African American Studies Research Guide: Biography

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Contents

A collection of reference tools that identify notable African Americans. Includes subscription resources, reference books, and websites.

Black History Month Poster

2015 National Black History Month Poster, "A Century of Black Life, History and Culture", courtesy of DiversityStore.com

Book Covers

100 Greatest African Americans: A Biographical Encyclopedia
Black Heroes

Black Women in America

The Book of African-American Women: 150 Crusaders, Creators, and Uplifters

Great African American Women

Icons of African American Protest: Trailblazing Activists of the Civil Rights Movement
Icons of Black America: Breaking Barriers and Crossing Boundaries


Notable Black American Men. Book II

Notable Black American Women

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General Biography Tools

**Biography and Genealogical Master Index**: An online index which helps identify which biographical tools have entries on your favorite person. Indexes more than 2000 biographical reference sources, providing access to more than 9.2 million citations on approximately 3 million contemporary and historical figures. The database covers a wide range of current biographical sources as well as the most important retrospective sources.

**Biography Index Past and Present** (1946 to date): Search biographical material from ALL WilsonWeb periodicals databases—with just this one database! Biography Index cites biographical articles appearing in any of more than 3,000 periodicals indexed in other Wilson databases, plus select other titles. What’s more, some 2,000 current books of individual and collective biography are cited each year, as well as biographical material in otherwise non-biographical books... Besides biographies and autobiographies, you’ll find citations to interviews, obituaries, collections of letters, diaries, memoirs, juvenile literature, book reviews, bibliographies and exhibition reviews. People covered range from antiquity to the present and represent all fields and nationalities.

**African American Biography Tools**

**African American National Biography**


This encyclopedia provides the most complete treatment to date of the accomplishments of African American scientists—and the struggles of African Americans to find their place in the scientific community.

**African American Biographical Database (AABD)**

[Alexandria, Va. ?] : Chadwyck-Healey, Inc., c1997. Note: only available in the Library of Michigan Genealogical Collection (2 S) in downtown Lansing: A resource of first resort when you are looking for biographical information, including photographs and illustrations, for African Americans. From the famous to the everyday person, AABD includes profiles and full-text sketches providing both biographical detail and illuminating narratives chronicling the lives of Black Americans. Each text used in the African American Biographical Database has been fully digitized so that in addition to searching for specific biographic sketches, you essentially have direct access to a rich collection of African American reference works, many of which are rare books.

**African Americans in science : an encyclopedia of people and progress**


This encyclopedia provides the most complete treatment to date of the accomplishments of African American scientists—and the struggles of African Americans to find their place in the scientific community.

**African American Lives / PBS**

Building on the program's theme of searching for lost history, the Web site for African-American Lives 2 provides information about the series, background on the research, scholarship, and science, and resources for people to learn more about their own family history and genealogy.

**African American National Biography**

A joint project of the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard University and Oxford University Press. 8 volumes. Reference (1 Center) E185.96 .A446 2008

Covering a broader range of African American lives than ever before, the African American National Biography presents history through a mosaic of the lives of 4,100 individuals, some known throughout the world and others all but forgotten, illuminating the abiding influence of African Americans on the life of this nation through the immediacy of personal experience. We include not only great and famous African Americans, but a selection that will be representative of the scope of African American experience.

**African-American Political Leaders**


Offering a wealth of useful information, this book profiles more than 185 political leaders. Each enlightening biographical entry concentrates on the events in that person’s life related to his or her accomplishments in politics and includes a list of further reading on that person. An introduction, bibliography, subject indexes, general index, and 52 photographs round out the .

**African American Women : A Biographical Dictionary**


Three hundred African American women who "made significant contributions to social reform, politics, arts and entertainment, religion, business, education and the professions from colonial times to the present" are the subject of this volume The signed entries are alphabetically arranged and vary in length from several paragraphs to eight pages. The articles discuss the woman's family, education, career background, and the significance of her achievements. An annotated bibliography follows each entry Some of the
women are little known, and information about them has come from oral histories, interviews, and manuscripts. The strength of this dictionary lies in its coverage of these lesser-known people. For example, there are entries for religious leader Lillian Coffey, social worker and physician Catharine Leattad, and Sarah Walker, the first black woman millionaire. Historical figures are included, but the emphasis is on the achievements of twentieth-century women. The majority of the women are associated with civil rights activities, organizations (e.g., NAACP), education, the arts, and politics, but other areas such as sports, aviation, and union leadership are covered. All entries are organized by career category in a useful index. There is also a general index and an insert of black-and-white photographs.

**Biography.com.** Click on the search icon and type in "famous african americans" to retrieve notable legal and political figures, scientists and educators, activists, artists and writers, athletes, entertainers, musicians and singers.


**Black Heroes** / Jessie Carney Smith, [editor] ; foreword by Nikki Giovanni. Detroit, MI : Visible Ink Press, 2001. 733pp. Main Library E185.96 .B593 2001 : Smith (humanities, Fisk University, Nashville) profiles African-American men and women from a variety of positions in life and different parts of the 20th century to bring their stories to wider attention. Most are from entertainment or politics, but others represent education, writing, art, law, science, medicine, and other fields.

**Black Women in America** / Darlene Clark Hine, editor in chief. New York : Oxford University Press, 2005. 2nd edition, 3 vols. Reference (1 Center) E185.86 .B542 2005 : Winner of the Dartmouth Medal for Outstanding Reference Publication of 1994, the first edition of Black Women in America broke new ground – pulling together for the first time all of the research in this vast but underrepresented field to provide one of the strongest building blocks of Black Women's Studies. Since the first edition was published, a new generation of American black women has flourished, demanding this landmark reference be brought up to date. Women such as Venus and Serena Williams, Condoleezza Rice, Carol Moseley Braun, Ruth Simmons, and Ann Fudge have become household names for their remarkable contributions to sports, politics, academia, and business. In nearly 600 entries, Black Women in America celebrates the remarkable achievements of black women throughout history, highlights their ongoing contributions in America today, and represents the new research the first edition helped to generate. 1st edition available too in both Biography Alcove and in Oversize Collection (Basement, Center) and in the Main Library stacks.


**Contemporary Black Biography.** Detroit : Gale Research Inc., c1992-to date. 84 volumes through 2011. Now part of the Gale Virtual Library


**Facts on File Encyclopedia of Black Women in America** / Darlene Clark Hine, editor ; Kathleen Thompson, associate editor. New York : Facts on File, c1997. 11 vols. Reference (1 Center) E185.86 .F2 1997 : This 11-volume set features biographical information on about 950 well-known and lesser-known African American women in a variety of fields and professions, as well as historical information about 100 institutions. Each subject volume is organized alphabetically by surname or organization and includes an introductory chapter, chronology (most covering through 1995), bibliography, index, black-and-white photographs, and content information about the entire set. The volume on law and government, for example, includes newsmakers such as Barbara Jordan, Shirley Chisholm, Carol Moseley-Braun, and Anita Hill, while Science, Health, and Medicine features Rebecca Lee Crumpler, considered to be the first black female physician; former Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders; and Henrietta Lacks, the young cancer patient after whom HeLa cells were named. Although the entries are well-written and -researched, information about contributing editors was not included, and direct quotations lack footnotes. Still, this richly personal and readable resource gives the lay audience at which it is clearly aimed a 400-year perspective on the achievement of black women in America, providing inspiration and insight to people of varying backgrounds and ages.


**Great Black Heroes.** This site looks as many of the Black heroes in the course of history, pioneers and ground breakers in different fields, and brings recognition to those who have worked to overcome obstacles to become heroes. The site includes profiles of each hero, as well as podcasts and videos. We hope that you find this site useful and would love to hear comments and suggestions. Courtesy of Gaius Chamberlain.

**Great Black Inventors.** Achievements by Black inventors can be seen as far back as ancient Africa but much of society has no idea that many of the products or devices that make their everyday lives more enjoyable are the result of the hard work and ingenuity of Blacks. Courtesy of the Black Inventor Online Museum.

**Icons of African American Protest : Trailblazing Activists of the Civil Rights Movement** Gladys L. Knight. Westport, Conn. : Greenwood Press, 2009. 2 volumes. Reference (1 Center) E185.96 .K56 2009 : Protest has always been a catalyst for change. It is the cornerstone of America's own birth. Did not the first immigrants help America take its first steps upon the road to greatness when they long ago protested against the oppression of their native government and established new edicts promoting the ideals of freedom and opportunity? Since the first African slave was forced to board a ship bound for this continent, protest has been a major motif in the African American experience. It was a critical weapon during the raging violence against blacks following the end of Reconstruction, the Jim Crow years, and against the grisly conditions in the ghettos in the North. Throughout history protest has been used to combat economic and political oppression, racism, discrimination, and exclusion from mainstream America. Icons of African American Protest reveals the extraordinary strength, courage, and sacrifice displayed by individuals for the cause of freedom and civil rights. The 24 leaders showcased here cover a broad spectrum of descriptors-vibrant, tame, intense, aggressive, and diffident-and their politics ran the gamut from conservative to ultra-radical. Nevertheless, whatever techniques, modes, or tactics employed—such as Thurgood Marshall's legal fights in the court room, Dr. King's reliance on nonviolent civil disobedience and direct action, and Huey P. Newton's advocacy for armed self-defense—they were all, in their time, radicals who strove to eradicate racism and the climate of exclusion.

**Icons of Black America : Breaking Barriers and Crossing Boundaries** Matthew C. Whitaker, editor. Santa Barbara, Calif. : Greenwood, 2001. 3 v. [vols. 1112, p. ii]: ill. online. E185.96 .J26 2011 Online : In this three-volume set, Whitaker (historical, philosophical, and religious studies, Arizona State U.) collects profiles of 100 successful and influential African American people, groups, and organizations. Ranging from the late nineteenth century to the present and in alphabetical order, entries present the life and legacy of the icons and how they have shaped and been shaped by American culture. They include Muhammad Ali, Maya Angelou, the Apollo Theater, Louis Armstrong, Arthur Ashe, Halle Berry, Bill Cosby, George Washington Carver, Angela Davis, Frederick Douglass, Louis Farrakhan, the Harlem Globetrotters, Zora Neale Hurston, Michael Jackson, Quincy Jones, Spike Lee, Hattie McDaniel, Motown Records, Barack Obama, Rosa Parks, Richard Pryor, Spelman College, Nat Turner, and Oprah Winfrey. An index is provided in the third volume only.

**Notable Black American Men** / Jessie Carney Smith, editor. Detroit : Gale Research, 1998. 1365pp. Reference (1 Center) E185.86 .N68 1998 : Covering nearly three centuries, it gives biographies of 500 men who are or were pioneers, entrepreneurs, businessmen, creative figures, leaders for social justice, major governmental or
Notable Black American Men. Book II / Jessie Carney Smith, editor. Detroit : Thomson Gale, c2007. 827pp. Reference (1 Center) E185.86 .N682 2007 : This collection of about 300 biographies joins the 500 of the first volume in the series, continuing the project to gain recognition for the accomplishments of men like Archie Alphonso Alexander, whose large-scale engineering projects included airfields, Todd Duncan, whose opera career included leading roles and the mentoring and teaching of dozens of singers, and Lewis Sheridan Leary, who never lived to see his dream of abolition. Entries also include period photographs and illustrations, chronologies and references including print and online resources and, when available, collections of primary documents. The geographic, occupation and subject indices are particularly well done.


Oxford Companion to African American Literature presents more than 400 biographies of authors, critics, literary characters, and historical figures, and 150 plot summaries of major works. A breathtaking achievement, it covers an enormous range of writers - from Sojourner Truth to Frederick Douglass, Ralph Ellison to Toni Morrison. It contains entries on major works (including synopses of novels) and also incorporates information on literary characters, as well as on character types such as Aunt Jemima and Brer Rabbit. Icons of black culture are addressed, including Muhammad Ali, John Coltrane, Marcus Garvey, Jackie Robinson, John Brown, and Harriet Tubman. There are general articles on poetry, fiction, and drama; on autobiography, slave narratives, Sunday School literature, and oratory; as well as on a wide spectrum of related topics.

PBS Jazz Biographies. This web site from PBS, the Public Broadcasting Service, contains almost 100 African-American biographies mainly on jazz from the New Grove Dictionary of Jazz.

People of the Underground Railroad: a Biographical Dictionary / Tom Calarco. Westport, Conn. : Greenwood Press, 2008. 377pp. Main Library E450 .C38 2008 : This volume is the largest in-depth collection of profiles of those individuals involved in the spirtng of black slaves to freedom in the northern states and Canada beginning around 1800 and lasting to the wild Card Civil years. One hundred entries introduce people who had a significant role in the rescuing, harboring, or conducting of the fugitives—from abolitionists, evangelical ministers, Quakers, philanthropists, lawyers, judges, physicians, journalists, educators, to novelists, feminists, and barbers—as well as notable runaways. The selections are geographically representative of the broad railroad network. The book presents authoritative information gathered from the latest research and established sources, many of them period publications. Numerous sidebars complement the entries, and a timeline, illustrations, and maps help put the profiles into context.

Voices of historical and contemporary Black American pioneers/ Vernon L. Farmer, editor-in-chief ; Evelyn Shepherd-Wynn, associate editor ; in collaboration with Lisa Pertlirr Brevard and in consultation with Ernesta Pendleton Williams ; foreword, Benjamin S. Carson Sr. ; afterword, Guion S. "Guy" Bluford, Jr. Santa Barbara, Calif. : Praeger, c2012. 4 volumes. Main Library E185.96 .V65 2012 : Farmer and Shepherd Wynn are both affiliated with Grambling State U., in educational leadership and English, respectively. They have assembled an unusual reference consisting of a combination of historical essays about outstanding Black achievers and leaders, and personal essays by distinguished contemporary Black individuals. The personal essays range in length from a few pages to memoirs of over 50 pages, and they emphasize each person's path to success--finding role models and support and overcoming obstacles. These engaging writings speak directly to a broad audience of students (high school and above) and educators. Each essay includes a thumbnail b&w photo, making this compendium feel alive and current. The reference consists of four volumes (paged and indexed separately) devoted, respectively, to medicine and science; law and government; aviation, armed forces, and astronautics; and education, social sciences, and humanities. The editors supply supporting material.

The WPA Slave Narratives are an extremely well-known source on conditions for African Americans under slavery. However, there are many other narratives by former slaves, and these texts are less widely known. Examples in Special Collections:


The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Narrated by Himself. London: Charles Gilpin, 1852.

The Narrative of Lunsford Lane; Formerly of Raleigh, N.C., Embracing an Account of His Early Life, Redemption by Purchase of Himself and Family from Slavery, and His Banishment from the Place of His Birth for the Crime of Wearing a Colored Skin. Boston: printed for the publisher, 1848.


The Rev. J.W. Loguen, as a Slave and as a Freeman, a Narrative of Real Life. Syracuse, NY: J.G.K. Truair, 1859.

Erik Ponder

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Amistad Research Center, Tulane University Has a catalog of their African-American, African, and ethnic minority archives, and information on the library, museum, African art. Based in New Orleans, Louisiana. http://www.tulane.edu/~amistad. Archive-It Website from the Internet Archive, founded by Brewster Kahle, which archives web pages from state archives and university libraries. African Studies Has a research guide for African Studies. Links to the faculty Committee on African and African-American Studies. http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/su/afr/. University of Connecticut Libraries. This research guide offers resources on topics in African American Studies with an emphasis on history, music (including hip-hop), literature, and certain key personalities. Last updated 07/16/2018. Articles. E-Black Studies Includes information on African American Studies degree programs and journals and a list of African American organizations. Features a section dedicated to Malcolm X. Also included are several e-books, such as. Introduction to Afro-American Studies: A Peoples College Primer, conference presentations, and various video lectures on topics in African American Studies. Author biographies are also included.
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