

A black and white photograph of a woman, Peggy Mitchell, in a radio studio. She is looking slightly upwards and to the right with a gentle smile. She has dark hair styled in a classic 1950s fashion and is wearing large, ornate earrings. The background shows a control panel with various knobs and buttons, and a sign that reads "KANDU".

Google Arts & Culture

**Trailblazing Black Women in
American Entertainment, Politics,
and Education**

in association with  sixredmarbles

[Peggy Mitchell in the WEDR studio, 1953, Archives of African American Music and Culture](#)

How to Make the Most of This Lesson

This lesson serves as a **roadmap** for your journey through a rich and exciting collection of online content made available by **Google Arts & Culture's partners**. You will explore photographs, slideshows, voice recordings, and more. The images in this lesson are just a sample of what's available to you via the **Google Arts & Culture** website.

You can complete this lesson independently or with fellow students, a teacher, or another adult. The content is accessible to a wide range of ages, but it's especially geared toward students ages 13 to 16.

Your journey in this lesson will take you through three major topics:

Chapter 1: Women Who Made Us Listen

Chapter 2: Women Who Paved the Way in Politics

Chapter 3: Women Who Broke Down Educational Barriers

You'll see some helpful signs along the way:



Estimated time for completing the chapter



Audio recording or video



Link to more online content



Learning activity

Tools for Learning

Below are tools for learning that you may need for Digital Discovery lessons:



A device that connects to the Internet
(a computer or tablet)



A tool for writing your responses and
big ideas (pen, pencil, computer, etc.)



Art supplies (markers, crayons, paint)



Scissors



A notebook



Scrap paper

Explore! Google Arts & Culture pictures are **big**. If you want to explore a picture in greater detail, click on the magnifying glass symbol and zoom in with the zoom slider. By dragging the white box around, you can see even **tiny** details.

Welcome to *Trailblazing Black Women in American Entertainment, Politics, and Education*

This lesson is full of opportunities for you to deepen your awareness of Black history. You'll dive into the stories of several iconic Black women, explore the roles they played in history, and creatively express what you've learned by creating a broadcast segment.

What will you do?

1. Listen to interviews, songs, radio broadcasts, and more.
2. Use your own voice in a recording to express what you've learned.
3. Reflect on the characteristics of those you meet in the lesson.
4. Follow links to read more about historic Black women.
5. Develop and respond to research questions.
6. Learn new facts about music, education, and politics.

NAACP Chair Daisy Bates



Naacp Convention, N R Farbman, Life Photo Collection

What's in this lesson?

1. Learn about world-changing singers, professionals, educators, and policy changers and how they used their voices to empower others.
2. Discover the first Black women deejays.
3. Develop awareness of the impact these women had on social justice, civil rights, and women's rights.
4. Discover how Black women's voices impacted policy, education, and the professional world.

By participating in this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Discover and identify Black women who have made a real impact on music, social justice, women's rights, politics, and more.
2. Listen to the message of a young Black woman today and reflect on it in your own words.
3. Extend what you know about these women by researching, writing, and even broadcasting about their impact.

Vocabulary

equal rights, abolitionist, activist, prejudice, deejay, Jim Crow laws, segregation, suffrage, boycott, civil rights movement, desegregation, *Brown v. Board of Education*, discrimination, Little Rock Nine

Need help with some of these terms? See the Glossary at the end of this lesson.

THE SUPREMES A' GO-GO



LOVE IS LIKE AN ITCHING IN MY HEART YOU CAN'T HURRY LOVE THIS OLD HEART OF MINE
(Is Weak For You) SHAKE ME, WAKE ME (When It's Over) BABY I NEED YOUR LOVING THESE
BOOTS ARE MADE FOR WALKING I CAN'T HELP MYSELF GET READY PUT YOURSELF IN MY
PLACE MONEY (That's What I Want) COME AND GET THESE MEMORIES HANG ON SLOOPY



Chapter 1:

Women Who Made Us Listen



What is this chapter about?
Iconic Black women in the
music and radio industry



*How long will this
chapter take?*
1 hour

The Supremes, featuring Diana Ross, Mary Wilson, and Florence Ballard, had an extraordinary five #1 hits in a row in the United States. The Supremes recorded under the Black-owned Motown label.

Chapter 1: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions below in your notebook.

Consider

1. What is an icon?

- If you could choose two words that describe someone as iconic, what would they be?
- Research the meaning of *icon*. How do you think it might be used to describe the women you'll learn about in this lesson?
- Who do you consider an icon (either famous or someone you know)?



Discover

2. Which Black women have you learned about or celebrated before? Jot down their names and, from what you remember, what makes them an icon. If you're unsure of many, why do you think that is?

Music Icons

When you think of Black women who are music icons, who comes to mind? Maybe it's Beyoncé or Alicia Keys. You might even recall some of the powerful singers of the past, such as Whitney Houston or Aretha Franklin. But many iconic Black singers came before and after them. Some have used their voices not only in music but also to further the struggle for **equal rights**.



The Dynamic Miss Faye Carol, SFJAZZ, 2014-02-08, SFJAZZ Center

Faye Carol is a singer originally from Mississippi who is well known for her jazz, blues, and gospel vocals. Here, she performs part of composer Marcus Shelby's oratorio, or narrative musical work, on the life of Harriet Tubman, a Black woman who escaped enslavement and became a history-making **abolitionist** and political **activist**.



Listen to Carol's performance [here](#).

Marian Anderson

Marian Anderson (1897–1993) was a classical singer of the 1920s through 1960s who performed with well-known orchestras and musicians. She was also an important figure in the struggle for Black artists to overcome racial **prejudice** in the United States. Anderson became the first Black person to perform at the White House, at the invitation of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. A performance followed at the Lincoln Memorial, capturing the attention of more than 75,000 people. Anderson made a powerful statement by performing at the memorial after being denied a performance space by the Daughters of the American Revolution because of her race. Her courage amidst the challenges of racism and prejudice empowered many other Black singers.



[Watch](#) Anderson sing at the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday.



"If you have a purpose in which you can believe, there's no end to the amount of things you can accomplish."

—Marian Anderson



Nina Simone, Getty Images. Used by permission. 1964-10-18, SFJAZZ Center

Nina Simone

Nina Simone (1933–2003) was a well-known American singer-songwriter who wrote, arranged, and performed music in a broad range of styles, including jazz, pop, blues, and classical. Many of her performances and recordings also included songs that paid tribute to her Black roots, including a 1958 U.S. hit “I Loves You Porgy.”

Simone released her debut album in 1958, during the height of the U.S. civil rights movement. In 1964 she put out a live album that openly addressed racial inequality in the United States. Simone continued to write and record protest songs throughout her career, which included more than 40 albums.



Listen to Linda Tillery and the Cultural Heritage Choir perform a song made popular by Simone in 1964 [here](#).

Women of the Airwaves

You may be aware of strong, creative Black women performers in the music industry, but what about those who highlight and report on the music itself? The opening image in this lesson is of Peggy Mitchell, a **deejay** in Birmingham, Alabama, in the 1950s. She and other Black women who navigated the airwaves from the 1930s to today have not only brought music to life through the radio but have also played a leading role in advocating for social justice and gender equality.



Gladys Hill in KCOH studio, 1962, Archives of African American Music and Culture



Get more perspectives on gender equality and women on the radio [here](#).

Vy Higginson

As the first female deejay at New York City's WBLS-FM radio, Vy Higginson took her role seriously. She spoke of radio's ability to expand one's world. Music (and how it was selected) could influence the mood of the day and encourage or highlight something new, such as the many varieties of music made by Black artists. Higginson also reported how Black women supporting each other as deejays in a male-dominated career gave her courage to move forward. Higginson moved on to influence music throughout her life. She cowrote a musical, established teen gospel groups, and continues to empower many young Black women singers.



Listen to Higginson speak about how she viewed her role as a deejay [here](#).



Vy Higginson at WBLS, 1970, Archives of African American Music and Culture



Photograph from LBJ Meeting with Civil Rights leaders, 1967-02-13, National Archives and Records Administration, U.S. National Archives

Texas state senator Barbara Jordan (center) and other civil rights leaders meeting with President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1967.

Chapter 2:

Women Who Paved the Way in Politics



What is this chapter about?

Iconic Black women who broke down barriers and created political change



How long will this chapter take?

1 hour

Chapter 2: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions below in your notebook.

Consider

1. What is political policy, and why do people want to change it?
 - Research the meaning of *policy*. Why might the women you'll meet in this lesson want policies to change?
 - Are there current policies with which you disagree? Explain your answer.



Discover

2. How does a person become a political **activist**? What issues typically motivate and inspire them? How do they make their views known?

Ida B. Wells-Barnett

Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862–1931) was born into slavery and spent her adult life fighting against the injustices created by slavery’s legacy. One of her primary targets was **Jim Crow laws**—those laws passed by southern states after the Civil War to enforce **segregation**, or the separation of the races, and to limit the rights of Black people. Throughout her life, Wells-Barnett wrote and lectured about violence against Black people, educational equality, and voting rights. She was a cofounder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organization that still fights discrimination against Black people today. Wells-Barnett was also a vocal leader in the movement for women’s **suffrage**, or the right to vote. She strove to achieve equal rights and education for all.



[Read more](#) about Wells-Barnett and other Black women who stood up for change.



Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks (1913–2005) was a seamstress in Montgomery, Alabama. She was also a civil rights activist and member of the NAACP. In 1955 Parks refused to give up her seat to a white passenger, as required by city law, on a Montgomery public bus. She was arrested for her actions and taken to jail. Parks's arrest inspired a citywide **boycott** of the Montgomery public bus system and led to the overturning of laws regarding bus segregation in Alabama. Parks's arrest and the boycott were a key launching point for the **civil rights movement**.



Learn more about Parks's arrest and the Montgomery bus boycott in this [video](#). Watch this [video](#) to hear more about the activism of Rosa Parks and other civil rights leaders.



[Rosa Parks](#), [Library of Congress](#), [National Women's Hall of Fame](#)

BRING U.S. TOGETHER



VOTE CHISHOLM 1972
UNBOUGHT AND UNBOSSSED

“Fighting Shirley”

Shirley Chisholm (1924–2005) broke barriers at both the state and federal levels of politics. In 1964, Chisholm became the first Black woman to be elected to the New York state legislature. In 1968, she became the first Black woman to be elected to the U.S. Congress. Chisholm was also a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus and the Congressional Women’s Caucus.

In 1972, Chisholm became the first Black woman to run for president of the United States. She appeared on ballots in 12 states.



Read more about Chisholm and other Black women who changed the world [here](#).



Elizabeth Eckford Entering Central High School, Little Rock, Arkansas, 1957-09-05, High Museum of Art, Atlanta

Chapter 3:

Women Who Broke Down Educational Barriers



What is this chapter about?

Black women who fought for equality in education



How long will this chapter take?

1 hour

Chapter 3: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions below in your notebook.

Consider

1. Why is education important? What does having an education allow one to do?



Discover

2. Have you learned about school **desegregation** in the United States and the U.S. Supreme Court decision ***Brown v. Board of Education*** before? Jot down what you know about these topics. If you are unfamiliar with them, write down three questions you have about these topics instead.

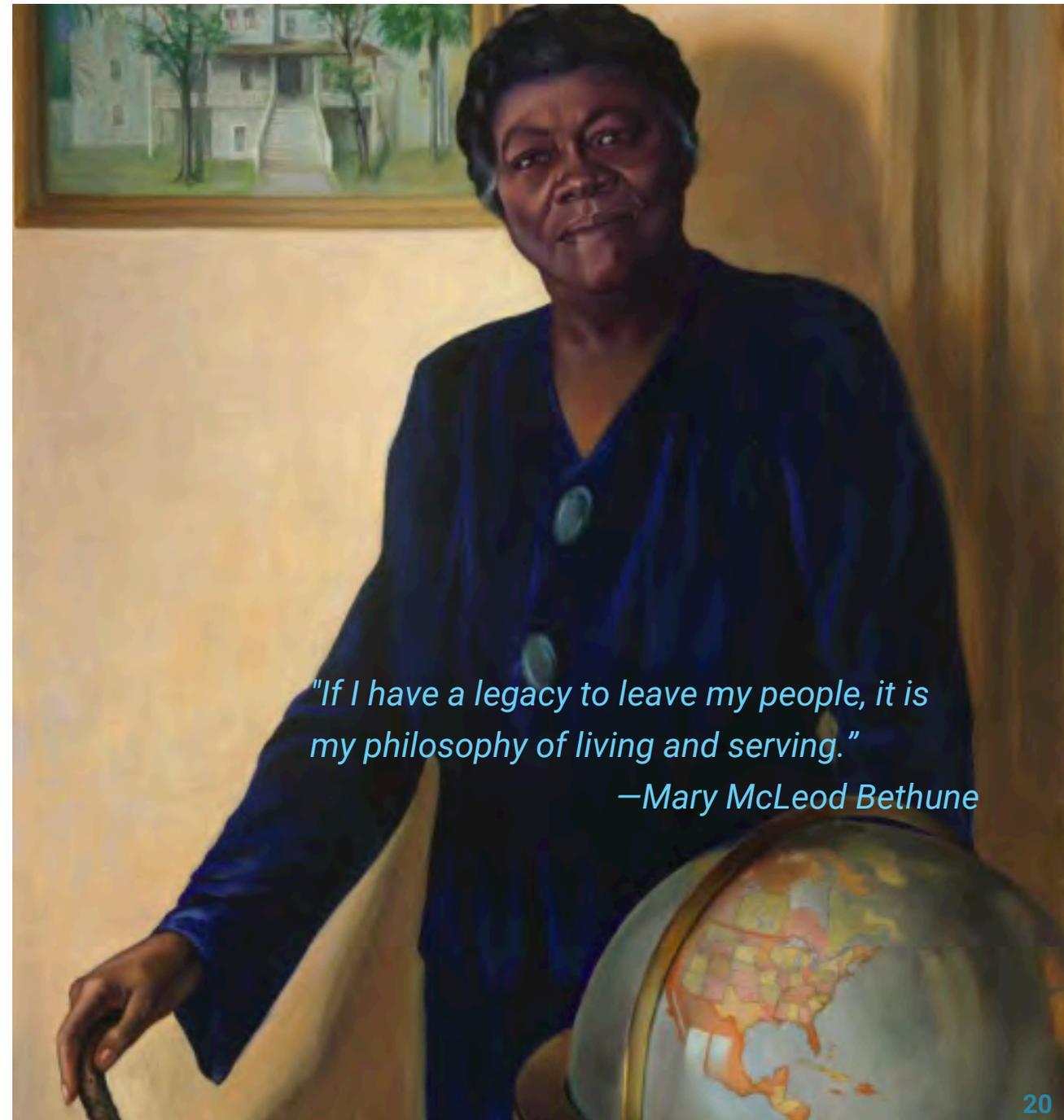
Mary McLeod Bethune

The “First Lady of the Struggle”

Mary McLeod Bethune (1875–1955) was born only 10 years after the end of the American Civil War. As a Black woman in the post–Civil War era, Bethune was acutely aware of the **discrimination** faced by all Black Americans. She believed that education was a critical tool for becoming a community leader, and she dedicated her life to equality in education for Blacks. She founded her first school, the Daytona Normal and Industrial Institute for Training Negro Girls, in 1904 with only \$1.50 (around \$44 in today’s U.S. dollars). The school later became Bethune-Cookman College. Throughout her life, Bethune led educational policy-making efforts at every level of government.



Read more about the role Bethune played in education and policy making [here](#) and [here](#).



*"If I have a legacy to leave my people, it is my philosophy of living and serving."
—Mary McLeod Bethune*

Daisy Bates

Daisy Bates (1914–1999) served as president of the Arkansas chapter of the NAACP during the 1950s. After the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision outlawing school segregation, Bates and the NAACP sued the Little Rock, Arkansas, school board for failure to abide by the decision. She and her husband recruited nine students and successfully integrated all-white Central High School.



Learn more about the desegregation of Central High School [here](#).



Daisy Bates looks through one of the windows of her home, which was shattered by opponents of the desegregation of Arkansas schools.

Students Challenge Barriers

The nine students Daisy Bates recruited have become known as the **Little Rock Nine**. One of the most famous images from the integration of Central High School was that of 15-year-old Elizabeth Eckford, shown here, seated. Eckford is waiting for a bus after being denied entry to the high school. She hadn't received notice that the desegregation was postponed by a day. The following day, all nine students entered the high school under armed guard.



Elizabeth Eckford Waits for Bus After Being Denied Entry into Central High School, 1957-09-03, Central High Museum Historical Collections/UALR Archives and Special Collections, William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum, U.S. National Archives



Other students in the American South also challenged the continued segregation in the schools.



Learn more about their efforts [here](#).

Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes after registering at the University of Georgia Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 1961-01-09, Georgia Public Broadcasting



Vivian Malone was one of the first Black people to attend the University of Alabama. Here, she walks through a crowd that includes photographers and members of the National Guard.

Vivian Malone Registering for Classes at the University of Alabama; 1963-06-11; Warren K. Leffler, Georgia Public Broadcasting

Digital Learning in Action

So, what did you learn? Read the questions and complete the learning activities below to extend your learning based on what you just experienced.



Reflect: Answer these questions:

- At the start of this lesson, you considered the word *icon*. How has your understanding of this word changed? Explain your answer.
- Consider the women you discovered in the lesson. What makes them iconic, and what should be celebrated about them? Write a paragraph of at least four sentences on this topic.
- How can you use your own voice to celebrate and highlight the contributions of Black women? Provide at least two ideas.



Summarize: [Watch the video](#) to hear actor and activist Yara Shahidi. Then answer the questions below.

- Imagine you're sharing this video with a friend. If you were sending this video to them, how would you summarize it? What is Shahidi's primary message, and why should your friend watch the video? Write your message and your reasoning in your notebook.



Create:

Imagine you're a radio broadcaster (or podcaster!) who is producing an ongoing series on trailblazing Black women. Design a three-to-five-minute segment to highlight one woman. Choose someone you learned about in this lesson, or select another Black woman you know about. First, develop a set of research questions for learning more about your subject's contribution. Then, complete the research online for the segment. Finally, write and record your segment and share with a friend, teacher, or family member. You can use a free online recording site like this [one](#).

Glossary

- **abolitionist:** a person who opposes enslavement and calls for its end
- **activist:** a person who works to bring about social or political change
- **boycott:** to withdraw from social or economic engagement with a country or organization
- ***Brown v. Board of Education:*** a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1954 that made state laws enforcing segregation in public schools illegal
- **civil rights movement:** a mass protest movement against segregation and discrimination that had its origins in the period of enslavement and gained momentum during the 1950s and 1960s
- **deejay:** "disc jockey"; a person who plays recorded music on the radio or to a crowd
- **desegregation:** the ending of policies separating the races
- **discrimination:** the unjust treatment of a certain category of people
- **equal rights:** equality of treatment under the law
- **Jim Crow laws:** any of the laws that enforced racial segregation in the American South after the end of the Civil War
- **Little Rock Nine:** a group of nine Black students who enrolled at all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957, in opposition to continued segregation after the Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*
- **prejudice:** hostile attitude toward another person or group based on race or other factors
- **segregation:** the enforced separation of people of different races
- **suffrage:** the right to vote