

BLACK HISTORY MONTH 2012: CELEBRATING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

African Americans have played a central role in all aspects of American life, serving in every walk of life, sacrificing in every armed conflict, and contributing in every way to the growth and the dynamic culture and economy of this nation.

February is Black History Month. This year's theme, "Black Women in American Culture and History," recognizes the many, often untold, contributions of African American women.

Maya Angelou reflected about the role of black women in American life: "No black American man at any time in our history in the United States has been able to feel that he didn't need that black woman right against him, shoulder to shoulder -- in that cotton field, on the auction block, in the ghetto, wherever."

The contributions and accomplishments of African American women to our nation's history offer some enriching and inspiring stories of individual achievement and personal courage. To highlight just a few:

Charlotta Bass was a pioneering publisher of the California Eagle, a weekly African American newspaper in Los Angeles. As a journalist from 1912 until her death in 1966, Ms. Bass was an early pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and the Women's Liberation Movement. Her newspaper also chronicled the concerns of local businesses and labor activists. An outspoken voice for international peace, Ms. Bass faced investigation by the FBI and the California Legislature's "Un-American Activities" committee.

Mary McLeod Bethune was an educator, civil rights activist, and pioneering government official who served as a policy advisor in the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and an influential voice in his "Black cabinet." She also founded Bethune-Cookman College for African American girls, now Bethune-Cookman University, in Daytona Beach, FL. Ms. Bethune founded the National Council of Negro Women, which today unites four million women worldwide and funds programs to combat poverty and encourage women in leadership.

Althea Gibson was an international tennis champion and competitor on the Ladies Professional Golf tour who broke color and gender barriers in the international athletic arena. Ms. Gibson is sometimes referred to as the "Jackie Robinson" of tennis for becoming the first African American to be rated number one in the world. She also won the singles title twice at both the Wimbledon and U.S. Open tennis tournaments.

These women's stories offer but a few insights into the lives of great Americans and their contributions. There are many resources available to learn more about the contributions of African Americans, as well as celebrations of this month's annual observance of Black History Month. Among them are: [California African American Museum](#); [PBS 2012 Black History Month](#); [KQED Black History Month Guide](#); [Oakland Museum of California](#); [Community Events in Oakland](#); and [San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society](#).