

Black History Daily Doses

February 15th



Bessie Smith

Listen while you read! You can hear her music by clicking on [Downhearted Blues](#), there is an imbedded link, or you can find more of her music [here](#).

Bessie Smith, also known as “Empress of the Blues,” was a Jazz Singer that helped shape the 20th century music scene. She began her recording career in 1923, signing with Columbia Records. Columbia Records established a “race records” series that consisted exclusively of African American artists, which Smith’s records were a part of. After World War II, the term race records was replaced with “rhythm and blues.”

Her first single “[Downhearted Blues](#)” helped her label, Columbia Records, out of a financial slump in 1923. She was considered the first African American superstar and was the highest paid African American artist working in music of her time. She sang specifically about living a life as a young, black, poor woman and this would influence artists in generations to come. Her final recordings were in 1933 with producer John Hammond. She influenced some of the most prominent vocalists such as Billi Holiday, and most recently, Queen Latifah, Salt-N-Pepa, and TLC.

Unfortunately, the Great Depression cut her record career short. However, she never stopped performing. She was in the Broadway musical, *Pansy*, in 1929. Also, that year, she made her only film appearance in *St. Louis Blues*.

Three of her recordings were inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame: “Empty Bed Blues” (recorded in 1928, inducted in 1983); “St. Louis Blues” (recorded in 1925, inducted in 1993); and “Downhearted Blues” (recorded in 1923, inducted in 2006).

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Dr. Bre Slay (Advocacy Subcommittee) and Dr. Liz Muenks and Dr. Hannah Katz (Diversity Committee Co-chairs)

Black History Daily Doses

February 16th



Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club Parade Krewe Mardi Gras 2021

Today marks Mardi Gras or “Fat Tuesday” for 2021. New Orleans receives an average of 11 million visitors each year for Mardi Gras a celebratory tradition said to begin in 1699 (the first American Mardi Gras). Enslaved and free black people were excluded from participation except as float drivers and flambeau carriers. After the civil war, black Benevolent Societies began to form; these were the first forms of insurance in the black community, where for a small amount in dues, members received financial help when sick and to bury deceased members. Each ward had its own group or “Club” which eventually came together to form the Zulus. Segregation laws forced black Mardi Gras Krewe to parade along the “back streets” into black neighborhoods. Due to a lack of access and financial backing, Zulu Krewe could not afford beads and other throws, so they threw coconuts. These coconuts or “golden nuggets” remain connected to the Zulu krewe and are often painted, glittered, and designed; they are one of the most coveted Mardi Gras throws one can catch! The Zulu organizations presence has been controversial as they were demeaned in the 1960s by Black civil rights leaders who expressed disdain at their dressing in grass skirts and wearing black makeup similar to black face makeup. This issue arose again in the early 2010s as many public figure’s blackface scandals surfaced. The Zulu krewe responded, “Those who incorrectly compare our use of black makeup to ‘blackface’ minstrelsy can first look to our name to dispel that notion...unlike minstrelsy, which was designed to ridicule and mock black people, the founders of our Social Aid & Pleasure Club chose the name ‘Zulu’ to honor their African ancestry and the continent’s most fierce warriors.” Beyond the intent, similar to the limited access to beads, the Zulu’s also had limited financial access to masks (which are legally required to be worn by any person parading) which made makeup the only option available to members at the time. The Zulu’s continue to demonstrate the importance of holding on to traditions and history as many of them had been stripped from enslaved Africans. The Zulu parade occurs every year at 8am on Mardi Gras, they maintain their routes through the black neighborhoods on the back streets and New Orleans and are one the most highly attended parades during carnival season.

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Black History Daily Doses

February 17th



Hattie McDaniel

McDaniel was born on June 10, 1893, in Wichita, Kansas, with some sources listing her year of birth as 1895. She was the youngest of 13 children in her family. In 1901, McDaniel and her family moved to Denver, Colorado. There she attended the 24th Street Elementary School, where she was one of only two Black students in her class. She enjoyed singing in church, at school and in her home.

In the 1920s, McDaniel worked with Professor George Morrison's orchestra and toured with his and other vaudeville troops for several years. By mid-decade, she was invited to perform on Denver's KOA radio station. Following her radio performance, McDaniel continued to work the vaudeville circuit and established herself as a blues artist.

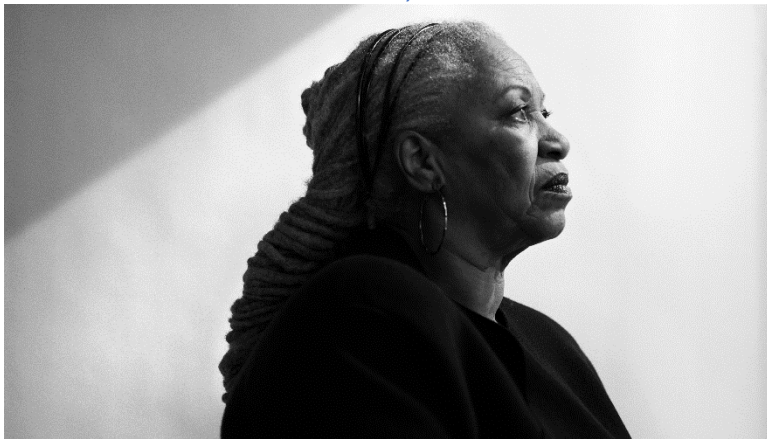
In 1939, McDaniel received a role that mark the highlight of her entertainment career. As Mammy, the house servant of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*, McDaniel earned the 1940 Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress, becoming the first African American to win an Oscar. All of the film's Black actors, including McDaniel, were barred from attending the film's premiere in 1939, aired at the Loew's Grand Theatre on Peachtree Street in Atlanta, Georgia.

McDaniel had cancer and passed away in Los Angeles, California, on October 26, 1952. After her death, the actress was posthumously awarded two stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. She was inducted into the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame in 1975 and honored with a commemorative U.S. postage stamp in 2006.

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Black History Daily Doses

February 18th



Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison is an African American author who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Besides being the first black woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, she also has won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. In her work Toni Morrison has explored the experience and roles of black women in a racist and male dominated society.

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio in 1931. Her parents moved there to escape the problems of southern racism. Morrison grew up in the community of Lorain, a small industrial town populated with immigrant Europeans, Mexicans and Southern blacks who lived next to each other. Dedicated to her studies, Morrison took Latin in school, and read many great works of European literature. She graduated from Lorain High School with honors and in 1949 she attended Howard University in Washington, D.C., America's most distinguished black college. There she changed her name from "Chloe" to "Toni," explaining once that people found "Chloe" too difficult to pronounce. She continued her studies at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

Her greatest literary masterpiece was *Beloved* (1987), which explores love and the supernatural. The main character, a former slave, is haunted by her decision to kill her children rather than see them become slaves. For this work, Morrison won several literary awards, including the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. The book was turned into a movie in 1998, and starred Oprah Winfrey.

In 1987, Toni Morrison was named the Robert F. Goheen Professor in the Council of Humanities at Princeton University. She became the first black woman writer to hold a named chair at an Ivy League University. She also started her next novel, *Jazz*, about life in the 1920's. The book was published in 1992. In 1993, Toni Morrison received the Nobel Prize in Literature. She was the eighth woman and the first black woman to do so.

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Black History Daily Doses

February 19th



Coretta Scott King

Coretta Scott King legacy is in the movement to end injustice and continue her husband's (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.) work and legacy after his death. She established the King Center, with the mission to “prepare global citizens to create a more just, humane and peaceful world using Dr. King’s nonviolent philosophy and methodology.” The King Center is a memorial and also provides programming and education. She also spearheaded the lobbying campaign to establish Dr. King’s birthday as a national holiday, which was signed into law in 1983.

Mrs. King focused on several issues. She openly expressed disdain for the Vietnam war, supported several women’s right causes, marched in a labor strike, and traveled the world lecturing on racism and economic issues.

In 1969 she was awarded the Universal Love Award. She was the first non-Italian to hold this distinction. Also, in 1969, she published *My Life with Martin Luther King Jr.*

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Black History Daily Doses

February 20th



Robert Johnson

Robert “Bob” Johnson, born April 8, 1946 in Hickory, MS, known as an African American entrepreneur, media magnate, executive, philanthropist, and inventor. Growing up, he was a scholar student and following high school he went on to further his education. He obtained his Bachelor’s degree in Social Studies and Master’s degree in Public Affairs. After graduating Johnson was able to land a job in the television industry. In 1983, Johnson became the co-founder of Black Entertainment Television (BET), the first cable television network targeted at African Americans. His earnings of BET made him the first black American billionaire in 2001. Johnson is also the first African American majority owner of a major professional sports team in the United States, the Charlotte Bobcats. After selling his stakes of BET and the Charlotte Bobcats, Johnson went on to found PLJ Companies, which operated extensively in the media, sports, gaming, real estates, and hospitality industries. Outside of the entertainment industry, Johnson is known for helping the world. His endeavors included promoting investments and project development in Liberia, hurricane preparedness in the Bahamas, and helping countries fight and prevent Malaria.

**This post submitted by Miraya Spears, a Behavioral Health Intake Coordinator at Marillac. Thank you.*

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Black History Daily Doses

February 21st



Gordan Parks

Gordon Parks, born November 30, 1912, in Fort Scott, KS, known as a photographer, filmmaker, writer, and composer. Parks was the first African American to be staffed as a photographer for the prolific LIFE magazine where he worked for 20 years. Parks utilized this platform to share his own personal story through his photos. He was a prominent pioneer of photojournalism. He concentrated on areas related to poverty, racism, civil rights, and black urban life. He has photographed Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, and Muhammad Ali. In his early career he won a fellowship with the Farm Security Administration for his images of the inner city. After the FSA was disbanded, he took photographs for the Office of War Information, the Standard Oil Photography Project, and Vogue. Parks was the first African American to direct and produce a major film, Shaft 1971. Parks then began writing and generated books, such as The Learning Tree, which he also filmed based off the title. Parks died of cancer in March 2006 in New York City, but was buried in his hometown of Fort Scott, Kansas.

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