

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH



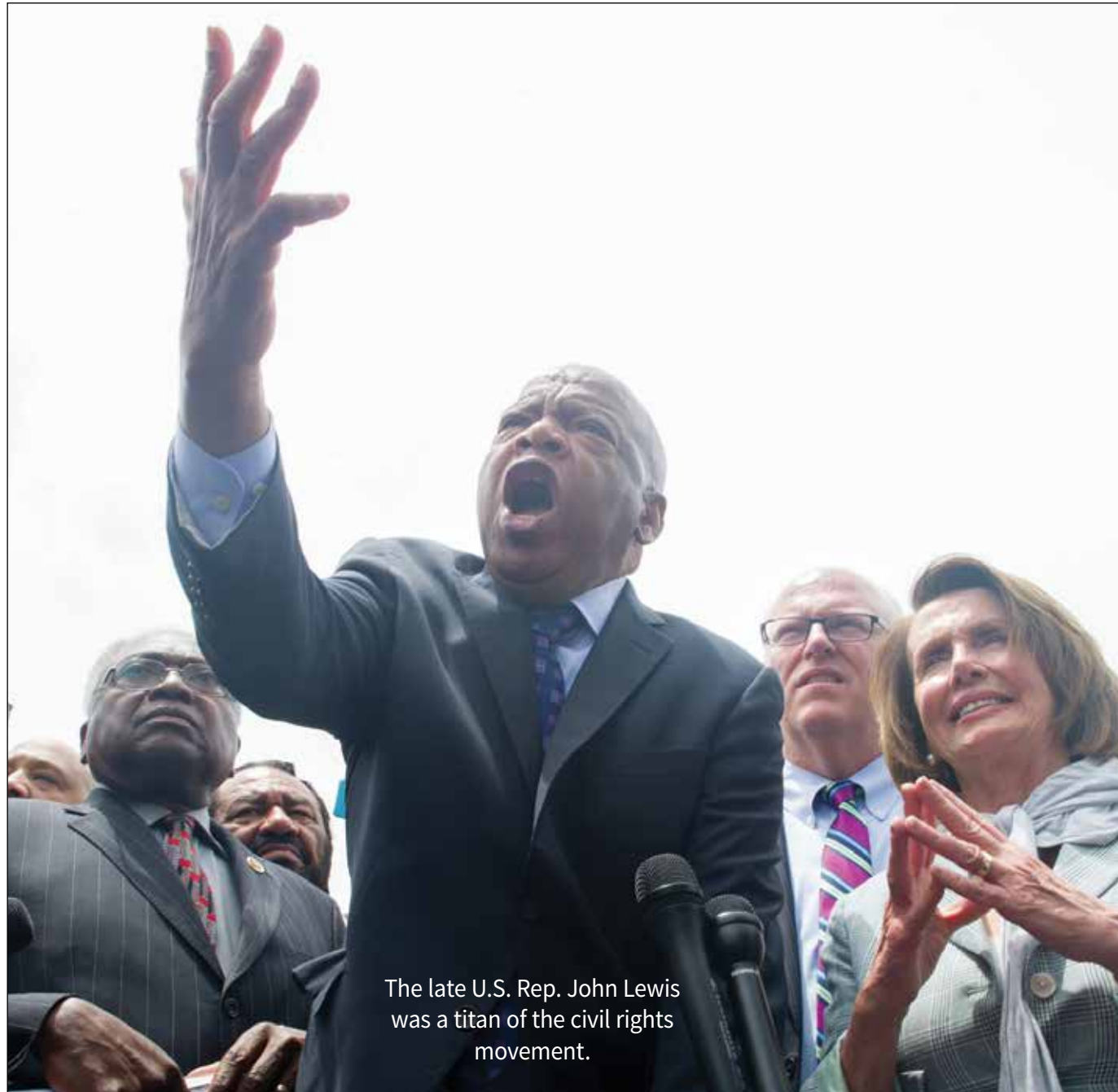
# Focus On Resistance

When faced with oppression, prejudice and threats against life and welfare, the African American community has always found ways to fight back, to resist those who would enslave or harm them.

This has been true from those who sang or jumped ship during the trans-Atlantic slave trade to more recent days when Black citizens have risen up in protest against police brutality.

Those resisters, and the moments that incited Black people to resist are the theme and focus of the 2023 Black History Month. Organizers encourage people of all ages to look at the ways Black people have advocated for dignity, self-determination and a safe life, the ways they have organized for a more just and fair democratic society.

Resistance takes many forms, from such simple acts as singing or writing to more organized actions such as sit-ins, boycotts, strikes and walk-outs. Resistance has been performed by millions of unknown people as well as such leaders as Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Rosa Parks,



The late U.S. Rep. John Lewis was a titan of the civil rights movement.

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Paul Robeson and Malcolm X.

The Association for the Study of African Life and History lists several places and groups of people who have led the way in resisting unfair systems, structures and acts of oppression.

- Black faith institutions: These are spaces that inspire people to resist, provide space for organizers to meet and

offer sanctuary when people were in danger.

- Black media: Newspapers, radio shows and podcasts raise awareness and help inform those who were resisting systemic racism.

- Cultural centers: These organizations help encourage the intellectual development of communities and collect and preserve Black history. They

include libraries, social clubs, cultural clubs and literary clubs.

- Black medical professionals: In a field where research often ignores Black health needs and experimented on Black bodies, Black medical professionals established hospitals, medical schools and clinics.

- Economic and financial

independence businesses: Recognizing the importance of economic power, these organizations helped to keep money within the Black community and to encourage Black ownership of businesses.

- Labor Unions: Black people formed labor unions specifically to address their needs within the various trades and occupations.

- Education: Whether founding Historically Black Colleges and Universities or working within elementary and secondary schools, educators worked to bring equal access to all people and resist the myth that Black people were intellectually inferior.

- Musicians and other artists: Music inspires resistance and expresses emotions and stories. African American spirituals, gospel, folk music, hip-hop and rap all played important roles in resistance. Writers, playwrights, photographers, painters and other visual artists have led as the Black Arts Movement, the Harlem Renaissance and the Chicago Black Renaissance. They counter stereotypes, provide space for people to express love and joy and help people imagine a world where Black people are full and equal participants.

- Sports: Athletes help advocate for the needs of the Black community and to break down barriers separating people.

This month, educators will focus on all the ways that resistance has changed our society and the heroes who have led the way.

# Tulsa Race Massacre

When segregation kept Black people from being able to shop at white-owned shops or participate fully in the economy, some Black communities responded by creating prosperous communities in which they gained wealth and power—actions which inflamed their poorer white neighbors to respond with riots and massacres.

One of the biggest examples of this was in Tulsa, Oklahoma, during the early part of the 20th century. In 1906, a wealthy Black Arkansas man bought more than 40 acres of land in Tulsa to create what would become known as Black Wall Street. Residents there were successful, building wealth and prosperity in an oil boom state.

The town, called Greenwood, grew from a population of 18,182 in 1910 to more than 90,000 by 1920. Oklahoma became the home to Black millionaires and many others who amassed great wealth. Greenwood was filled with a superior school



The Greenwood section of Tulsa burns amid a race riot in 1921.

system for Black children, banks, hotels, cafes, clothing shops, movie theaters and modern homes with indoor plumbing.

On May 31, 1921, the Tulsa Tribune reported on its front page that a Black teenager attempted to rape a white woman as the two rode an elevator together. Two armed mobs — one Black and one

white gathered at the courtroom. The former, with many Black World War I veterans, were trying to protect the teenager, Dick Rowland, from being lynched. However, since they were outnumbered, they left, heading back to Greenwood. The white mob followed and began looting, rioting and burning Black businesses, violence that

would last for 18 hours.

Before it was over, many people, possibly more than 300, would die, 800 people would be injured, 35 city blocks would be burned down and 9,000 people lost their homes.

The riot was made worse by police and the Oklahoma National Guard who deputized white people who were partic-

ipating in the riots and gave them firearms and ammunition. The National Guard arrested 6,000 people, all of them Black residents of Greenwood, and detained them in holding centers at the local fairgrounds. Meanwhile the rioters destroyed everything left behind including homes, churches, schools, businesses, two newspapers, a hospital and a library.

None of these acts were ever prosecuted or punished at any governmental level. Little to no help was offered to rebuild Greenwood, the American Red Cross being one of the few organizations that provided relief for months after the massacre.

Charges against Rowland were dropped. Police concluded that he likely stumbled and accidentally stepped on the foot of the white woman in the elevator.

The 18-hour massacre is one of the worst incidents of racial violence in U.S. history and for a long time was covered up, with local newspapers and police destroying records of it.

It wasn't until after its 50th anniversary that scholars began to study the events. In 1996, on the riot's 75th anniversary, the Mount Zion Baptist Church, which had been burned to the ground during the riot, held a memorial service and after an official investigation in 2001, the event started to be taught in Oklahoma schools and be included in Oklahoma history books.

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# Giants of the Resistance

Black history is filled with the names of people who resisted, those who fought back against oppression in seek of change

Often unpopular in their time, four people among the many resisters who demanded justice include Marcus Garvey, Stokely Carmichael, Angela Davis and Elaine Brown.

## MARCUS GARVEY

Born in Jamaica in 1887, Marcus Garvey was a political activist, journalist, orator and the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League. A Black nationalist in favor of Blacks migrating to Africa, his views were often unpopular even among other civil rights activists.

What became known as Garveyism included a united one-state Africa that would further his ideas of Black racial purity. He longed to see Black people be financially independent, free from white oppression and discrimination. He encouraged Black pride and self-worth. His ideas helped launch such movements as Rastafari, the Nation of Islam and the Black Power Movement.

After moving to the United States in 1914, he founded several businesses, including the Negro Factories Corporation



Angela Davis speaks during a lecture in 2014.

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and the Negro World newspaper. In 1923, he was convicted of mail fraud. While Calvin Coolidge commuted his sentence, he was deported to Jamaica in 1927. He died in London in 1940.

## STOKELY CARMICHAEL

Born in Trinidad in 1941, Stokely Carmichael, who later changed his name to Kwame Ture, moved to the U.S. when he was 11 and became an active member and organizer of the civil rights movement. He was one of the original freedom riders of 1961 and a leader of the Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

A voting rights activist, he helped bring voting access to Black residents of Mississippi and Alabama. A believer in Black power, he was known for his fiery speeches and eloquent writing.

In 1968 he moved to Africa, adopting the name Kwame Ture, and began promoting pan-Africanism. He died in 1998 of prostate cancer.

## ANGELA DAVIS

A militant activist born in Alabama in 1944, Angela Davis is best known for being

imprisoned on conspiracy charges related to a prison escape attempt in which several people were killed.

A communist and a member of the Black Panthers, Davis was a doctoral candidate at the University of California, San Diego. Her political opinions were cited as the reason the California Board of Regents refused to renew her appointment as a lecturer. It took until the 1990s for her to be able to again take up academic posts.

In 1970, an escape attempt was made during George Jackson's trial. She was linked

to the event because of evidence showing that the guns were registered to her. She went into hiding and was placed on the FBI's most wanted list. Once captured, she spent 18 months in jail before being acquitted by an all-white jury. Such musicians as the Rolling Stones and John Lennon and Yoko Ono wrote songs about her to support the "Free Angela Davis" campaign and the Angela Davis Legal Defense Committee.

In 1997, she identified as a lesbian and has continued to champion causes for the Black, LGBTQ+ and women communities.

## ELAINE BROWN

Born in 1943, Elaine Brown was a prison activist, author, singer and one-time presidential candidate.

She was the first and only female leader of the Black Panthers, which she led from 1974 to 1977. She has written several books about criminal injustice and is active in the legal appeal of a prisoner who was convicted in Georgia at age 13 for a murder she says he did not commit.

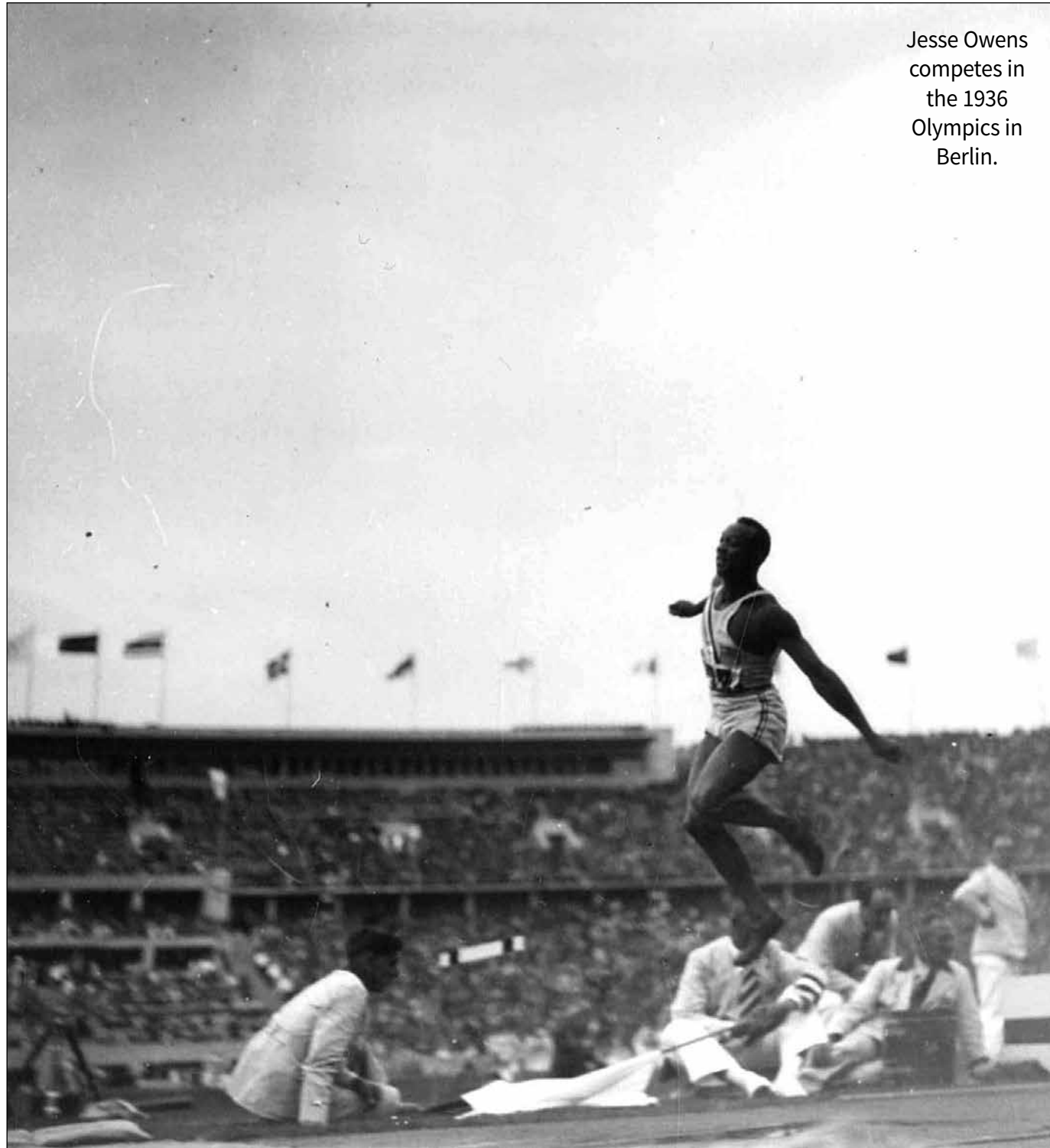
She is the CEO of a non-profit that helps to launch and sustain for-profit businesses by people who were formerly incarcerated or have other major social barriers to economic survival. She recorded two albums of original songs—one for Motown records, "Until We're Free" and "Seize the Time" which is now available on iTunes.

# 1936 Olympics

Even while facing racism and prejudice at home, 18 Black athletes became heroes during the 1936 Olympics--an event held in Nazi Germany. Their presence and success were hailed as a rebuke to Hitler's master-race myths where he proclaimed the supremacy of the Aryan race.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum lists the medals won by the Black athletes of the team, primarily in track and field events. While Jesse Owens, who won four gold medals, was the most famous of the group, others proved that he wasn't an exception.

John Woodruff won gold in the 800-meter race. Cornelius Johnson took gold in the high jump with Dave Albritton winning silver. Mack Robinson, the older brother of Jackie Robinson, won silver in the 200-meter dash, just four-tenths of a second behind Owens. Ralph Metcalfe, who later went on to become a U.S. congressman, won a gold in the 4x100-meter relay and a silver in the 100-meter race. He came in just a tenth of a sec-



Jesse Owens competes in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin.

ond behind Owens.

According to NPR, 18 Black athletes won 14 medals, eight of them gold, which represented a quarter of the 56 medals won by the entire U.S. team. They were hailed by the African-American newspaper,

The Pittsburgh Courier, as "The Black Eagles."

The racism was fierce against them in Germany. In his diary, Joseph Goebbels, the head of propaganda for the Nazis, wrote, "white humanity should be ashamed of itself."

He was referring, according to Andrew Maraniss, the author of "Games of Deception," to whites losing and that they allowed Black people to compete.

When the leader of the Hitler Youth told Hitler he

should pose for a picture with Owens, Hitler responded angrily, "The Americans ought to be ashamed of themselves for letting their medals be won by Negroes. I myself would never shake hands with one of them."

While white people in both Germany and the U.S. published racial slurs about how Black athletes succeeded because of their "jungle" backgrounds, a white Boston Globe columnist challenged them, "The best the Nazis have been able to do with the racial problem created by Jesse Owens & Co. is to theorize that these represent a race of American helots, more nearly akin to the panther and the jack rabbit than to their Aryan competitors. This is a view that conveniently disregards the fact that one of these colored athletes is a Phi Beta Kappa scholarship man, one is in medical school, one a law student and the others are meeting the requirements of American college life."

When the athletes returned home, they again faced prejudice. Unlike other athletes, none of them were invited to the White House or got to shake the hand of the then-president, Franklin Roosevelt. Jesse Owens famously told a crowd that he didn't even get a telegram from the president.

Some would go on to succeed while others struggled to survive. Robinson, according to NPR, once used his Olympic jacket to keep warm while he was working as a street sweeper.

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# Harlem Renaissance

Art has a way of connecting people and the Harlem Renaissance at the beginning of the 1900s represented a period where Black art sparked a cultural revolution that saw Black success attracting people of all races.

It was a movement featuring Black Pride that formed the foundation for the Civil Rights Movement.

The National Gallery of Art describes it as “a period of rich cross-disciplinary artistic and cultural activity among African Americans...artists associated with the movement asserted pride in black life and identity, a rising consciousness of inequality and discrimination and interest in the rapidly changing modern world—many experiencing a freedom of expression through the arts for the first time.”

It was a Renaissance that lasted until the start of the Great Depression and the abolishment of Prohibition, making speakeasies less popular. The final nail in its coffin was the Harlem Race Riot of 1935.

## HARLEM BECOMES A CULTURAL CENTER DUE TO MIGRATION

Some of the major figures of



Louis Armstrong was among the major artists of the Harlem Renaissance.

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the Harlem Renaissance were Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen, Louis Armstrong, Paul Robeson, Josephine Baker, Ma Rainey, Aaron Douglas and Marcus Garvey.

The Renaissance started with the Great Migration north, with Harlem being one of the most

popular destinations for Blacks from the South to move to, according to History.com. The three-mile neighborhood had the highest concentration of Black people in the world. People like W.E.B. Du Bois led a Black Pride movement that put a spotlight on Black cultural achievements.

## ARTISTS CHANGE RACIAL PERCEPTIONS

Poets and novelists wrote about Black cultural identity and editors founded literary magazines. Some of these publications painted exotic pictures of life in Harlem that attracted tourists who viewed Black cultural life in a positive way.

Music played a huge role in the Harlem Renaissance. In 1927, the Savoy opened an integrated ballroom with two bandstands. People flocked to it to listen to jazz and dance, creating a nightlife in Harlem. Then there were places like the Cotton Club that were geared toward white people who wanted to experience Black culture, but not rub elbows with actual Black people. It featured performances by such people as Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway even while allowing only white customers.

In addition to writers and musicians, intellectuals, sculptors, dancers, actors and opera performers all created art that gave a realistic look into what it meant to be Black in America. They demanded equality and civil rights.

The Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture records the achievements of Black artists in this period. It shows how the Harlem Renaissance permanently changed America for the better and inspired future generations of Black artists. In one of their website articles, they write, “The self-portrait of African American life, identity and culture that emerged from Harlem was transmitted to the world at large, challenging the racist and disparaging stereotypes of the Jim Crow South. In doing so, it radically redefined how people of other races viewed African Americans and understood the African American experience.”

# Loving vs. Virginia

A shy couple in Virginia ended up changing the law for everyone in the United States.

Before the 1967 Supreme Court ruling of *Loving vs. Virginia*, many states had miscegenation laws that forbid inter-racial marriages or sexual relations.

In 1958, two Virginia residents traveled to Washington D.C. to get married. Mildred Jeter was a Black and Native American woman and Richard Loving was a white man. They returned to Virginia and five weeks later were woken up from their bed at 2 a.m. and arrested by the local sheriff. They were charged with a felony based on a law forbidding inter-racial marriages.

They pleaded guilty and were sentenced to a year in prison, but the judge told them he would suspend the sentence if they left Virginia and didn't return for 25 years. They would return to D.C. where they raised three children. However, they missed home, and, according to History.com, Mildred Loving wrote a letter to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy asking for help. He referred her to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

In November of 1963, the Lovings began a legal battle that would go all the way to the Supreme Court. They filed a motion with the original



The graves of Mildred and Richard Loving in Central Point, Virginia.

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trial judge asking him to vacate their conviction. He refused. The Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals upheld the original ruling.

In April 1967, the case appeared before the U.S. Supreme Court. Earlier Supreme Court rulings had upheld miscegenation laws because the penalties applied equally to people of all races.

In defending the law, Virginia's assistant attorney general compared it to similar laws against incest and polygamy. The ACLU lawyers argued that the laws were illegal under the 14th Amendment which guarantees due process and equal protection under the law to all citizens.

On June 12, 1967, the Supreme Court unanimously

ruled that the interracial marriage law violated the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.

"Under our Constitution, the freedom to marry, or not marry, a person of another race resides with the individual, and cannot be infringed by the state," wrote Chief Justice Earl Warren.

In 2022, a Supreme Court

ruling stating that the 14th Amendment did not protect abortion decisions sparked concerns that the *Loving vs. Virginia* ruling might also be in danger. In December of 2022, the U.S. Congress passed the Respect for Marriage Act which prohibits the federal government from invalidating or making illegal any same-sex or interracial marriages.

# Dunbar High School

Until desegregation, Black and white students were educated separately.

The first public high school for Black students was founded in 1870 in Washington D.C. It gained a reputation for outstanding academic achievement and was a model for educational success.

William Syphax, the president of the Board of Trustees for Colored Schools, founded the school in 1870 as the Preparatory High School for Colored Youth. It met at the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church. Its name changed to M Street High School from 1891 to 1916 and then was renamed for the Black poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Syphax founded the school after attempts to integrate D.C. schools had failed. The original class had 45 students and one teacher, Emma J. Hutchins.

Because it was a public school, educators received the same pay as their white counterparts, something rare at the time. Famous faculty members included Mary Church Terrell, an educator and activist, and Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the creator of Black History Month. A graduate of the school, Julia Evangeline Brooks also taught there and was a pioneer in the founding of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. One of its early principals was the first Black graduate of Harvard College.



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Another was the second Black woman to graduate from college. Luminary educators included Anna Julia Cooper, Kelly Miller and A.A. Birch Junior.

Teachers at the school were noted because nearly all of them had graduate degrees and many had earned PhDs.

Its students were noted for their success, with 80 percent of their graduates going on to

college. Famous graduates included businessman H. Naylor Fitzhugh, surgeon Charles R. Drew, educator and activist Nannie Helen Burroughs, governor and federal judge William H. Hastie, economist Robert Weaver, lawyer Charles Hamilton Houston, Poet Laureate Sterling Brown, and Air Force General Benjamin O. Davis.

The publication Black Past

described the school's curriculum as being ambitious from the very start with the goal of sending graduates to college. Classes included English, Latin, foreign languages, history, science, philosophy and mathematics up to calculus. Its graduates went on to study at such illustrious universities as Howard University, Dartmouth, Harvard and Yale. Others

became military officers.

Until the mid-1950s, Dunbar took students from throughout the D.C. area and Fairfax County, Virginia, which had no secondary schools for Black students.

Much of the school's nature changed after the U.S. Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* which brought about the integration of public schools. In Washington, this ruling led to a political compromise in which all schools became neighborhood schools.

Economist Thomas Sowell in 2015 wrote, "Dunbar, which had been accepting outstanding black students from anywhere in the city, could now accept only students from the rough ghetto neighborhood in which it was located...As unmotivated, unruly and disruptive students flooded in, Dunbar teachers began moving out and many retired. More than 80 years of academic excellence simply vanished into thin air."

Black Past reports that as of 2010, only 29 percent of Dunbar's students met D.C.'s grade-level standards for reading and only 23 percent met the standards for math.

However, from 1870 to 1955, Dunbar had the reputation of being the best Black high school in the country and its graduates helped to reshape U.S. history, education, sports, politics, religion, military, entertainment, medicine, business and Black Greek organizations.