

African American History

* Famous Firsts *



February is African American History Month

This month provides an opportunity join in paying tribute to the generations of African Americans who struggled with adversity to achieve full citizenship in American society. During and after World War II, African Americans began to make some progress in their fight for equality and justice. Several became the first of their race to be appointed to government positions. Others were first to advance in sports, literature, opera and other fields. Here are some noteworthy firsts:

1947 – **Jackie Robinson** became the first Black to play major league baseball.

1950 – **Gwendolyn Brooks** was the first Black to win a Pulitzer Prize.

1950 – **Ralph Bunche** was the first Black to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

1955 – **Marian Anderson** was the first Black to sing a leading role in the Metropolitan Opera, New York.

1957 – **Althea Gibson** was the first Black to play US national indoor tennis and to win the Wimbledon championship.

1960 – **Wilma Randolph** was the first Black to three Olympic gold medals in track and field.

1963 – **Sidney Poitier** was the first Black to win an Oscar for best actor in the movie *Lilies of the Field*.

1966 – **Andrew Brimmer** was the first Black to serve on the Federal Reserve Board.

1966 – **Constance Motley** was the first Black woman to be appointed judge of a Federal District Court.

1966 – **Edward Brooke** was the first Black to be elected to a federal office as U.S. senator from Massachusetts.

National Museum of
Black American History

1966 – **Robert C. Weaver** was the first Black man serving as cabinet member, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

1967 – **Thurgood Marshall** was the first Black Supreme Court Justice.

1969 – **Shirley Chisholm** was the first Black woman elected to Congress.

1972 – **Shirley Chisholm** was the first black candidate and the first woman to run for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination.

1977 – **Andrew Young** was the first Black ambassador to the United Nations.

1977 – **Patricia Harris** was the first Black woman serving as cabinet member, Secretary to the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

1988 – **Jessie Jackson** was the first Black man to run for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination.

2008 – **Barack Obama** was the first Black to be elected President of the United States.