



AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE ARTS

2024 Black History Theme



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INTRODUCTION TO BLACK HISTORY MONTH

2024 THEME: AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE ARTS

In 1915, Carter G. Woodson traveled to Chicago from his home in Washington, D.C. to take part in a national celebration of the 50th anniversary of emancipation. He had earned his bachelor's and master's degree at the University of Chicago, and still had many friends there. As he joined the thousands of Black Americans overflowing from the Coliseum, which housed exhibits highlighting African American achievements since the abolition of slavery, Woodson was inspired to do more in the spirit of celebrating Black history and heritage.

Before he left Chicago, he helped found the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH). A year later, Woodson singlehandedly launched the *Journal of Negro History*, in which he and other researchers brought attention to the achievements of Black Americans.

Born in 1875 in New Canton, Virginia, Woodson had worked as a sharecropper, miner and various other jobs during his childhood to help support his large family. Though he entered high school late, he made up for lost time, graduating in less than two years. After attending Berea College in Kentucky, Woodson worked in the Philippines as an education superintendent for the U.S. government. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Chicago before entering Harvard. In 1912, three years before founding the ASNLH, he became only the second African American (after W.E.B. DuBois) to earn a doctorate from that institution.

Like DuBois, Woodson believed that young African Americans in the early 20th century were not being taught enough of their own heritage, and the achievements of their ancestors. To get his message out, Woodson first turned to his fraternity, Omega Psi Phi, which created Negro History and Literature Week in 1924. But Woodson wanted a wider celebration, and he decided the ASNLH should take on the task itself.

In February 1926, Woodson sent out a press release announcing the first Negro History Week. He chose February because the month contained the birthdays of both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, two prominent men whose historic achievements African Americans already celebrated. (Lincoln's birthday was February 12; Douglass, who was formerly enslaved, hadn't known his actual birthday, but had marked the occasion on February 14.)

As schools and other organizations across the country quickly embraced Woodson's initiative, he and his colleagues struggled to meet the demand for course materials and other resources. The ASNLH formed branches all over the country, though its national headquarters remained centered in Woodson's row house on Ninth Street in

Washington D.C. The house was also home base for the Associated Publishers Press, which Woodson had founded in 1921.

The author of more than 20 books, including *A Century of Negro Migration* (1918), *The History of the Negro Church* (1921), *The Negro in Our History* (1922) and his most celebrated text, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933), Woodson also worked in education, as principal for the Armstrong Manual Training School in Washington, D.C., and dean at Howard University and the West Virginia Collegiate Institute.

Clearly, Woodson never viewed the study of Black history as something that could be confined to a week. As early as the 1940s, efforts began to expand the week of public celebration of African American heritage and achievements into a longer event. This shift had already begun in some locations by 1950, when Woodson died suddenly of a heart attack at home in Washington.

With the rise of the civil rights and Black Power movements in the 1960s, young African Americans on college campuses were becoming increasingly conscious of the historic dimension of their experience. Younger members of the ASNLH (which later became the Association for the Study of African American History) urged the organization to change with the times, including the official shift to a month-long celebration of Black history. In 1976, on the 50th anniversary of the first Negro History Week, the Association officially made the shift to Black History Month.

Since then, every U.S. president has issued a proclamation honoring the spirit of Black History Month. Gerald Ford began the tradition in 1976, saying the celebration enabled people to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.” Ronald Reagan’s first Black History Month proclamation stated that “understanding the history of Black Americans is a key to understanding the strength of our nation.”

In 2016, Barack Obama, the nation’s first Black president, made his last proclamation in honor of Woodson’s initiative, now recognized as one of the nation’s oldest organized celebrations of history. “As we mark the 40th year of National African American History Month, let us reflect on the sacrifices and contributions made by generations of African Americans, and let us resolve to continue our march toward a day when every person knows the unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

2024 Theme

African Americans and the Arts

African American art is infused with African, Caribbean, and the Black American lived experiences. In the fields of visual and performing arts, literature, fashion, folklore, language, film, music, architecture, culinary and other forms of cultural expression, the African American influence has been paramount. African American artists have used art to preserve history and community memory as well as for empowerment. Artistic and cultural movements such as the New Negro, Black Arts, Black Renaissance, hip-hop, and Afrofuturism, have been led by people of African descent and set the standard for

popular trends around the world. In 2024, we examine the varied history and life of African American arts and artisans.

For centuries Western intellectuals denied or minimized the contributions of people of African descent to the arts as well as history, even as their artistry in many genres was copied and/or stolen. However, we can still see the unbroken chain of Black art production from antiquity to the present, from Egypt across Africa, from Europe to the New World. Prior to the American Revolution, enslaved Africans of the Lowcountry began their more than a 300-year tradition of making sweetgrass baskets, revealing their visual artistry via craft.

The suffering of those in bondage gave birth to the spirituals, the nation's first contribution to music. Blues musicians such as Robert Johnson, McKinley 'Muddy Waters' Morganfield and Riley "BB" B. King created and nurtured a style of music that became the bedrock for gospel, soul, and other still popular (and evolving) forms of music.

B.B. King Live In Africa '74 is a rare - extremely rare - intimate view of B.B. King in concert. At age 49, having "crossed over" to wide popularity with his show at the Fillmore West in 1968 and secured his fame with the 1970 hit "The Thrill Is Gone," B.B. stands onstage before Muhammad Ali and a crowd of 80,000 on the continent his ancestors left in chains and gives one of the most thrilling performances of his life. "The King of the Blues" (B.B.), "Soul Brother #1" (James Brown) and other African-American artists on the bill reveled in the return to their cultural motherland for a gala affair that was attended by fans and journalists from all over the world.

Black contributions to literature include works by poets like Phillis Wheatley, essays, autobiographies, and novels by writers such as David Walker and Maria Stewart. This is a featurette for the historical documentary featuring a poem by Phillis Wheatley about George Washington written in the 1700s:

Black aesthetics have also been manifested through sculptors like Edmonia Lewis and painters like Henry O. Tanner.

In the 1920s and 30s, the rise of the Black Renaissance and New Negro Movement brought the Black Arts to an international stage. Members of the armed forces, such as James Reese Europe, and artists such as Langston Hughes, Josephine Baker and Lois Mailou Jones brought Black culture and Black American aesthetics internationally, and Black culture began its ascent to becoming a dominant cultural movement to the world. In addition to the Harlem Renaissance, today we recognize that cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, and New Orleans also were home to many Black artists.

The 1960s continued this thread through the cultural evolution known as the Black Arts Movement, where artists covered issues such as pride in one's heritage and established art galleries and museum exhibitions to show their own work, as well as publications such as Black Art. This period brought us artists such as Alvin Ailey, Judith Jamison, Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez. The movement would not have been

as impactful without the influences from the broader Black world, especially the Negritude movement and the writings of Frantz Fanon.

Alvin Ailey said that one of America's richest treasures was the cultural heritage of the African-American - "sometimes sorrowful, sometimes jubilant, but always hopeful." This enduring classic is a tribute to that heritage and to Ailey's genius. Using African-American traditional spirituals, this suite fervently explores the places of deepest grief and holiest joy in the soul. Now more than ever, the world needs the power of dance to bring people together and connect us all by our common humanity.

In 1973, in the Bronx, New York Black musicians (DJ Kool Herc and Coke La Rock) started a new genre of music called hip-hop, which comprises five foundational elements (DJing, MCing, Graffiti, Break Dancing and Beat Boxing). Hip-hop performers also used technological equipment such as turntables, synthesizers, drum machines, and samplers to make their songs. Since then, hip-hop has continued to be a pivotal force in political, social, and cultural spaces and was a medium where issues such as racial violence in the inner city, sexism, economic disinvestment and others took the forefront.

The term Afrofuturism was used approximately 30 years ago in an effort to define cultural and artistic productions (music, literature, visual arts, etc.) that imagine a future for Black people without oppressive systems and examines how Black history and knowledge intersects with technology and science. Afrofuturist elements can be found in the music of Sun Ra, Rashan Roland Kirk, Janelle Monáe and Jimi Hendrix.

In celebrating the entire history of African Americans and the arts, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) puts into the national spotlight the richness of the past and present with an eye towards what the rest of the twenty-first century will bring. ASALH dedicates its 98th Annual Black History Theme to African Americans and the arts.

AFRICAN AMERICAN DANCE HISTORY

This date is dedicated to African American Dance. **Black Africans brought their dances to North, Central, South America and the Caribbean Islands as slave labor starting in the 1500s.** In the west, these dance styles of hundreds of Black ethnic groups merged with white dances, forming the extension of the African aesthetic in the Americas. Dance has always been an integral part of daily life in Africa. In the Americas, it helped enslaved Africans connect with their homeland keeping their cultural traditions alive.

Before enslavement, Africans danced for many special occasions, such as a birth or a marriage, or as a part of their daily activities; dance affirmed life and the outlook of the future. After the Middle Passage, Africans in the Americas sang and danced while working as slaves. As they converted to the religions of white-Europeans and indigenous people, they incorporated these traditions into these cultures. Blacks who worked in the colonies of Spain, Portugal, the Caribbean, and South America were given more freedom to dance than enslaved Blacks in North America. Many white-American slave owners barred Africans from most forms of dancing. As African instruments were outlawed, drums, early Stepping, in particular, were created. Africans found ways of getting around these prohibitions. For example, since lifting the feet was considered dancing, many dances included foot shuffling and hip and torso movement. Dances dominant through the 18th century included the ring shout or ring dance.

The dances of the plantation moved onto the stage through Minstrel shows, which introduced Black dance to large audiences during the 1800s. As popular entertainment, both Blacks and whites performed them. Initially, Blacks appeared as caricatures that were often ridiculed, but they drew from their cultural traditions even as they made fun of themselves. In 1891, The Creole Show, a revue staged on Broadway, introduced **The Cakewalk, the first American dance created by Blacks to become popular with whites. Other Black-influenced dance trends followed were the Charleston, the Lindy Hop, the Jitterbug, and the Twist.** The 1920s and 1930s were an especially fruitful time for Black dance in the United States. Similar innovations in theater, music, literature and other arts during the Harlem Renaissance accompanied African American developments in dance. Black musical theater, derived from minstrel shows, continued to popularize and legitimize black dance traditions and performers, as it had in the 19th century.

Outstanding performances raised professional dance standards for Blacks and whites alike. "Shuffle Along," a landmark Broadway show created by Blacks and with an all-Black cast, was immensely popular with white audiences. Many other all-Black shows, including "Runnin' Wild," "Chocolate Dandies," and "Blackbirds" of 1928, also played to enthusiastic American audiences in the 1920s and 1930s. Tap combined elements of African-influenced shuffle dances, English clog dancing, and Irish jigs. Black dancers such as **Bill Robinson** brought a new form of respectability and popularity. Tap dancing

developed further in the 1930s and 1940s when white dancers included it in motion pictures. During the 1930s and 1940s, Blacks moved into ballet and modern dance. Leading white choreographers integrated African American themes and movement styles into their dances and hired Blacks to perform them. 1257

Also during this time, two American dancers trained as anthropologists, Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus, made immeasurable contributions to African-influenced dance based on their research in Africa and the Caribbean. These dances fascinated audiences with their use of freely moving torsos, rhythmic vitality, native-influenced costumes, and highly energetic and enthusiastic performers. The Lester Horton Dance Theater and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater contributed significantly to modern dance. Other prominent Black choreographers and artistic directors include Donald McKayle, Debbie Allen, Talley Beatty, Garth Fagan, Bill T. Jones, Joel Hall, Virginia Johnson, Robert Battle, and others.

In recent years, several regional modern dance companies have been rich in innovations and connections with the past. The definition of dance has broadened to include the urban black dance forms of break dancing and hip-hop, which have been recognized for their artistry and expressiveness. All-female companies such as Urban Bush Women have been formed, as has a company devoted exclusively to hip-hop dance, The Pure Movement Dance Company. Tap dance found a new audience. Female tap dancers, who once danced in relative obscurity, have also achieved recognition and encouragement. They highlight the legacy of women who have matched male tap dancers step by step.

Dance created and performed by African Americans has become a permanent part of American dance. Contemporary dance companies founded by Blacks tour both nationally and internationally. These groups include the African American Dance Ensemble, Kan Kouran West African Dance Company, Ko-Thi Dance Company, Dinizulu, His African Dancers, Drummers, Singers, and Muntu Dance Theater.

AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERARY ARTS

From the first African-American novelist to the 22-year-old poet who performed at the 2021 presidential inauguration

Let look at the outstanding achievements of Black Americans' creatives throughout history. These Stories help us understand the world and see it through another's eyes. They can be an escape, teach us empathy, and inspire change.

Although there are many, let's look at 12 Black Americans fiction writers and poets who have made their mark over two centuries and continue to shape and inspire generations.

Harriet E. Wilson (1825–1900)

Harriet E. Wilson is considered the first African American to publish a novel in the United States.

It is largely autobiographical, telling the story of Frado, a Black woman born after slavery has been abolished in the northern states. While Frado is considered to be “free,” the protagonist grows up as an indentured servant—working without a salary in order to repay a loan; she is treated as a lower-class citizen and abused.

Many see this novel as exposing the reality of what it meant to be “free” and black in the northern states following the abolition of slavery. It has been suggested that the book didn't receive critical acclaim from abolitionists when it was first published, given the harsh image it painted of what this “freedom” actually looked like.

Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960)

Zora Neale Hurston was a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, published in 1937, is the most popular of the four novels she wrote alongside more than 50 short stories, plays, and essays.

Through her short satires, which were published in anthologies such as *The New Negro* and *Fire!!*, she portrayed the African-American experience and the realities of racial division.

James Arthur Baldwin (August 2, 1924 – December 1, 1987)

was an American writer and civil rights activist. He garnered acclaim for his work across several forms, including essays, novels, plays, and poems. His first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, was published in 1953; decades later, *Time* magazine included the novel on its list of the 100 best English-language novels released from 1923 to 2005. His first essay collection, *Notes of a Native Son*, was published in 1955.

Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2000)

The first Black author to win the Pulitzer Prize, Gwendolyn Brooks was a lauded poet, poet laureate of the State of Illinois, and the first Black woman to hold the position of poetry consultant to the Library of Congress.

Her poems in *A Street in Bronzeville* and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Annie Allen* (1949) were “devoted to small, carefully celebrated, terse portraits of the Black urban poor,” commented Richard K. Barksdale in *Modern Black Poets: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Brooks published her first and only novel, *Maud Martha*, in 1953.

Maya Angelou (1928–2014)

Maya Angelou born **Marguerite Annie Johnson**; (April 4, 1928 – May 28, 2014) was an American memoirist, poet, and civil rights activist. She published seven autobiographies, three books of essays, several books of poetry, and is credited with a list of plays, movies, and television shows spanning over 50 years. She received dozens of awards and more than 50 honorary degrees.^[3] Angelou's series of seven autobiographies focus on her childhood and early adult experiences. The first, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), tells of her life up to the age of 17 and brought her international recognition and acclaim.

Chloe Anthony Wofford Morrison (born **Chloe Ardelia Wofford**; February 18, 1931 – August 5, 2019), known as **Toni Morrison**, was an American novelist. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, was published in 1970. The critically acclaimed *Song of Solomon* (1977) brought her national attention and won the National Book Critics Circle Award. In 1988, Morrison won the Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved* (1987); she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993.

Richard Nathaniel Wright (September 4, 1908 – November 28, 1960) was an American author of novels, short stories, poems, and non-fiction. Much of his literature concerns racial themes, especially related to the plight of African Americans during the late 19th to mid-20th centuries suffering discrimination and violence. Literary critics believe his work helped change race relations in the United States in the mid-20th century. Notable works include *Tom's Children*, *Native Son*, *Black Boy*, *The Outsider*.

Alice Walker (1944)

Alice is an American novelist, short story writer, poet, and social activist. In 1982, she published the novel *The Color Purple*, for which she was awarded the National Book Award for hardcover fiction and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

Walker coined the term “womanist” in her short story, *Coming Apart*. Womanism is a social theory based on the history and everyday experiences of women of color, especially Black women.

Ralph Ellison (March 1, 1913 – April 16, 1994) was an American writer, literary critic, and scholar best known for his novel *Invisible Man*, which won the National Book Award in 1953.

Ellison wrote *Shadow and Act* (1964), a collection of political, social, and critical essays, and *Going to the Territory* (1986). *The New York Times* dubbed him "among the gods of America's literary Parnassus".

A posthumous novel, *Juneteenth*, was published after being assembled from voluminous notes Ellison left upon his death.

Octavia E. Butler (1947–2006)

In 1995, Octavia E. Butler made her mark on a genre that had been dominated by white men. She became the first science fiction writer to receive the MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Grant.

She also won the coveted Hugo Award and Nebula Prize twice each for her novella *Bloodchild*, her short story *Speech Sounds*, and her novel *Parable of the Talents*.

Tayari Jones (1970)

is a New York Times best-selling author. Her fourth novel, *An American Marriage*, centers around a middle-class African-American couple, Celestial and Roy, who lives in Atlanta in Georgia. Their lives are torn apart when Roy is wrongfully convicted of rape. The novel was awarded the Women’s Prize for Fiction, appeared on Barack Obama’s summer reading list, and featured in Oprah’s Book Club Selection.

Amanda Gorman (1998)

If you were watching the inauguration of U.S. President Joe Biden on January 20th, you’ll recognize this rising star.

Amanda Gorman is a 22-year-old poet and activist who performed a reading of her poem "The Hill We Climb" at the ceremony marking the start of Biden’s four-year term.

Her work addresses issues of oppression, feminism, race, marginalization, and the African diaspora.

AFRICAN AMERICAN VISUAL ARTS

Art tends to have two effects on us when we view it. The first is the purely aesthetic, the heart-wrenching power of seeing something novel, beautiful, frightening, or unexpected. Second is the theme: that search for meaning that asks, "who made this, and why?" Today we will talk about ten of the most influential Black painters, sculptors, and photographers from the last two hundred years of American history. From breaking down barriers to establishing new cultural canons, these artists have pioneered the portrayal of Black experience in the United States through works that do all of the above: inspiring wonder, hope, and shock in equal volumes.

In response to both historical and contemporary injustices, Black art gives voice to those previously silenced. At the same time, several art movements have celebrated the beauty and flourishing of Black culture.

Notable movements include the Harlem Renaissance of the twenties and thirties, which revived African American music, art, writing, and scholarship. In the sixties and seventies, the Black Arts Movement (BAM) combined activism and art to invoke pride in Black history and culture. Though not predominantly arts-focused, the Black Lives Matter movement has led to large-scale murals and public artworks that at once protest police brutality and convey hope, solidarity, and a colorful reinvention of spaces. Looking forward, Afrofuturism imagines speculative futures and technologies that blossom out from Black experiences.

All this has come from a diverse history: from Romantic landscapes to bold abstraction. Without further ado, let's dive into this journey through the work of ten iconic artists...

Robert Seldon Duncanson (1821-1872)

Robert S. Duncanson was a landscape painter whose work frequently depicted rivers and lakes against glowing, golden sunsets. Associated with both the Hudson River School and the Ohio River Valley tradition, he was the first African American artist to become known internationally.

He had no formal training and taught himself by using other artists' works as reference and sketching outside. His most famous work, *Land of the Lotus Eaters*, has a mythical and Romantic feel. Later in life, he lived in Canada and toured the United Kingdom.

Edmonia Lewis (1844-1907)

Also known by her Native American name, Wildfire, Mary Edmonia Lewis was the first professional African American and Native American sculptor. She grew up in New York then went to college in Ohio, but was met with hostility and racism, being accused of several crimes before leaving.

She found a teacher who helped her learn sculpture, and launched a successful career, making sculptures and busts of abolitionists. However, the praise she received often felt

insincere, and she worried about being taken advantage of. Relocating to Rome, she found more artistic and spiritual freedom, and her career solidified. Her neoclassical style of sculpture, and passion for abolitionist causes, can be seen in many pieces, such as 'Forever Free.

Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859-1937)

Henry Ossawa Tanner was born in Pennsylvania to a bishop and abolitionist father and lived near artist Robert Douglass Jr. who inspired him to become a painter. He went to the Philadelphia Academy of the Fine Arts and studied anatomy intensively. Later, he traveled to Paris, where art circles were more open, and he grew a strong reputation in France.

He painted portraits, seascapes, and increasingly religious works, and became internationally acclaimed. His realist oil paintings are often illuminated in pastel tones, contrasted with moody blues and warm oranges.

James Van Der Zee (1886-1983)

Photographer James Van Der Zee was born in Massachusetts and early on displayed keen musical talent, although by his teenage years he had also built a darkroom in his parent's house. He moved around New York and New Jersey, before settling in Harlem. Van Der Zee founded an art and music conservatory with his sister, and later a photography studio with his wife. Throughout the twenties and thirties, he became well-known, photographing celebrities and his Harlem neighbors alike.

Alma Thomas (1891-1978)

Alma Thomas was born in Georgia to a dress designer and a businessman. After moving to Washington following the Atlanta race riots, she was able to access art classes for the first time. She went on to study fine art at Howard University, where some sources claim she was the first woman in America to earn a Bachelor's in art.

She taught in a school until retirement, but continued to study sculpture and painting, developing her signature style with abstract expressionist and color field influences. Going on to create a number of bright collections, she exhibited her work around the country, finding fame at the age of eighty. Rather than producing explicit social commentary in her works, she wrote that she "sought to concentrate on beauty and happiness."

Augusta Savage (1892-1962)

This iconic sculptor loved to make things from childhood, and after taking a clay modeling class, her passion was cemented. She was awarded a scholarship in New York and completed her four-year course in only three. However, Savage was continuously discriminated against and rejected from further art studies or was unable to afford the high living expenses.

Nonetheless, her sculptures became recognized, and she received commissions from prominent social figures. Her community raised funds for her, and finally, she was able

to attend a school in Paris. On returning to the US, she ran workshops and contributed to the early careers of many significant artists. As her work was often clay or plaster, much of it is missing or has been damaged. Even so, her influence is undeniable, and she is now appreciated as a leader of the Harlem Renaissance.

Aaron Douglas (1889-1979)

Another figurehead of the Harlem Renaissance, in his early years Aaron Douglas took art classes and later went to the University of Nebraska to study Fine Art. He came to Harlem during the height of the Renaissance, where he painted murals and became an art editor and illustrator, bringing attention to racial injustices of the time through his work. His murals became noteworthy, and he was commissioned on several large projects.

Keen to see young Black artists prosper, Douglas was involved in the Harlem Artists Guild and towards the end of his career, he founded a new art department for Fisk University in Tennessee, where he taught until retirement. His African-centered imagery and use of silhouettes creates a sense of unity between African Americans and Africans.

Gordon Parks (1912–2006)

Known for photojournalism, Gordon Parks also directed major films that told the stories of slaves and mistreated Black Americans. He was born to a farming family in Kansas and his early life was deeply affected by segregation and limited opportunities. Still, he taught himself photography skills, and quickly caught the eye of photography clerks, who helped him find work.

He ended up in Chicago, photographing socialites, fashion, and portraits. He joined the FSA (Farm Security Administration) to document the lives of poor communities. One of his best-known photographs, *American Gothic*, shows a cleaner named Ella Watson standing in front of the American flag with a mop.

Later, he took photographs for *Vogue* and *Life* magazine and published books, before consulting on Hollywood films and moving into directing and producing.

Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000)

Referring to his style as “dynamic cubism”, fused with the aesthetics of Harlem, Jacob Lawrence was a painter known for his use of bright colors. After living in foster care and then reconnecting with his mother in Harlem, Jacob attended classes at the Harlem Art Workshop, where he worked with Augusta Savage.

His work mixed stories of the African American struggle during the Great Depression, with bold color and striking shapes. He created long series of paintings to tell stories, such as the "Migration Series", where he showed Black Americans moving away from the rural South. He worked in tempera, screen-prints, and other media.

Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960-1988)

Part of the Neo-expressionist movement, Jean-Michel Basquiat's career had a global impact on the art world. After struggling at school, he and his friend Al Diaz formed a graffiti duo around an invented character, SAMO. He joined a band, created art prolifically, and upcycled clothing.

After his first successful exhibitions, Basquiat quickly gained recognition, befriended fellow artists such as Andy Warhol, and acquired a worldwide art dealer. His work combined visual art, music, fashion, and social commentary at an astounding pace: it is thought he produced over 2,000 pieces of artwork during his short life.

From realism to abstraction, these artists and many, many more have explored and brought awareness to the issues of their time, and expressed each of their unique experiences of the world they lived in. Which of these artworks is your favorite?

African American Music History

African American music cannot be separated from the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the forced transportation of millions of African people across the Atlantic who were then enslaved. The cultures from which they were torn and the conditions into which they were forced both contributed to the sounds of African American music. Many of the instruments historically used in African American music, including the banjo and the drum, have antecedents in African musical instruments, and many features common to African American music likewise have roots in African musical traditions, such as the call and response song form and an immersive approach to singing.

Slaves' lives were restricted in innumerable ways, but among them included limits on literacy and property ownership. Music was therefore passed down orally, and early records of African American music indicate that songs changed frequently, not just from singer to singer, but also from day to day when sung by the same musician. Music was a solace, a community-builder, and voice for hope during enslavement and afterward, in the days of Reconstruction and then Jim Crow.

Although many of them are less well known than their later counterparts, there were plenty of professional African American musicians and singers during Reconstruction, including a group of African American university students, led by their music instructor, and billed as the Fisk Jubilee Singers. They sang African American folk music and religious music, including slave songs, to white audiences, and raised enough money through their ventures to fund a building on campus named, appropriately, Jubilee Hall.

Today we will hear and see some famous musician, singers some you do know and some you might not know:

Marian Anderson (1897 – 1993)

There are few musicians who have had to face the racial adversity that Marian Anderson faced during her life and career. Anderson showed a great talent for singing at a very young age and applied to the Philadelphia Music Academy after graduating from high school – an application which was declined due to the color of her skin. Continuing her studies privately, her musical career blossomed, and she launched a highly successful European singing tour. On her return to the United States, she was invited to perform at the White House by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt.

Louis Armstrong (1901 – 1971)

Having grown up in extreme poverty with an absent father, Louis Armstrong (affectionately known as “Satchmo”) acquired a cornet at a young age with the help of his surrogate family. This clearly sparked something within Armstrong, who had grown up hearing jazz music on the streets of New Orleans. Before long, he was pioneering the transformation of jazz from ensemble music to the solo art form we still recognize today.

Sister Rosetta Tharpe (1915 – 1973)

Commonly known as "The Godmother of Rock & Roll," Sister Rosetta Tharpe was one of the first big stars of gospel music in the late 1930s. It was her somewhat unique style (coupling her spiritual lyrics with electric guitar accompaniment), however, that made her appeal to a whole new audience. Tharpe was one of the first popular recording artists to use heavy distortion on her electric guitar and her song "Strange Things Happening Every Day" became the first gospel record to reach the R&B Top 10 in 1945.

There is no end to the list of huge names who cite Tharpe as an influence (Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry and Johnny Cash to name a few) and she truly helped shape rock and roll as a genre.

Billie Holiday (1915 – 1959)

Born Eleanor Fagan, Billie Holiday grew up in Philadelphia in extreme poverty and endured a very difficult upbringing. Finding her solace in music, Holiday began singing in local clubs as a teenager in her adopted hometown of New York City. It didn't take long for Holiday's talent to be recognized in the jazz world. She broke new ground in the late 30s by becoming the first female African-American vocalist to work with a white orchestra. It was at the end of this decade that Holiday sang and recorded the song "Strange Fruit," (a protest of racism in America, particularly the lynching of African-Americans) which was crucial in the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement.

Billie Holiday impressed audiences around the world with her use of tonal variation and vibrato and unparalleled skill at jazz phrasing until her death at the young age of 44. During her lifetime, Holiday fought racism and sexism – and in the face of great personal adversity blossomed into one of the most revered jazz singers of all time.

Miles Davis (1926 – 1991)

Even among this list of musical talent, there are few people in history who can legitimately be referred to as a "musical genius," but Miles Davis might just be one. Born in Illinois in 1926, Davis traveled to New York City at the age of 18 where he was to study at the prestigious Juilliard School of Music before dropping out in order to become a full-time jazz musician. Davis played nightclubs in the city alongside Charlie "Bird" Parker (with whom he recorded for several years), during which time he developed his unique improvisational style. Albums such as *Birth of the Cool* and *Kind of Blue* followed soon after – the latter becoming the biggest-selling jazz album of all time and cited by most critics as the finest in jazz history.

What set Davis apart was his ability to continually evolve. As Davis himself said: "I have to change. It's like a curse." It was this ability to reinvent himself and push the limits of his own musical style that created his legacy, and he was to become an inspiration for an entire generation of black musicians.

Stevie Wonder (1950 –)

There are few people alive today whose equal importance in the worlds of music and civil rights activism match that of Stevie Wonder. Born Stevland Hardaway Morris and blind since shortly after birth, Stevie Wonder was the very definition of a child prodigy – signing with Motown Records at the tender age of 11 and mastering the piano, harmonica, drums and bass before he was even a teenager. The only way was up for such a prodigious musical talent and Little Stevie Wonder was to become an important pioneer and innovator in the music industry over the course of the following six decades. To date, Stevie Wonder has picked up 25 Grammy Awards, an Oscar, sold over 100 million records worldwide and has been inducted into both the Rock and Roll and Songwriters Halls of Fame.

Aside from his musical achievements, Stevie Wonder has long been active in civil rights movements. The release of his song "Happy Birthday" in 1980, followed by tireless campaigning, led directly to the establishment of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day in 1986. Wonder was also a key figure in the abolishment of the Apartheid regime in South Africa in the late 80s, publicly supporting Nelson Mandela with the result of his music being banned in the country for several years. It is a mark of his accomplishments outside of music that the United Nations named Wonder a UN Messenger of Peace in 2009.

Michael Jackson (1958 – 2009)

The “King of Pop,” Michael Jackson experienced a level of fame that no other musician will likely ever come close to. Joining his brothers to form what eventually become the Jackson 5 at the age of five, Michael Jackson had his first number one with the group at just 11 years old. Three more number one singles ensued before Michael Jackson went solo in 1971.

As a solo artist, there is very little that Michael Jackson didn't achieve. Such was his soaring popularity following the release of his album *Thriller*, Jackson broke the MTV color barrier (an unspoken policy of "cultural apartheid") in 1983 with "Billie Jean" becoming the first song to receive heavy rotation on the network. During a live performance of the song later that year, Jackson debuted what would become his signature dance move, the moonwalk. His iconic dancing, coupled with his singing and, of course, his incredible songwriting made Jackson the ultimate entertainer and set a new benchmark for pop stars who would come after him.

The cultural impact of Michael Jackson cannot be understated either. During his career, Michael Jackson continually raised awareness of world issues – most notably helping to raise over \$60 million for famine relief in Africa, and he is commonly cited as the most philanthropic pop star in history. Jackson had a vision of the world coming together in peace and harmony. His intention was to create music that would change the world for the better. In spite of his personal troubles and the controversies that surrounded him later in life, most would agree that he achieved that.