

Jackie Robinson excelled in sports at the University of California in Los Angeles. He played baseball, track, football, and basketball. He was the first athlete to letter in four sports in the same year at UCLA. This means he received four achievement awards in sports.

After leaving school, he was drafted into the army. While serving, he refused to sit in the back of a bus. He was protesting this common act of racial discrimination. Although he was almost court-martialed over his refusal, the charges were dropped.

Early in the last century, African-American athletes were not allowed to play professional baseball with Major League ball teams. In 1945 Branch Rickey, the general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, knew it was wrong. He also knew it would take an extremely unusual talent to overcome the long-standing race barrier. When one of his scouts told him about Jackie Robinson, Rickey was certain he had the right man. By hiring Jackie Robinson, he defied strong resistance.

Robinson signed on knowing he would face many hardships. Even some of his teammates hurled racial slurs at him. He had promised Rickey he would control his anger and not respond to the abuse. He kept his word.

Robinson played second base. Soon others would follow: Satchel Paige, Willie Mays, and Hank Aaron, the first hitter to beat Babe Ruth's home run record. Each is a legend, but Jackie Robinson was the first to persevere and break the race barrier.

Ann Bancroft was born in 1955. She spent her early childhood in a rural area of Minnesota. Ann overcame a learning disability and graduated from college. She taught physical education and wilderness survival.

In 1986, Ann heard that a group was forming an expedition to the North Pole. She displayed her first risk-taking traits by becoming part of the six-member team.

The group was going to replicate the experiences of adventurers that had first traveled this cold and desolate land long ago. They wanted the journey to match the expedition of earlier explorers. The team had to be self-sufficient. Taking only what they needed, they used dogsleds and walked. No plans were made for additional supplies to be provided during their trek. Ann was the first woman to arrive at the North Pole under these primitive and arduous conditions. It took fifty-six days.

Ms. Bancroft has continued to explore. She became the first woman to ski across Greenland. She led the first team of women on a skiing odyssey over six hundred miles to the South Pole. Traveling about ten miles each day, the undertaking lasted sixty-seven days. Ann's message to others: "Girls should go on thinking there is a world out there that is theirs for the taking."

Around 100 B.C., a tribe called the Anasazi lived in the desert regions of Arizona. Once they were a nomadic tribe. They eventually settled down and colonized. These people were thought to have a primitive culture. However, after examining their ancient society, scientists changed their minds.

These early people built amazing cities. Their dwellings indicated they had an advanced knowledge of architecture. Some of the buildings were three stories high and made from stone. One village had an arena and a ball court. Rooms for religious rites were built throughout their pueblos. Their artistic skills are amply displayed in stone drawings on caves and canyon walls.

The Anasazi's ability to survive the blistering heat in the high desert plateau was also discovered. Their buildings had a clever structural design. Their homes were constructed above underground stone crevices. Air pockets in the fissures stored chilly night air that was released during the day. This created a highly efficient exchange of air. The cool breezes made afternoons bearable.

Anasazi were able to farm the arid land due to ash from an ancient volcano. Its porous properties retained moisture from scant rainfall. This residue covered eight hundred square miles. The tribe abandoned their adobe villages in the mid-twelfth century A.D. No one knows why. Some people think a severe, extended drought caused the departure. Fortunately, remains of their civilization were not destroyed.

Who first discovered America? Usually, the credit goes to Christopher Columbus. In 1492, he landed on this continent and claimed he had found a new world. However, there are ample clues other explorers had reached the shores of North America before Columbus.

Evidence suggests people from Asia were here prior to Columbus. Once, a shallow waterway linked the northern part of Asia to Alaska. People from Asia could have traveled between the two continents. Perhaps they were the first humans to have discovered this land.

We know Vikings were aggressive explorers. A long-standing debate has taken place over a Viking map of Vinland. Carbon dating of this map suggests they arrived about fifty years before Columbus. Some claim this map is authentic; others say it is a forgery.

Men from Portugal traveled to the New World. They sailed along the Atlantic coast. Strange symbols have been found on a massive landmark known as Dighton Rock. They are thought to have Portuguese origins. Are these writings proof these sailors explored America before Columbus?

In the end, which country claims the honor of discovering America is a moot point. Native Americans had been here for thousands of years. They had settled in villages from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.

However, Columbus's landing is regarded as the most historically important. Unlike the others, he set up two-way commerce between the Old World and the New World.

The Boston Tea Party in 1773 was not a party. It was a risky act of defiance. The events that led up to this act began in England.

A British business had more tea than it could sell in England. The British Parliament let the company sell its excess tea tax-free to American colonists. This gave the company an unfair advantage over local merchants who had to pay taxes. Even though the cost of the tea was lower, colonists were unwilling to pay the unjust taxes.

People in Philadelphia decided to boycott. They forced British tea agents to resign their positions. Colonists in other areas tried blocking the company's ships. They wanted to keep the vessels from docking in their ports. People in Boston tried the same thing. They were unsuccessful. Three British ships docked in Boston's harbor. The ships' officers refused to leave the port.

To protest, colonist Samuel Adams and fifty followers, carrying hatchets and dressed like Mohawk Indians, boarded the ships. They chopped chests of tea open and threw them into the harbor. Paul Revere spread the word of the anti-tax protest.

On April Fool's day in 1774, the King of England closed the Boston port. The governor of Massachusetts did not support the colonists. Ben Franklin printed unflattering letters about the governor. England scolded Franklin for his critical words. Tax laws and the dressing down of Franklin hardened the colonists. Inevitably, the disputes lead to the American Revolution.

Jacob Riis moved to the United States from Denmark when he was twenty-one. Living in his new homeland was difficult. Unable to find work for a long time, he suffered severe hardships. Eventually, he became a police reporter and photographer for the *New York Tribune*. He was assigned to work in the Lower East Side. There poverty abounded. Although Jacob had been quite poor, he was shocked at the awful conditions of ordinary people who were living in the slums.

Jacob vowed to improve the intolerable situations. He photographed the perilous streets, housing blight, and alleyways. Then he wrote a book entitled *How the Other Half Lives*. The book depicted slum dwellings and abuses of lower-class urban life. It was an effective tool for his cause. After reading the book, Teddy Roosevelt, who was the New York Police Commissioner at the time, called Riis and said, "I have read your book, and I have come to help." It has been stated that Mr. Riis was "the most useful citizen in America."

Riis, now famous, pushed harder for reform. Living conditions of tenement dwellers improved. Drinking water was purified. Fewer people were contracting cholera, yellow fever, and small pox. His unrelenting efforts helped improve the lives of people across the nation.

John Phillip Sousa is best remembered for his rousing, marching music. Known as “The March King,” his most famous composition is “Stars and Stripes Forever.” Never idle for long, Sousa composed one hundred thirty-six marches. He demonstrated his unusual talent as a young boy. When he was only thirteen years old, Sousa began an apprenticeship with the Marine Band in Washington, D.C. By age twenty-six, he had been appointed bandleader. The famous band was assigned to the president of the United States. This band still plays at official functions.

Sousa was not just interested in marching bands; he enjoyed band concerts in theaters and invented a new kind of tuba. The large tuba was perfect for outdoor marching, but its blaring sound was too direct for concert halls. The tuba’s flared bell, angled parallel to the ground, sent sound forward. Concert halls required something different. Sousa designed a new brass instrument that was better suited for the stage. Then he had the new piece manufactured. It was a circular tuba with a bell facing upward. The sound was sent toward the ceiling instead of into the audience. It became known as the sousaphone in honor of its inventor.

During his lifetime, Sousa received several honorary degrees and fought for music education and composers’ rights. He continued to tour and conduct his own band until the age of 77.

The life of Stephen Foster, like the lives of many talented people in history, has become embedded in folklore. Before he was thirty, Foster had written and published many songs. He was a popular musical genius. He lived in the era of slavery and musical shows. Foster tried to write songs that could be appreciated by all people. He accomplished this impressive feat by composing songs with lyrics that touched the hearts of young and old. His first big hit was “Oh! Susanna.” Songs such as “Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair,” “My Old Kentucky Home,” and “Old Folks at Home” became familiar favorites.

During his lifetime, no copyright laws existed. Composers were not protected from other people stealing their work. Musicians were allowed to rewrite any composer’s song. All they had to do was create a new or different musical arrangement.

Foster realized people were infringing on the ownership of his compositions. So, he would sometimes write his own contracts. At that time, this was a practice considered highly unusual.

Publishing houses also took advantage of him. They made one-time, buy-out payments for his songs. Steven Foster died penniless. Had current copyright laws been in place at the time, he would have received millions of dollars for his creative talents.



When most people speak about rain forests, they refer to the lush, tropical regions in the jungles near the equator. People seldom mention the dense, temperate rain forests located along the Pacific coast. This forest ranges from Alaska to Oregon. Here warm, moist air from the Pacific Ocean drops up to sixteen feet of rain in a single year.

Let us examine a few differences between temperate and tropical rain forests. Both ecosystems receive a great deal of rain. Tropical forests have rain evenly spread throughout the year. Strong shower bursts occur frequently. In contrast, temperate rain forests have lengthy wet seasons and fairly dry summers. Fog provides the necessary moisture for plants during the summer.

A tropical rain forest has three layers: the forest floor, the understory, and the canopy. It is home for well over half of the earth's plant and animal species. The poor soil supports a wealth of vines, climbing plants, and broad-leafed evergreens. The temperate rain forest has a less complex ecology. Its cool winters limit the numbers and variety of life forms that survive there. The most common trees are evergreens.

Tropical rain forests are more fragile than temperate rain forests. However, both forests are threatened. Once they are destroyed, it will take years for these ecosystems to revive.

The bison, native to North America, is also called a buffalo. The powerful male is twice the weight of the female. It measures over six feet tall at its shoulders and weighs nearly a ton. The bison's shaggy, brown fur grows longest on the animal's head, neck, and shoulders; a straggling beard hangs from its chin. Both male and female have short, curving horns. Despite their massive size, buffalo are agile runners, capable of sprinting up to thirty-five miles an hour.

Herds of buffalo were rapidly dying by the early 1800s. Once, the animals numbered over sixty million. People were pushing across the continent. The herds had to compete with the settlers. They were turning the animals' grazing grounds into farmland. The westward expansion encroached upon the buffalo's habitat. Building the railroad from the Atlantic to Pacific Ocean made the buffalo's demise certain. Organized hunting parties killed this huge mammal for sport. People shot the animal from trains as they passed through its territory.

Some settlers were concerned. They thought the slaughter of the buffalo might also wipe out Native Americans. Bison were an important staple and their main source of protein. They used the hides for clothing, blankets, and shelter. In 1885, fewer than nine hundred buffalo remained on the plains. Cattlemen became alarmed. So people created refuges to save the animals. Today, herds number around 200,000. Hopefully, the buffalo will endure for future generations to enjoy.

The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 doubled the size of a young United States. Purchasing this vast, fertile land helped our country rise to world-power status. The events leading up to history's largest peaceful land transfer are extremely interesting.

The sale of the Louisiana Territory to the United States by Napoleon was the result of a complex chain of events. France first claimed the land as its own. The French and Indian War shifted the balance of power among France, England, and Spain. At the end of the war in 1762, France gave the land to Spain. Forty years later, Spain began to decline as a world power. France again became interested in Louisiana. During secret talks, France convinced Spain to return the territory.

When news reached President Thomas Jefferson in the States, he conferred with France. He wanted to purchase New Orleans and Louisiana. The United States wanted this land. Many American settlers and merchants lived in the region.

France was having financial problems. It could no longer defend the territory. Napoleon talked officials into selling the entire area. The land was purchased for fifteen million dollars. This was a mere three cents an acre. Today, this region is often referred to as "the nation's breadbasket." It provides an abundance of the country's food products.

In 1979, Jan Scruggs, an honored Vietnam War veteran, had an idea. The idea was to build a memorial. Its purpose was to honor the soldiers who had died during this unpopular war.

The following year, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund held a national design contest. Maya Lin, a young, talented woman was studying structural design and sculpture at Yale. She entered the contest. Her entry was a polished, black-granite, v-shaped wall. It was inscribed with the names of the 58,000 who had perished. Maya won the competition.

Some people felt the design was not suitable. They wanted a different tribute to the fallen heroes. Critics were split into supporters and opponents. Both sides were eventually satisfied. The parties agreed to erect a statue of three soldiers with a flag at the entrance.

The wall was completely funded through private donations. It has become one of our most valued monuments. People visit it daily seeking the names of friends and relatives who died. Photographs, flowers, and mementos are tearfully placed on the sidewalk in front of the wall. These items are kept and cataloged in a building near the site. A scaled-down version of the wall travels throughout the country. This allows people unable to visit Washington D.C. to see the names of their loved ones.