

## African-American Women's Timeline

1619

17 Black men and 3 black women land at Jamestown, Virginia, on August 20<sup>th</sup>. They were possibly the first Africans to arrive in America.

1746

Lucy Terry composes the poem "Bars Fight", the earliest extant poem by an African-American. Transmitted orally for more than 100 years, it first appears in print in 1855.

1773

Phillis Wheatley, the first notable black woman poet and first black author in the United States, is acclaimed in Europe and America following the publication in England of her Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral.

1777

The African Free School of New York City was opened.

1832

Maria W. Stewart was the first woman in the U.S. to engage in public political debates.

1837

Institute for Colored Youth founded by Richard Humphreys; later it became Cheyney University.

1849

Harriet Tubman escaped from slavery. She would return to the South at least twenty times, leading over 300 slaves to freedom.

1850

Speaking on behalf of the Abolitionist movement, Sojourner Truth travels throughout the Midwest, developing a reputation for personal magnetism and drawing large crowds.

1850

Harriet Tubman returns to Maryland to guide members of her family to freedom via the Underground Railroad. Later helping more than 300 slaves to escape, she becomes known as the "Moses of her people." She also worked as a scout and spy for Union troops during the Civil War.

1851

Sojourner Truth gives her spontaneous "Ain't I A Woman?" speech at the woman's rights convention in Akron, Ohio.

52

1854

Sarah Emlen Cresson was a cofounder of Ashmun Institute, the first school of higher learning for young black men; later (1866) renamed Lincoln University.

1854

Author Frances E.W. Harper's most popular verse collection, *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects*, is published, containing the antislavery poem "Bury Me in a Free Land."

1855

In *Missouri v. Celia*, a slave, a black woman is declared to be property without a right to defend herself against a master's act of rape.

1859

Harriet E. Wilson writes *Our Nig*, a largely autobiographical novel about racism in the North before the Civil War.

1860

Of 2,225,086 black women, 1,971,135 are held in slavery. In San Francisco, about 85% of Chinese women are essentially enslaved as prostitutes.

1862

Mary Jane Patterson is the first African-American woman to receive a full baccalaureate degree, from Oberlin College.

1864

Rebecca Lee of Boston was the first black woman physician.

1866

Lucy Hobbs was the first black woman to graduate from dental school.

1867

Cigar makers are the first national union to accept women and African-Americans.

1868

The African Methodist Episcopal Church establishes women's first official office within organized Christianity: "Stewardess," or assistant to the clergy.

1870

Susan McKinney, the first African-American female in the medical profession, opened her first hospital in her home. She treated black, white and poor people.

1873

Susan McKinney became the first African-American female to enter the medical profession.

1878

Mary Eliza Mahoney became the first professionally trained African-American nurse in the

U.S.

1881

The first black women's college, Spelman College, was founded by Sophia B. Packard and Harriet E. Giles.

1892

The offices of the Memphis Free Speech as destroyed following the editorials of part-owner Ida B. Wells denouncing the lynching of three of her friends.

1896

Mary Church Terrell becomes the first president of the National Association of Colored Women, working for educational and social reform and an end to racial discrimination.

1900

Women's Convention, the largest black women's organization was founded.

1903

Maggie Lena Walker founded the Saint Luke Penny Savings Bank, becoming the first black woman to head a bank.

1905

Madame C.J. Walker develops and markets a method for straightening curly hair, on her way to becoming the first black female millionaire in the United States.

1917

Tally Holmes and Lucy Stone were the first black players to win the American Tennis Association championship.

1921

Bessie Coleman became the first African-American and woman to be licensed as an international pilot.

1921

Georgiana Simpson and Sadie M. Alexander were the first black women to be awarded Ph.D. degrees, only one day apart.

1922

Aviator Bessie Coleman, who later refuses to perform before segregated audiences in the South, stages the first public flight by an African-American woman.

1923

Blues singer Bessie Smith, discovered by pianist-composer Clarence Williams, makes her first recording. She will eventually become known as "Empress of the Blues".

1924

Spelman Seminary, which began awarding college degrees in 1901, becomes Spelman College. The school began in 1881 with two Boston women teaching 11 black women in an

Atlanta church basement.

1925

Singer and dancer, Josephine Baker goes to Paris to dance in the Theatre des Champs-Elysees in La Revue Negre, becoming one of the most popular entertainers in France.

1933

Caterina Jarboro was the first black woman to perform with an American opera company, the Chicago Opera Company.

1934

Caterina Jarboro became the first black prima donna of an opera company, performing with Aida at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City.

1935

Mary McLeod Bethune founded the National Council of Negro Women in 1935.

1936

Mary McLeod Bethune was the first black woman to receive a major appointment from the U.S. government. She was named Director of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration.

1937

Write and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston publishes her second novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which receives considerable acclaim and criticism within the black community.

1938

Assisted by saxophonist Lester Young, her romantic companion during these years, jazz vocalist Billie Holiday makes several of her finest recordings.

1938

Crystal Bird Fauset of Pennsylvania was the first black woman elected to a state legislature.

1939

Singer Marian Anderson performs at the Lincoln Memorial before an audience of 75,000 after the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to allow her to sing at Constitution Hall.

1939

Jane Matilda Bolin was the first African-American female judge.

1940

Hattie McDaniel was the first black woman to receive an Oscar for her supporting role in *Gone with the Wind*.

1948

Alice Coachman was the first black woman to win a gold medal in the Olympics.

1950

Edith S. Sampson became the first black named to the U.S. delegation to the United Nations.

1950

Althea Gibbons was the first black tennis player to be accepted in national competition.

1950

Gwendolyn Brooks is awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry for *Annie Allen* (1949), becoming the first African-American writer to win the award.

1955

Rosa Parks, secretary of the Montgomery Alabama chapter of the NAACP, refuses to surrender her seat when ordered by a local bus driver, leading to the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-56.

1953

Lorraine Williams was the first black to win a nationally recognized tennis title, the junior girls' championship.

1955

Opera diva Leontyne Price is triumphant in the title role of the National Broadcast Company's *Tosca*, making her the first black to sing opera on television.

1956

Tennis player Althea Gibson becomes the first African-American to win a major title—the Wimbledon doubles—as well as the French singles and doubles and Italian singles.

1958

Mahalia Jackson, known as the “Queen of Gospel Song,” joins Duke Ellington in his gospel interlude *Black, Brown, and Beige* at the 1958 Newport Jazz Festival.

1959

*Raisin in the Sun*, by Lorraine Hansberry, becomes the first drama by a black woman to be produced on Broadway. The 1961 film version features Sidney Poitier and receives a special award at the Cannes.

1960

Estelle Axton and Jim Stewart found the Stax Records of Memphis, Tennessee, which becomes to define Southern Soul Music sound, including such artists as Sam and Dave, Booker T. and the MGs and Otis Redding.

1960

Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* was the first Broadway play by a black writer to win the New York Drama Critics Award.

1960

At the Olympic Games in Rome, Wilma Rudolph won three gold medals in track, a feat no American woman had ever managed. She also broke two records and matched another.

1963

Vivian Malone was the first African-American woman to register at the University of Alabama, despite Gov. Wallace blocking her way.

1965

Patricia R. Harris took the post of U.S. Ambassador to Belgium, becoming the first African-American ambassador.

1965

Marian Wright Edelman became the first African-American woman to be admitted to the Bar in the state of Mississippi.

1966

Constance Baker-Motley becomes the first African-American female to be appointed as a federal judge. She also led the legal battle in Alabama in which the Alabama National Guard was federalized and Gov. George Wallace was forced to bow to court-ordered integration of the public school.

1967

Singer Aretha Franklin releases a series of hits including "I Never Loved A Man," "Baby, I Love You," and "Respect," the last of which becomes something of an anthem for the Civil Rights Movement.

1968

Shirley Chisholm becomes the first black American woman to be elected to the U.S. Congress, defeating civil-rights leader James Farmer. She served the 12<sup>th</sup> Congressional District for seven terms from 1968-1982.

1968

Diahann Carroll played star a single mother who was a nurse in a doctor's office in Julia the groundbreaking television series, which was the first to show an African American main character in a non-stereotypical role.

1969

Lillian Lincoln becomes the first African-American woman to graduate from the Harvard Business School.

1970

Cheryl Brown from Iowa was the first African-American woman to enter the Miss America Pageant.

1971

Angela Davis is arraigned on charges of murder, kidnapping, and conspiracy for her alleged participation in a violent attempted escape from the Hall of Justice in Marin County, California in 1970.

1972

Shirley Chisholm becomes the first black woman nominated for president of the U.S.

1974

Actress Cicely Tyson is lauded for her role as the 110 year old title character of the television drama *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, which was adapted from Ernest J. Gaines novel.

1975

Playwright Ntozake Shange receives considerable acclaim for her theatre piece *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/ When the Rainbow is Enuf*.

1975

Gloria Dean Randle Scott served as the president of the National Girl Scouts Association.

1976

Patricia R. Harris was the first black woman named to the Cabinet of a U.S. president. She was the appointed secretary of the Dept. of Housing and Urban Development by Jimmy Carter.

1976

Barbara Jordan, congressional representative from Texas, delivers the keynote address at the Democratic National Convention, confirming her reputation as one of the most eloquent public speakers of her era.

1977

Maude Whatley chaired a committee which established the first clinic that provided adequate, affordable health care in Tuscaloosa, Al.

1980

Lencola Sullivan was the first African-American woman to make it to the top five in the Miss America Pageant.

1983

Writer Alice Walker receives the Pulitzer Prize for *The Color Purple*.

1984

Vanessa Williams became the first African-American woman to win the Miss America pageant.

1985

The Oprah Winfrey Show debuts. Oprah Winfrey becomes the first black woman to host a nationally syndicated weekday talk show and own a television and film production company.

1986

Jackie Joyner-Kersey breaks the world record for the heptathlon, which is two-day contest comprising the 100-meter hurdles, high jump, shot put, and 200-meter race on the first day, and the long jump, javelin, and 800-meter race on the second day.

1987

Niara Sudarkasa was the first female president of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania — a post she held nearly 12 years. During her employment at the University of Michigan, she became the first African-American woman granted tenure in the Arts and Sciences; the first to become a full professor; the first to head an academic center and the first appointed Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs.

1988

Toni Morrison becomes the first African-American to win the Pulitzer Prize for literature.

1988

Florence Griffith Joyner became an Olympic track and field champion during the 1988 Seoul games. She broke world records in the 100 and 200-meter events which earned her the title "World's Fastest Woman." She also excelled in the fields of fashion design, acting, writing, sports casting as well as being a wife and mother. One of her most impressive achievements was her appointment as co-chair of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.

1989

Oprah Winfrey became the first African-American to own her own television and film company, Harpo Studios, Inc.

1989

Modern dancer Judith Jamison becomes the artistic director of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, following Ailey's death.

1992

Mae C. Jemison becomes the first African-American woman astronaut, spending more than a week orbiting Earth in the space shuttle Endeavor.

1992

Carol Mosley-Braun becomes the First African-American woman elected to the U.S. Senate, representing the state of Illinois.

1993

Poet Maya Angelou, author of the autobiographical work *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970), composes and delivers a poem for the inauguration of President Bill Clinton.

1993

Poet Rita Dove, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Thomas and Beulah*, is chosen as poet laureate of the United States.

1993

Writer Toni Morrison, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for *Beloved*, receives the

Nobel Prize for Literature.

1993

M. Joycelyn Elders becomes the first African-American and first woman U.S. Surgeon General.

1995

On February 26, 1995, Bantam Books congratulated Maya Angelou for being the first African-American to be the longest-running (2 years) on The New York Times Paperback Nonfiction Best-seller list for I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings.

2000

Venus Williams wins the U.S. Open tennis tournament.

2001

Whoopi Goldberg becomes the first African-American woman to get a Mark Twain Prize for humor.

2001

Halle Berry became the first African-American woman to win the Academy Award for best actress for the film Monster's Ball.

2001

Condeleezza Rice becomes the first African-American woman to become National Security Advisor for the U.S., appointed by President George W. Bush.

2002

Vonetta Flowers was the first African-American to win a gold medal in a Winter Olympics. She won in the women's bobsleigh event.

2003

Serena Williams becomes the first African-American woman to win a career Grand Slam in tennis.

2004

Phylicia becomes the first African-American to win the Broadway Theater's Tony Award for best actress in a play.

2005

Condoleezza Rice becomes the first African-American woman to be appointed Secretary of State.

2006

Sophia Danenberg becomes the first African-American to reach the peak of Mount Everest.

2008

Karen Bass becomes the first African-American woman elected Speaker of a State House of Representatives.

2009

Michelle Obama becomes the first African-American First Lady of the United States.

2009

Susan Rice becomes the first African-American woman United States Ambassador to the United Nations.

2009

Ursula Burns becomes the first African-American woman CEO of an S&P 100 Company.