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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE

CELEBRATE  
**BLACK**  
**HISTORY**  
**MONTH**



BEREA COLLEGE

The Carter G. Woodson Center for Interracial Education in Berea, Ky.

# Black History Month Basics

**F**ebruary is Black History Month not only in the U.S., but in the United Kingdom, Canada and the Netherlands. Keep reading to learn more about Black History Month and celebrate important contributions of six notable African-Americans.

## IN AMERICA

It started when Carter G. Woodson, a Harvard-trained historian, wanted to raise awareness of African-American contributions to society. He founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, which announced Negro History Week in 1925 and celebrated the first one in 1926. The week in February was chosen on purpose; it

contained the birth anniversaries of President Abraham Lincoln and abolitionist Frederick Douglass.

The 1960s brought social change and the Civil Rights Act, as well as an increased awareness of African-American contributions to culture. In 1976, the U.S. bicentennial, the week was expanded through the month of February. President Gerald R. Ford

asked Americans to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.” Since Ford, every American president has declared February Black History Month.

Woodson’s group lives on, too, as the Association for the Study of

African-American Life and History.

## OUTSIDE THE U.S.

The United Kingdom celebrated Black History Month for the first time in 1987 through the leadership of Ghanaian analyst Akyaaaba Addai-Sebo. Canada recognized February as Black History Month in 1995 with a motion by the House of Commons.



# Jean Baptiste Pointe Du Sable

The founder of Chicago is a mysterious man. Not much is known about Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable's early life; he was born around 1745, possibly in Haiti, maybe in Canada. Maybe his father was a pirate and his mother an African slave. He may have been educated in France. But we know he founded Chicago and that, for years, he wasn't recognized for it.

Sometime in the 1780s, Du Sable and his family — he married a Potawatomie woman and had children — settled in the area then known as Eschecagou, near the mouth of the river. He lived there off and on for 20 years, enlarging his trading post and holdings. In 1800, he sold his Chicago land to John Kinzie, a white man. Kinzie was, for years, hailed as the first settler of Chicago. Du Sable died in 1818 in Missouri.

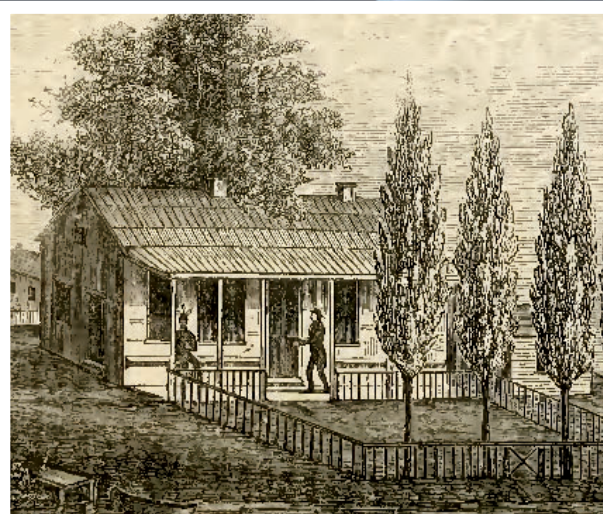
During the 1960s, as Americans realized more and more African-American contributions to the nation, du Sable started to get the credit he deserved.

A 1963 article in Ebony magazine lamented that du Sable was not yet recognized in Chicago, pointing out that his home was known as the Kinzie homestead. In 1965, a plaza called Pioneer Court was built on the site of the du Sable homestead, and in 1976, the same year African-American History Month was federally declared, the home-site was named a National Historic Landmark.

Since then, a number of bridges, roads and other Chicago-area places and institutions have been named for du Sable. One of the most important is the DuSable Museum of African-American History, founded in 1961,



U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS  
Ricki Stevenson, founder of Black Paris Tours., speaks about Sable during a Black History Month 2014 event.



CHICAGO MAGAZINE  
The house built by John Baptiste Pointe du Sable close to the mouth of the Chicago River as it appeared when owned by the Kinzie family in the early 1800s.



MOSES ENGINEERING COMPANY, NEW YORK  
A depiction of Pointe du Sable from A.T. Andreas 1884 book History of Chicago.

located in Washington Park. It is the oldest, and before the National African-American Museum in Washington, D.C., largest museum of African-American culture.



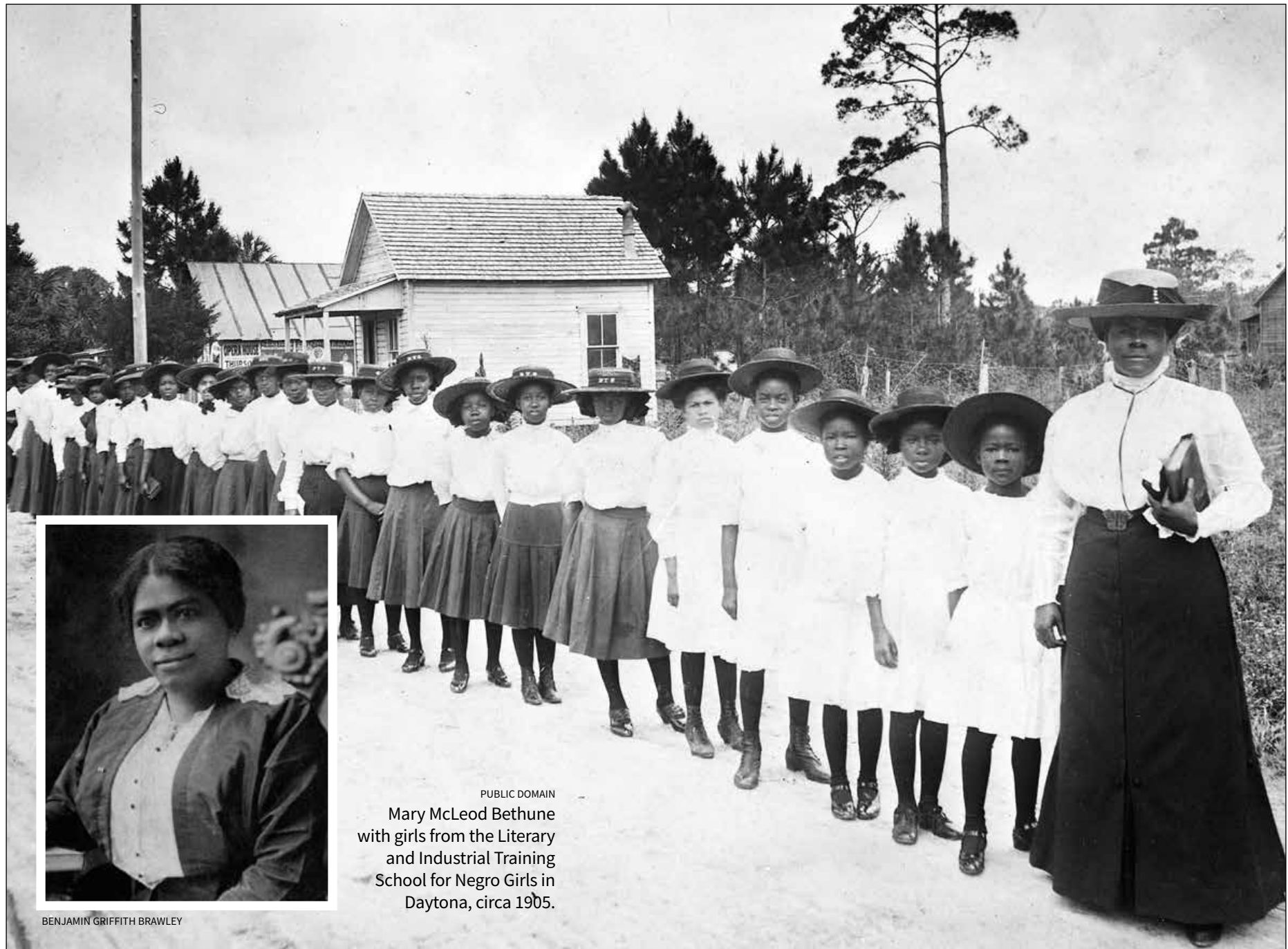
# Mary McLeod Bethune

The fifteenth of 17 children born to former slaves, Mary McLeod Bethune grew up to be the founder of a college, a senior official in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's administration, and present at the founding of the United Nations.

Bethune grew up in South Carolina and was educated in segregated schools. In 1904, she founded the Daytona Educational and Industrial School for Negro Girls in Florida, which eventually became Bethune-Cookman College. She also served as president of the National Association of Colored Women and founded the National Council of Negro Women.

From 1936 to 1944, Bethune was director of Negro Affairs in the National Youth Administration in the Roosevelt administration. She was part of the Black Cabinet, a group of African-American officials who lobbied for advancement for African-Americans. Bethune worked for equal pay for African-American federal workers, African-American participation in New Deal programs, ending lynching and stopping the poll tax, and was a regular speaker at conferences on racial issues. She also served as president of Carter G. Woodson's Association for the Study of Negro Life and History.

During World War II, Bethune was special assistant to the secretary of war and assistant director of the Women's Army Corps. She left federal service in 1944 but was still president of the National Council of Negro Women, in



BENJAMIN GRIFFITH BRAWLEY

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Mary McLeod Bethune with girls from the Literary and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls in Daytona, circa 1905.

which capacity she attended the founding conference of the United Nations. Bethune died in 1955.

Schools around the country are named for Bethune, and the college she founded and which bears her name still

exists. A statue of her was erected in Washington, D.C. in 1974, and a crater on Venus is named in her honor. The National Park

Service maintains one of her residences, 1318 Vermont Ave., Washington, D.C., as a historic site.



# Ernest E. Just

Another South Carolina native, Ernest Everett Just was a biologist and science writer who advocated the study of whole cells under normal conditions, recognizing the role of the cell surface in the development of organisms.

Just was born in 1883 and survived a bout with typhoid while still young. He went on to graduate from Dartmouth, where he distinguished himself as a Rufus Choate scholar and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. He went on to teach at Howard University, where he and three students founded the Omega Psi Phi fraternity. In 1909, Just was invited to the Marine Biology Laboratory at Woods Hole, Mass., by University of Chicago head of zoology Frank R. Lillie. He spent just about every one of the next 20 summers in the lab, investigating the eggs of marine invertebrates.

In 1916, Just graduated with a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, and continued his duties as the head of the Department of Zoology at Howard. He traveled to Europe, conducting research at prestigious institutions in Italy, Germany and France. Just authored two books, “Basic Methods for Experiments on the Eggs of

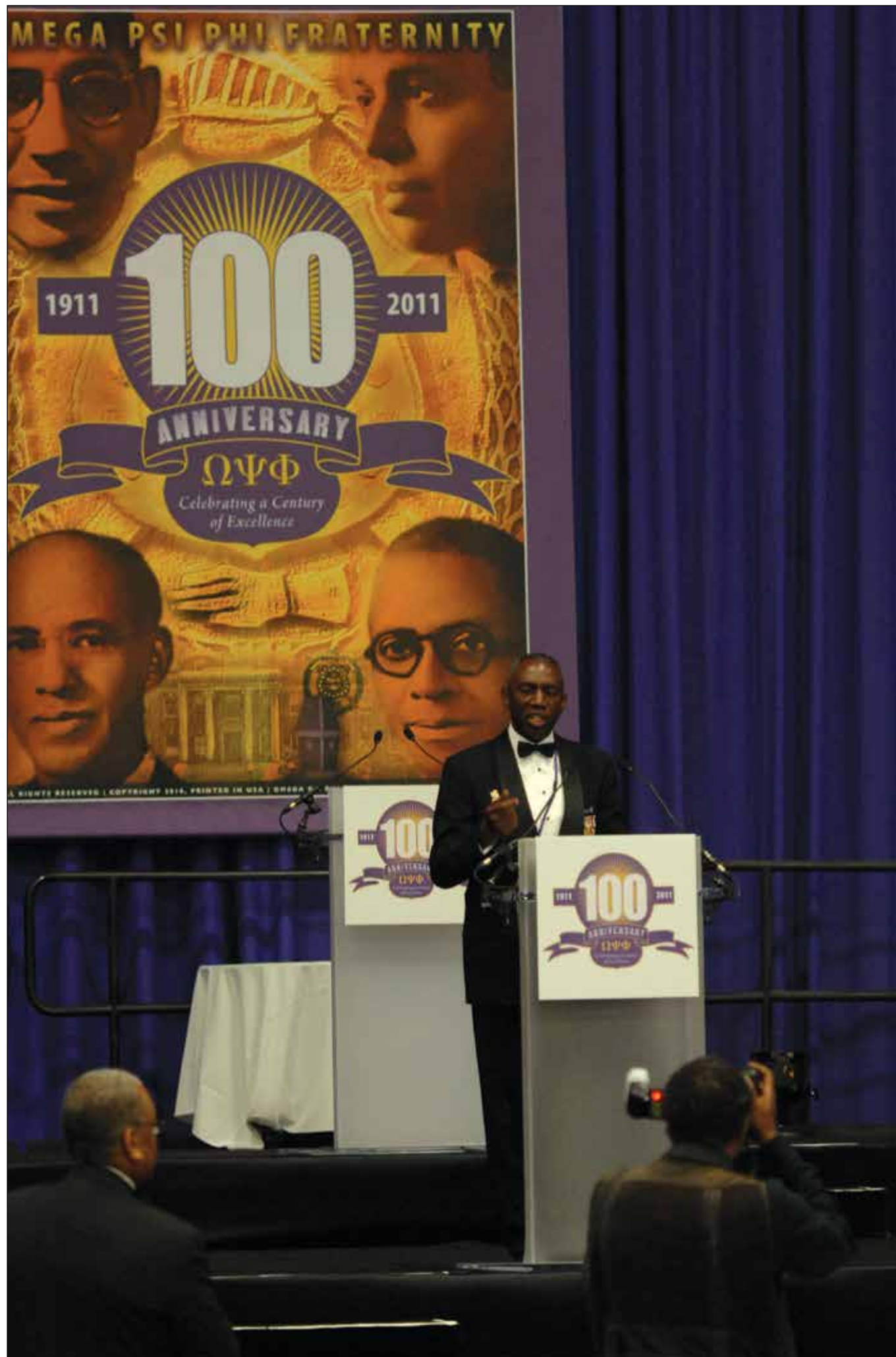


PUBLIC DOMAIN

Marine Animals” and “The Biology of the Cell Surface,” both in 1939. But he continued to be frustrated by racism in America and his difficulty finding a more prestigious appointment at a research university.

In 1940, Just was working in France when Germany invaded. He was imprisoned but later that year was rescued by the U.S. State Department. In 1941, he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and died that year.

Just was the subject of a book that was a finalist for the 1984 Pulitzer Prize, “Black Apollo of Science: The Life of Ernest Everett Just” by Kenneth R. Manning. A number of symposia and awards also bear his name, and a special issue of the journal Molecular Reproduction and Development is dedicated to him.



TELFAIR H. BROWN, SR., U.S. COAST GUARD

The 100 year celebration of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, honoring the military members of the fraternity.



# Hattie McDaniel

**H**attie McDaniel has a career so distinguished that she has two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, one for TV and one for radio. A singer and actress, McDaniel was the first African-American to win an Academy Award for her role as Mammy in “Gone With the Wind.”

Born to former slaves, McDaniel was born in Kansas but grew up in Colorado. Her brother and sister also acted and sang, and McDaniel worked on her songwriting skills with her brother’s minstrel show. She toured and appeared on radio shows and in films, working as a maid or cook when she couldn’t get work performing. McDaniel finally had a leading role in the 1934 film “Judge Priest,” followed by “Alice Adams” in 1935, and starring alongside Jean Harlow, Clark Gable and Bela Lugosi in a steady drum of other films that year.

Her best known role is in 1939’s “Gone With the Wind,” where she starred as the maid, Mammy, alongside Gable and Olivia de Havilland. McDaniel earned an Academy Award for that role at the 1940 Twelfth Academy Awards, where she sat at a segregated table. The hotel did not allow African-Americans, but admitted McDaniel and an escort as a favor.

“This is one of the happiest moments of my life, and I want to thank each one of you who had a part in selecting me for one of their awards, for your kindness,” McDaniel said in her acceptance speech. “It has



PUBLIC DOMAIN  
Hattie McDaniel (left) on the set of “Gone with the Wind,” along with Olivia de Havilland (center) and Vivien Leigh (right) in 1939.

made me feel very, very humble; and I shall always hold it as a beacon for anything that I may be able to do in the future. I sincerely hope I shall always be a credit to my race and to the motion picture industry.”

McDaniel went on to play a series of domestic workers on screen, appearing for the last time in 1951 as the titular character of the hit ABC series “Beulah,” where she once again was a maid. She died of breast cancer in 1952.

During her success on screen, McDaniel was also one of a handful of

Los Angeles homeowners to win in the courtroom. The case centered on African-American homeownership in a traditionally white upscale neighborhood of West Adams Heights, popularly called Sugar Hill. Sued by white homeowners, the African-Americans, including McDaniel won the right to live there.

In another twist, since McDaniel’s death, her historic Oscar award has been missing. It was meant to have ended up at Howard University — and did for a time — but has since disappeared.



CBS RADIO



# Matthew Henson

Explorer Matthew Henson spent nearly 20 years trekking the frozen north with his more famous colleague Robert Peary, including the 1909 expedition that claimed to reach the geographic North Pole.

Henson was born in Maryland to sharecroppers and grew up in the Washington, D.C., area. He was hired by Peary as a personal valet in 1887, and Henson first accompanied him to the Arctic in 1891. In 1908-1909, Henson also accompanied Peary on the Greenland expedition that claimed to reach the geographic North Pole, even planting the flag at the spot, but the claim the Peary expedition reached the pole was debunked in 1989.



GUTENBERG.ORG

Henson served as navigator and craftsman and, like Peary, had a relationship with an Inuit woman. They had a son, Anauakaq.

The 1909 expedition brought Henson some fame. He published a memoir in 1912, "A Negro Explorer at the North Pole." He became the first African-American lifetime member of The Explorers Club, was awarded a duplicate of the Peary Polar Expedition Medal, and was received at the White House by President Harry Truman and President Dwight Eisenhower. But Henson's achievements didn't receive the same recognition Peary's did. He spent the rest of his life working at the U.S. Customs House in New York.

Henson died in 1955.

A U.S. Navy ship, the USS Henson, a Pathfinder class oceanographic survey ship, is named in his honor, as is a conservation center in Washington, D.C., and a National Geographic Society scholarship. Maryland has several schools and a state park named for Henson, as well.



UNITED STATES LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



**B**orn in 1892 in Texas, Bessie Coleman started out picking cotton. But her dream was in the sky.

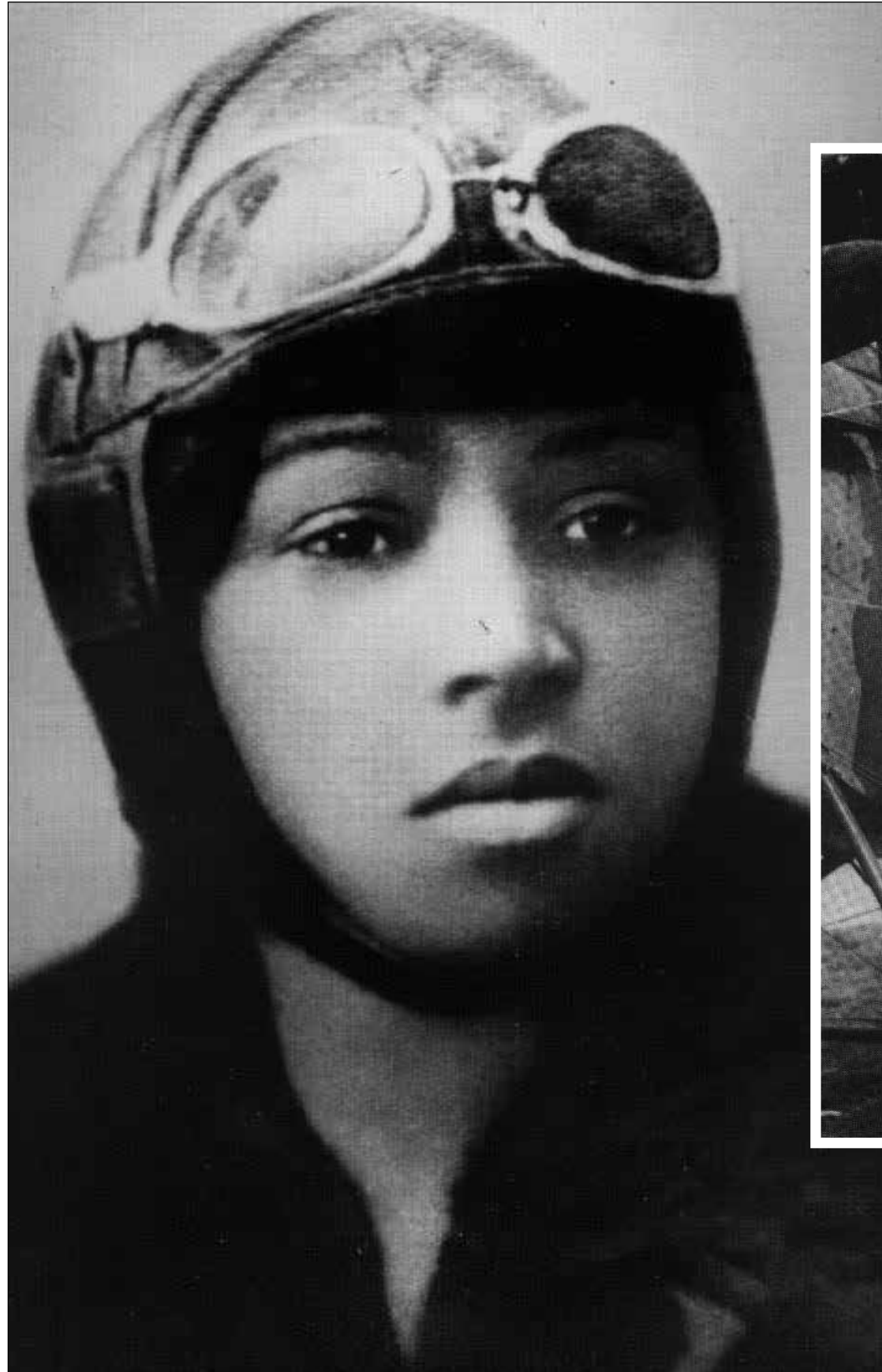
Coleman had to go all the way to France to achieve it; no American flight school would take her. In 1919, she left for Europe and, in 1921, became the first person of African-American descent and the first person of Native American descent to become an internationally licensed pilot by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale. Coleman received training from the Fokker Corp., and met with Anthony Fokker, one of the world's most distinguished aircraft designers.

Queen Bess, as she was called, returned to America to make her living barnstorming, or flying in stunt shows. Coleman also lectured and even opened a beauty shop to make money to buy a plane. At her shows, she would refuse to take to the air unless the crowd was desegregated and everyone used the same gate.

Coleman bought a Jenny JN-4 in Dallas in 1926. Her mechanic and agent, William D. Willis, flew the plane back to Coleman in Jacksonville, Fla., making several stops for mechanical issues along the way. Coleman insisted on flying and, on April 30, fell 3,500 feet from the open cockpit to her death during a test flight. It was found a wrench used to service the engine had jammed the controls. More than 10,000 mourners attended her funeral in Chicago, which was presided over by journalist Ida B. Wells, a champion for equal rights.

Airport roads and memorials around the world honor Coleman, as do several schools and aviation awards. Mae Jemison, the first African-American female astronaut, took a picture of Coleman with her into space.

# Bessie Coleman



SAN DIEGO AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM

NASA