

April 4th, 1928 — May 28th, 2014

Maya Angelou

"Develop enough courage so that you can stand up for yourself and then stand up for somebody else."

Poetry and civil rights activism came together in the life of Maya Angelou. From her childhood years in the Depression-era South, her lifework took her to protests with Martin Luther King and journalist assignments covering the decolonization of Egypt. Wherever she went, Angelou's words spoke truth to the power structures inherent in society, empowering a generation of Black authors to do the same

Submitted by: Courtney Cabell



August 30, 1948 – December 4, 1969

"You have to understand that people have to pay the price for peace. If you dare to struggle, you dare to win. If you dare not to struggle then god damn it, you don't deserve to win."

Fred Hampton



A precocious activist, Fred Hampton became involved with the Black Panther chapter as a teenager in Illinois, mobilizing community members of all races in the struggle for Black liberation. First ruled a justifiable killing, his death at the hands of the police has been widely recognized as an FBI-led assassination, speaking to the severity of government interference in the civil rights movement and its hostility towards Black liberation.

Submitted by: Antonio Santa Maria



If there was ever a poet laureate of critical theory, bell hooks would be a strong contender. Her works explored such topics as intersectionality and queer theory, giving rich and evocative language to academic concepts and elevating the lived experiences of marginalized groups. She embodied the most important task of the poet: to inspire consciousness-raising in her audience, thereby empowering them to be better citizens.

Submitted by: Aber Abdulle

September 25, 1952 – December 15, 2021

"Since we live in a society that promotes faddism and temporary superficial adaptation of different values, we are easily convinced that changes have occurred in arenas where there has been little or no change."

"

bell hooks

The field of cellular biology would not be where it is today without the profound, but unknowing, contribution of Henrietta Lacks. In 1951, Lacks was admitted to a hospital and diagnosed with cancer. Without her or her family's knowledge, cell samples were taken from her body, and were found to be unusually capable of reproducing. Today, these cells are used by thousands of researchers around the world, but no formal recognition or compensation has been given to Lacks or her family.

Submitted by: Derrick Sebree Jr



August 1, 1920 – October 4, 1951

"They made millions! It's not fair! She's the most important person in the world and her family living in poverty. If our mother so important to science, why can't we get health insurance?" — Lawrence Lacks, son

Henrietta Lacks

Ralph Ellison

March 1st, 1913— April 16th, 1994

"Our task then is always to challenge the apparent forms of reality—that is, the fixed meaning and values of the few—and to struggle with it until it reveals its mad, vari-implicated chaos, its false faces, and on until it surrenders its insight, its truth."

A novelist and literary scholar, Ralph Ellison wrote his novel 'Invisible Man' to explore the African-American search for identity in a society which seeks to erase it. He became a part of the Black literary scene of 1950s Harlem, and was celebrated as one of the most important Black authors of his time.

Submitted by: Farid Alsabeh

Bio written by: Farid Alsabeh



May 19, 1925 – February 21, 1965

"We cannot think of uniting with others, until after we have first united among ourselves. We cannot think of being acceptable to others until we have first proven acceptable to ourselves."

Malcolm X



Taking his last name as a symbol for the erasure of his ancestral history, Malcom X emerged as one of the leading figures of the civil rights movement. His impassioned speeches and calls for active resistance against police violence gave a voice to the disenfranchised masses, and he remains an influential figure in the ongoing struggle for Black liberation.

Submitted by: Logan D. Chappell
Bio written by: Farid Alsabeh



A mathematician by training, Katherine Johnson was the first Black woman to be integrated into West Virginia's graduate schools. Continuing her streak as a pioneer, she then went on to provide trajectory analysis and other calculations crucial for NASA's space program. The quality of her work rivaled the best computers of her time, and contributed to the successes of United States during the Space Race.

Submitted by: Audra Crawford
Bio written by: Farid Alsabeh

August 26, 1918 – February 24, 2020

"Follow your passion. Whatever you're doing, do your best at all times and make it as correct as possible. Work as if someone is watching you. Then you'll be prepared when an opportunity presents itself. And you'll have the answers."

Katherine Johnson

Social progress is accomplished when members of marginalized groups dare to live fully. Marsha P. Johnson was one such person. Widely regarded as an important figure in the Stonewall riots, Johnson subsequently provided support to homeless queer youth in the Manhattan area, and also became a leading advocate for humane care of HIV-patients.

Submitted by: Jared William Boot
Bio written by: Farid Alsabeh



August 24, 1945 – July 6, 1992

"History isn't something you look back at and say it was inevitable, it happens because people make decisions that are sometimes very impulsive and of the moment, but those moments are cumulative realities."

Marsha P. Johnson

Condoleezza Rice

November 14, 1954 —

"I worry about the fact that in K-12 education, I can look at your zip code and tell whether or not you're going to get a good education."

The first female African-American Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice made her mark in the field of international relations by developing what became known as transformational diplomacy, an effort to help foreign countries develop their potential for democracy and protecting human rights.

Submitted by: Kimberly FD
Written by: Farid Alsabeh



August 10, 1952 —

“Libraries are a cornerstone of democracy — where information is free and equally available to everyone. People tend to take that for granted, and they don’t realize what is at stake when that is put at risk.”

Carla Hayden



If you ever find yourself lost in the halls of the Library of Congress, Carla Hayden will be the first person you'll look for. The first female, as well as the first African-American, to be selected as the librarian for this prestigious Library, Hayden has served as a spokesperson for the importance of free and open access to information, which ensures the existence of an informed and politically-conscious populace.

Submitted by: The MSP librarians

Written by: Farid Alsabeh



As a young child, Okoye fiddled on the keys of her home piano — thirty years later, she would be awarded a fellowship from the Guggenheim. Her music provides audiences with insightful and passionate expositions on the challenges facing the Black community, ranging from systemic disparities in health care to the problem of police brutality.

Submitted by: Jana Thompkins
Written by: Farid Alsabeh

July 18, 1972 —

"How does this happen in our society?" It is the question asked whenever another unarmed Black man is shot, but not as often with the more mundane—the everyday interactions that lead to failures in our system: education, employment, and ... medical treatment."

Nkeiru Okoye

It was Alicia Garza's 2013 tweet in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's killer that led, along with the efforts of two other activists, to the Black Lives Matter movement. Since then, Garza has served as the head of the Black Futures Lab, which works to transform and empower Black communities. Her public appearances, which include a recent movie feature, have increased the visibility of and support for anti-racism.

Submitted by: Jasmine Perin
Bio written by: Farid Alsabeh



Alicia Garza

January 4, 1981 —

“When people come together to solve problems, they do not automatically become immune to the ways society and the economy are organized. We bring the things that shape us, consciously and unconsciously, everywhere we go. Unless we are intentional about interrupting what we've learned, we will perpetuate it, even as we are working hard for a better world.”