During the Reagan years he advised the president at summit conferences in both Moscow and Washington, D.C. In 1989 he became the first African American to serve as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a position he held until he retired from the army in 1993. Upon retirement he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

## Charlayne Hunter-Gault

Born 1942

Charlayne Hunter-Gault and Hamilton Holmes were the first two black American students to attend the University of Georgia in January 1961. Students rioted to protest. Hunter-Gault says of the experience, "If you've ever been in the middle of a riot or the eye of a hurricane, you know it's very calm. That is exactly how I felt the night of the riot." Hunter-Gault knew at the age of twelve that she wanted to be a journalist, and despite the oppressive racial climate she encountered at the University of Georgia, she stayed and earned her B.A. in journalism in 1963.

After graduating from college, Hunter-Gault went to work for the *New Yorker* magazine, and in 1967 she received a Russell Sage Fellowship to study social science at Washington University. Later she went to Washington, D.C., to cover the Poor People's Campaign, and in 1968 she accepted a position with the *New York Times*. Over the years Hunter-Gault has received numerous awards, including the New York Times Publishers Award, two National News and Documentary Emmys, and the George Foster Peabody Award, given to her by the University of Georgia for the documentary "Apartheid's People." Presently she is a journalist on PBS television.

## August Wilson

Born 1945

Despite never finishing high school, August Wilson holds the distinction of having twice won the Pulitzer Prize, for plays depicting the African American experience: *Fences* and *The Piano Lesson*. Wilson set out to create a cycle of plays on the African American experience, concentrating on the twentieth century. His first play, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, set in the 1920s, won the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, and his Joe Turner's Come and Gone, set in 1911 and focusing on black migration to the North, was voted the best new play in 1988 by the New York Drama Critics Circle. While many of his plays have opened in New Haven, Connecticut, all have moved on to long New York runs and to countless productions elsewhere. Wilson is also founder of the Black Horizons Theater Company.

## Carole Moseley-Braun

Born 1947

In 1992 Moseley-Braun was elected a Senator (D.) from Illinois, becoming the first African American woman to sit in the U.S. Senate and only the second African American since Reconstruction to be a Senator. The daughter of a Chicago police officer, Moseley-Braun received a law degree from the University of Chicago and worked in the U.S. Attorney's Office, where she won the Special Achievement Award. In 1978 she was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives, where she was voted Best Legislator each of the ten years she served. In 1988 she became the first African American to hold high office in Cook County when she was elected Cook County Recorder of Deeds, an important stepping stone to her Senate race.

## Cynthia A. McKinney

Born 1955

One of the strongest voices for modern black interests in the Georgia's state legislature has long been J. E. "Billy" McKinney, a civil rights activist who first served in 1973. Fifteen years later his daughter, Cynthia, a political scientist who had taught at Clark Atlanta University and Agnes Scott College, a century-old woman's college in DeKalb County, also won a seat in the state House. Together they became the only father-daughter legislative team in the country. Cynthia McKinney brought to her post the same commitment to defending minority interests her father had; she was just 10 when the Voting Rights Act was passed and she has recalled that, as a child, she often rode on her father's shoulders as he walked in civil rights marches. She won a seat on the Georgia legislature's redistricting committee and helped to craft the two new black-majority districts. In 1992 McKinney ran as a Democrat for the right to represent one of the districts she had helped create, the Eleventh. She won with 73% of the vote and was later reelected to a second term.