

**You Can
Thank
a Black
Woman**



Behind every movement, revolution, discovery, and culture shift in American history, Black women have been at the forefront. History has chosen not to remember these women and so often we forget. *You Can Thank a Black Woman* is inspired by the many women who have argued, written, sang, ran, and fought for change. We have selected eight women who have changed America for the better—whose names we should all know. Our hope is that sharing a small piece of this larger narrative will inspire you to do the research, and recognize, and thank the Black women who have, and continue to make this country a better, more equitable place.



Shirley Chisholm

1924-2005

Politician, educator, author, and activist, Shirley Chisholm was the first African-American woman elected to Congress and the first to run for president of the United States. Born to immigrant parents in New York, Chisholm began her career as a teacher, witnessing firsthand the inequality that children, women, and Black people faced in her community. She entered politics in the late 1950s and became the first Black woman elected to Congress when she won her seat in 1964. While in Congress, Chisholm focused on housing and economic inequality and civil rights. In 1972, she ran for president on her platform of “Unbought and Unbossed,” but faced many hurdles based on her sex and race and wasn’t even allowed to participate in debates. Ultimately she received just 10% of the vote. Chisholm worked in Congress until 1983 when she went on to teach and establish the National Political Congress of Black Women and was best known as “Fighting Shirley” until she died in 2005.

Thank her for *being the first and not the last.*

Grace Jones

b. 1948

A Jamaica-born triple-threat (she's a model, singer, and actress), Grace Jones bucked gender and racial norms throughout her career. At 13, Jones moved to Syracuse, N.Y., where her strict father worked as a Pentecostal minister, so Jones spent most of her time with her grandmother and her grandmother's husband, who regularly beat Jones and her siblings. Jones defied her repressive religious family by wearing makeup, drinking, and frequenting gay clubs. In 1970, she became a model in Paris, where her stark, androgynous look and flattop hairstyle caught the eye of Yves St. Laurent—not to mention *Elle*, *Vogue*, and Andy Warhol. She signed with Island Records and produced a spate of now legendary albums, including *Warm Leatherette*, *Nightclubbing*, and, after her 1982 album, *Living My Life*, she starred opposite Roger Moore in the James Bond movie, *A View to a Kill*. More recently, she made a song for *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay—Part 1* soundtrack, published a memoir, and the February 2022 issue of *British Vogue* credited Jones as the inspiration for its cover story, proving once again that Jones is a timeless icon.

Thank her for *avant-garde style, music, and boldness that helped pave the way for today's top Black, boundary-pushing female artists.*





Sojourner Truth

1797-1883

Born into slavery in 1797 as Isabella Bomfree, Sojourner Truth spent her life fighting for abolition and women's rights after escaping to freedom with her infant daughter. As an itinerant preacher in the 1830s, she brushed elbows with some of the greatest thinkers of the age like Frederick Douglass and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. With a towering six-foot frame and a gentle voice, Truth captivated audiences at speaking engagements across the country. By the 1850s, she was considered one of the most powerful orators of her time and gave her famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech at the 1851 Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio. Despite being unable to read or write, and Dutch as her first language, Truth's words have been published, performed, and quoted over the past 250 years and her impact continues to be felt to this day.

Thank her for *showing the world what women are capable of.*



Wilma Rudolph

1940-1994

The “fastest woman in the world,” Wilma Rudolph was born to a large family in Saint Bethlehem, Tenn., in 1940. Her childhood was plagued by bouts of scarlet fever and polio and, despite a doctor’s prediction that she would never walk as a result of the polio, Rudolph was out of leg braces by age 11. It was during high school that Rudolph discovered her love of running and began competing at the collegiate level. Rudolph first ran in the 1956 Olympics where she won a bronze medal in the 4x100 race. When she came back for the 1960 Olympics in Rome, she won three gold medals, breaking several world records to become the first American woman to win gold for three events during a single Olympic Games. Rudolph famously refused to attend a parade thrown in her honor because the crowd would have been segregated.

Thank her for setting a new standard for female athletes in America.





Stacey Abrams

b. 1973

Lawyer, politician, voting rights activist... romance novelist? Stacey Abrams refuses to be categorized neatly. Her complexity and dexterity make her one of the most compelling figures in American politics today, as well as the eight romance novels she's written under the pen name Selena Montgomery. Through Fair Fight Action, the organization she founded to register voters—and ensure their turnout—Abrams famously helped turn Georgia blue during the 2020 election and secure the run-off Senate election for two state Democrats. Continuing her fight against voter suppression in Georgia, she notably refused to concede her 2018 gubernatorial loss to Brian Kemp, and is running again this year. The election is on November 8, 2022, and will be one to watch.

You can thank her for *keeping up the grassroots fight for voting rights, even when Congress failed to pass the Voting Rights Act.*



bell hooks

1952-2021

Born Gloria Jean Watkins in segregated Kentucky, she later adapted the name bell hooks (all lowercase)—a name borrowed from her grandmother. hooks was a lifelong professor, author, activist, and feminist who attended Stanford University and earned her M.A. in English from the University of Wisconsin in Madison. She penned her first book, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, during graduate school and published it before completing her doctorate. Before her death on December 15, 2021, she had published around 40 books that advanced the scholarship on love, race, Black womanhood, patriarchy, sexuality, and feminism. She taught everywhere from Stanford to Yale and founded the bell hooks Institute at Berea College in Berea, K.Y. In 2020, she was named one of *Time* magazine's 100 Women of the Year and remains one of—if not *the*—preeminent writers and scholars of the Black female experience.

Thank her for *pivotal, prolific writing that pushed contemporary feminist movements to include the Black experience.*





Mae Jemison

b. 1956

Mae Jemison has lived many lives. A doctor, engineer, astronaut, children's book author, and *Star Trek* guest star, Jemison has done it all. A life-long science enthusiast, Jemison was struck at a young age by the lack of female astronauts, and decided she would go to space one day. After graduating high school at 16, Jemison pursued a degree in chemical engineering from Stanford before attending medical school at Cornell. She worked as a doctor with the Peace Corps for many years before applying to NASA in 1985. Two years later, she was selected to be a part of NASA Astronaut Group 12, which went to space as the STS-47 crew in 1992 on *The Endeavor*. *The Endeavor* spent eight days orbiting Earth, making Jemison the first African-American woman in space. Since her return to Earth, Jemison has worked as a professor, a writer, and a business owner, and was inducted into the Women's Hall of Fame in 1993.

Thank her for *breaking barriers—in every sense of the word.*



Marsha P. Johnson

1945-1992

Marsha P. Johnson was born Malcom Michaels Jr. in Elizabeth, N.J., in 1945. After a brief stint in the Navy after high school, Johnson moved to Greenwich Village where she became a well-known drag queen and fixture in New York's LGBTQ community. Often referred to as the "drag mother," she made a point to help homeless LGBTQ youth in New York and New Jersey before any real services were available. Aside from her illustrious drag career, Johnson is best known for her role in the 1969 Stonewall Riots where she and other gay rights activists fought off the police during a raid of the Stonewall Inn, a popular gay bar in the city. Johnson was recognized as an instigator of the resistance, which solidified her role as a gay rights activist. After Stonewall, Johnson created the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) group, which served homeless LGBTQ youth in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles during the '70s.

Thank her for *PRIDE*.



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