

# Who's who

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## Black activists

### Stokely Carmichael (1941–98)

Born in the West Indies, raised in Harlem, and educated at historically black Howard University, Carmichael participated in CORE's Freedom Rides (1961) and SNCC's voter registration campaigns in Mississippi (1964). When SNCC became more militant, he was elected as its leader (1966). He came to national attention through his advocacy of 'Black Power' during the Meredith March (1966) and his celebrity led other SNCC members to christen him 'Stokely Starmichael'. His disillusionment with SNCC and the Black Panthers, coupled with a total of 36 arrests, led him to emigrate to Africa.

### Frederick Douglass (1818–95)

After his escape from slavery, he became the most famous and effective black abolitionist. During and after the Civil War, he campaigned for black equality.

### W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963)

Born in Massachusetts, he attended an integrated high school. He attended a black Fisk University in Tennessee, then studied at Harvard and in Europe. He taught in several Northern universities, then became a professor at the University of Atlanta in Georgia. In 1903, he wrote *The Souls of Black Folk*, which identified the 'colour line' as the greatest problem of the century. In 1909, he was important in the establishment of the NAACP and he edited its magazine *Crisis* from 1909–34. During the Cold War, he became increasingly anti-American and emigrated to Africa.

### Marcus Garvey (1887–1940)

Born in Jamaica, he established the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914, then moved from Jamaica to Harlem in 1916. He created the first black mass movement in the USA, emphasising racial pride, self-respect and self-reliance. He was deported in 1927.

### Martin Luther King Jr (1929–68)

Born into a middle-class family of ministers in Georgia, King was the leading spokesman for black Americans in the years 1956–65. He contributed to the Montgomery Bus Boycott. His 'I have a dream' speech was the highlight of the March on Washington (1963). His Birmingham campaign (1963) contributed to the passage of the Civil Rights Act (1964), and his Selma campaign was vital to the passage of the Voting Rights Act (1965). He was less successful in combating ghetto problems. His 'dream' was integrationist, so he was greatly criticised by black separatists. He was assassinated by a white racist.

### Thurgood Marshall (1908–93)

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, which he said was as segregated as any Southern city, Marshall became a lawyer and was employed by the NAACP in 1935. He won many NAACP cases in the Supreme Court, notably the *Brown* ruling against segregated education (see page 108). In 1962, President Kennedy made him a judge in the US Court of Appeals. In 1965, President Johnson appointed him US Solicitor-General, and in 1967, elevated him to the US Supreme Court.

### Elijah Muhammad (1897–1975)

Born Elijah Poole to a Georgia sharecropper family that joined the first Great Migration and eventually settled in Detroit, 'Elijah Muhammad' joined Marcus Garvey's UNIA, but was more impressed by the Nation of Islam, which he led from 1934 until his death. The organisation grew dramatically under his leadership, although that growth probably owed more to Malcolm X.

### Barack Obama (1961–)

Born in Hawaii to an absentee African father and a white mother, he lived with his mother and her second husband in Indonesia from 1967 to 1971. After that, he lived with his grandparents in Hawaii and won a scholarship to an elite private school. From 1985, he worked as a community organiser in Chicago, then attended Harvard Law School from 1988 to 1991. He was the first black editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, so a publishing company commissioned him to write his autobiography, *Dreams From My Father* (1995). After Harvard, he returned to Chicago, where he worked for a small law firm that helped black Americans and on a black voter drive. In 1996, he was elected to the Illinois Senate, where some black senators called him a 'white man in black face'. After eight years in the Illinois Senate, he was elected to the US Senate. He was one of the few senators to speak against the war in Iraq. He gained further national attention in a speech entitled 'The Audacity of Hope' at the 2004 Democrat National Convention. His second book, *The Audacity of Hope* (2006), further publicised his carefully crafted narrative as someone who represented the triumph of the American Dream and hope for change. He defeated Hillary Clinton for the Democrat nomination and then the Republican John McCain for the presidency in 2008. He was re-elected in 2012, defeating the Republican Mitt Romney.

### Rosa Parks (1913–2005)

Alabama-born Rosa Parks was an NAACP activist who came to prominence when she agreed to be NAACP's test case in the fight against segregated bus practices in Montgomery, Alabama. Her arrest for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger triggered the Montgomery bus boycott and, many think, the whole civil rights movement. She subsequently moved to Detroit, where she continued her activism.

### A. Phillip Randolph (1890–1979)

Born in Florida, he was politicised in New York City, where he edited a radical black magazine during the First World War. He was asked to organise black railroad porters, and in 1925 set up the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters union, which gave him great influence among black activists. His threatened March on Washington DC in protest against discrimination in the defence industry led President Roosevelt to establish the Fair Employment Practices Commission. In 1948, he used the Cold War situation to pressurise President Truman into desegregating the military. In 1963, he masterminded and dominated the March on Washington, which probably helped the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

### Ida B. Wells (1862–1931)

Born into a slave family in Mississippi, she was a life-long activist, most noted for the campaign against lynching, which forced her to flee the South in 1892. She led calls for a national black organisation and was a founding member of the NAACP. She was also influential in promoting black women's organisations and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids.

### Booker T. Washington (1856–1915)

Born into slavery in Virginia, he emphasised that black economic advancement rather than confrontation was the key to progress. He established the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Its curriculum focused upon practical skills. He was recognised as America's premier black spokesman and several presidents consulted him, although other black leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois opposed his accommodationism and advocated protest.

### Walter White (1893–1955)

Born in Atlanta, Georgia, he joined the small staff of the NAACP in 1918 and led the organisation 1931–55. He exploited his white skin and blonde hair to work undercover with the Ku Klux Klan and expose their activities. He lobbied Congress for anti-lynching legislation and spoke out eloquently against discrimination.

### Roy Wilkins (1901–81)

Missouri born sociologist and journalist, who began working for Walter White and the NAACP in 1931, and led that organisation from 1955 to 1977. Recognised as one of the leading spokesmen for black Americans during that period, he was also criticised by some black Americans for his conservatism.

## Politicians

### Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969)

General Eisenhower was a career soldier whose role in winning the Second World War made him universally popular. As President (1953–61), he was reluctant to intervene in the segregated South. He disliked the *Brown* ruling, but eventually tried to help enforce it at Little Rock in 1957. Concerned about the black vote and white violence against black Americans, his administration supported two feeble Civil Rights Acts (1957 and 1960) designed to promote black voting.

### Ulysses S. Grant (1822–85)

A career soldier, General Grant was vital to the Union defeat of the Confederate armies in the Civil War (1861–5). As commander of the US Army (1864–9), he supervised Radical Reconstruction and was unusually sympathetic to black Americans. As President of the United States (1869–77), he opposed white supremacists.

### Harry Hopkins (1890–1946)

Born in Iowa, he was a social services administrator in New York City who impressed Governor Roosevelt. As President, Roosevelt employed him to supervise New Deal programmes, notably FERA, WPA and the NYA. He was an important aide and advisor to Roosevelt during the Second World War.

### Harold Ickes (1874–1952)

Pennsylvania-born reporter, lawyer, and Chicago politician Harold Ickes became Secretary of the Interior (1933–46) under Roosevelt, who wanted a progressive Republican in his cabinet. Ickes was important in the implementation of the New Deal.

### Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826)

Principal author of the Declaration of Independence (1776), one of the Founding Fathers of the United States and President of the United States (1801–9). Although he was probably responsible for the words 'all men are created equal' and said he despised slavery, he supported its continuation.

### Andrew Johnson (1808–75)

Born in North Carolina and a tailor by trade, he entered Tennessee politics and held several offices, including US Senator. A Democrat, he served as Lincoln's vice president in 1865 and became president upon Lincoln's assassination. He frequently clashed with the Republican-dominated Congress, which considered him too sympathetic to Southern whites and nearly impeached him. His presidency is generally considered unsuccessful. He had little or no sympathy for black Americans.

### Lyndon Johnson (1908–73)

Texas-born Johnson worked as a teacher, congressional aide, New Deal official, congressman, Senator (1949–61), and then as Kennedy's Vice President (1961–3). He became president after Kennedy's assassination, and was then elected in his own right in 1964. His aim as president was a 'Great Society', in which America would be free of poverty and racism, but he was forced to focus increasingly on the Vietnam War, which made him very unpopular. He was an exceptionally helpful president to black Americans.

### John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917–63)

Kennedy's Second World War record, charm, and family wealth, helped ensure his election to the House of Representatives (1947–53), Senate (1953–60) and the White House. President Kennedy (1961–3) wooed black voters in his 1960 campaign, but was slow to help them when President. He finally reacted to black pressure and supported a civil rights bill in 1963. His real preoccupation was the Cold War.

### Robert Fitzgerald Kennedy (1925–68)

Appointed Attorney General by his brother, President John F. Kennedy. One of Kennedy's preoccupations as Attorney General (1961–4) was civil rights issues. He was elected to the US Senate in 1965, but was assassinated during what seemed likely to be a successful presidential election campaign in 1968. By that time, he had become far more sympathetic to minority rights.

### Abraham Lincoln (1809–65)

Lincoln was a backwoodsman who became a lawyer then politician. His opposition to the expansion of slavery led the South to secede from the union when he was elected president in 1860. As president, he masterminded the North's defeat of the South. During his presidency (1861–5), he grew increasingly sympathetic to black slaves, whose emancipation he ensured. He was assassinated by a Confederate sympathiser, and is generally ranked as one of the greatest American presidents.

### Eleanor Roosevelt (1884–1962)

Born into the New York elite, she married her cousin Franklin Roosevelt. She encouraged him to remain in politics after he contracted polio and was an unprecedentedly active First Lady (1933–45). She was 'the eyes and ears' of President Roosevelt's New Deal and worked particularly hard to promote equality of opportunity for black Americans.

### Franklin Roosevelt (1882–1945)

Born into an elite New York family, Roosevelt had a successful political career (despite contracting polio in 1921) before his election as president. As president (1933–45), his initial preoccupation was his New Deal, which helped sustain Americans during the Great Depression. During 1941–5, his preoccupation was winning the war against Germany and Japan. He is generally considered one of America's greatest presidents. He was unusually sympathetic to black Americans.

### Harry S. Truman (1884–1972)

A Missouri farmboy who distinguished himself in the First World War and then in state politics. In 1944, US Senator Truman agreed to be Roosevelt's running mate then became President on Roosevelt's death in April 1945. His sympathetic attitude to black American inequality helped put the issue on the national political agenda, although much of the time he was preoccupied with the developing Cold War.

## Supreme Court Justices

### Earl Warren (1891–1974)

A lawyer, Warren was a progressive Republican Governor of California (1943–53), and then appointed as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court by President Eisenhower. The Warren Court (1953–69) was known for its liberalism, notably in the *Brown* ruling against segregated schools.

### Thurgood Marshall (1908–93)

Born in Baltimore, which he said was as segregated as any Southern city, he was not allowed to enter the University of Maryland, so he attended all-black Howard University. In 1935, the NAACP employed him as a lawyer, and he won many great NAACP legal victories against segregated schools and lower-paid black teachers in Maryland and Virginia (1935–40), segregated universities (e.g. *Sweatt v Painter* 1950), and segregated schools (*Brown*, 1954). President Kennedy promoted him to the US Court of Appeals in New York, and in 1967 President Johnson made him the first black Supreme Court justice.

## Cultural figures

### Harper Lee (1926–2016)

Born in Monroeville, Alabama, Lee never wrote another novel after her first, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), was a surprise bestseller. When old and in poor health, she supposedly assented to the publication of *Go Set a Watchman* (2015), an early draft of what developed into *To Kill a Mockingbird* but far less sympathetic to black Americans than the 1960 book.

## Malcom X (1925–65)

Like his Garvey-ite father, Malcolm supported separatism and nationalism. He joined the Nation of Islam while in prison and recruited thousands of members to that church during the 1950s. White Americans considered his 'by any means necessary' philosophy dangerous. He mocked Martin Luther King's non-violence and inspired a new and more militant generation of black leaders such as SNCC's Stokely Carmichael, along with the Black Power movement.

## Toni Morrison (1931–)

Perhaps America's most successful black author, Morrison was born in Ohio to a family that had joined the Great Migration in order to escape Southern racism. Educated at Howard University (1949–53) and then Cornell, she variously worked as editor, novelist and professor. Her novels explore the black American experience. Some consider *Beloved* (1987) her best work.

## Mark Twain (1835–1910)

Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born to a slave-owning Missouri family. After working as a printer and on Mississippi river boats, he joined the Confederate cavalry during the Civil War, deserted along with the rest of his division, then went West and tried silver mining and journalism. He wrote under the name of 'Mark Twain', the words called out on a riverboat to signal that the water depth was safe for passage. Mark Twain's novels sold well, especially *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and its sequel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885). He had a great contemporary reputation.

## Sidney Poitier (1927–)

Born to a Bahamian family in Miami, Poitier worked as a dishwasher in New York City, where he learned to read at the age of seventeen. After serving in the US Army, he became an actor. In the late 1960s, he was a big box-office star. Several of his films dealt with race relations, including *In the Heat of the Night* (1967), and he was the first black American male to be nominated for (1958) and to win (1963) an Oscar (Academy Award). He was the first black superstar actor – and the only one for many years. He felt he was the 'token black', while other black Americans felt his characters were emasculated. He said he would have preferred to have been defined by his acting ability rather than his colour.

## Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–96)

Born into a deeply religious and well-educated family in Connecticut, she met and married academic and abolitionist Calvin Ellis Stowe when the family moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. The couple frequently sheltered escaped slaves and in 1851–2, her 40-installment *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published in the anti-slavery newspaper, *The National Era*. It was then published in novel form in 1852. It subsequently went through countless editions and is considered one of the most influential books ever written.

### Oprah Winfrey (1954–)

Born in Mississippi, the 'Queen of all Media' was frequently described as the world's most influential woman as well as the richest black American of the twentieth century. Her exceptionally successful television talk-show ran from 1986 to 2011. She was also a film producer, occasional actress and philanthropist.