



# Freedom's SISTERS

## THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN HEROES AMONG US.

There have always been women who longed for an America as good as its promise. Women who fought for the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. Women who heard songs of freedom in their hearts.

They lived in the time of your great-great grandmother. And yesterday. And they live today.

*Freedom's Sisters* tells the stories of 20 African American women whose work for liberty and equality continues to push aside limitations that constrict Americans.

Let these women show you new ways to hope, to dream, and to be.



Smithsonian



Ford Motor Company Fund





Photo by Charmian Reading

## ELLA JO BAKER

1903-1986

**Every time I see a young person who identifies with the struggle of black people . . . I take new hope.**

A gifted organizer, Ella Baker built a network of civil rights organizations that promoted communication and cooperation among all black people, including the working class and young. Under her guidance, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) became a leading civil rights organization during the 1960s.



Highlander Research and Education Center Archives

## SEPTIMA POINSETTE CLARK

1898-1987

**The greatest evil in our country today is not racism, but ignorance.**

Septima Clark taught thousands of African Americans how to achieve personal and political empowerment. At Tennessee's Highlander Folk School, the passionate educator founded Citizenship Schools to teach reading and writing skills necessary to pass voter literacy tests.

## MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE

1875-1955



State Archives of Florida

**Be calm, be steadfast, be courageous.**

Daughter of former slaves, Mary McLeod Bethune became a college president, founder of the National Council of Negro Women, and a prominent government official. One of the most influential black women of her time, she used her power to help hundreds of thousands of African Americans expand their power.

## KATHLEEN CLEAVER

born 1945



Photo by Ron Reisterer/Oakland Tribune

**No one ever asks what is a man's role in the revolution.**

Kathleen Cleaver improved the lives of countless African Americans—first as a radical revolutionary with her husband, Eldridge Cleaver, in the Black Panther Party, and later as a respected scholar and educator. This dedicated activist now teaches law at Emory and Yale universities.



Library of Congress

## SHIRLEY CHISHOLM

1924-2005

**Our country needs women's idealism and determination, perhaps more in politics than anywhere else.**

Declaring herself "unbought and unbossed," Shirley Chisholm made history in 1968 as the first black woman elected to Congress and as a presidential candidate in 1972. She served seven consecutive terms in the U.S. House of Representatives.



Photo by Robert Jordan/AP/Wide World Photos

## MYRLIE EVERS-WILLIAMS

born 1933

**. . . I understand the pain and the challenges, and my attitude is one of standing up with open arms to meet all of them.**

Widow of activist Medgar Evers, Myrlie Evers-Williams built her own legacy—as a corporate executive, as the first black female commissioner of public works in Los Angeles, and later as chair of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).



Library of Congress

## FANNIE LOU HAMER

1917-1977

**I'm sick and tired of being sick and tired.**

Nothing—not even a brutal beating in jail—stopped Fannie Lou Hamer from fighting to secure African Americans' constitutional right to vote. Her powerful testimony about how she and other black people were mistreated influenced passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.



Justin Ide/Harvard News Office

## CHARLAYNE HUNTER-GAULT

born 1942

**If people are informed they will do the right thing. It's when they are not informed that they become hostages to prejudice.**

In 1961, Charlayne Hunter-Gault made headlines when she integrated the University of Georgia. Today, this award-winning journalist writes her own headlines. Her work has earned two Emmy Awards and two Peabody Awards, broadcast journalism's highest honors.

## FRANCES WATKINS HARPER

1825-1911

**I know that no nation can gain its full measure of enlightenment and happiness if one-half of it is free and the other half is fettered.**



Bailey-Thurman Family Papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University

Frances Watkins Harper used stirring poetry and prose to inspire social activism. In 1854, the internationally acclaimed author and lecturer was hired by the Maine Anti-Slavery Society and became one of the first female abolitionist speakers.

## BARBARA CHARLINE JORDAN

1936-1996

**If the society today allows wrongs to go unchallenged, the impression is created that those wrongs have the approval of the majority.**



Library of Congress

High moral standards, dedicated public service, and galvanizing speeches made Barbara Jordan an inspiration to all Americans. Throughout her political career, first as a state senator and later as a U.S. representative from Texas, she fought for constitutional rights.



©YWCA of USA/Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College

## DOROTHY IRENE HEIGHT

born 1912

**We are not a problem people; we are a people with problems. We have historic strengths; we have survived because of family.**

A prominent civil rights leader for nearly half a century, Dorothy Height has fought for equal rights for both African Americans and women. As president of the National Council of Negro Women, she was often the only woman at top civil rights movement meetings.



Photo by Bernard Gotfryd/ Library of Congress

## CORETTA SCOTT KING

1927-2006

**Struggle is a never-ending process. Freedom is never really won; you earn it and win it in every generation.**

Wife of Martin Luther King, Jr., Coretta Scott King was a leader in her own right—the “First Lady” of the civil rights movement. After her husband's death in 1968, she led protest marches, advised freedom movements around the world, and founded the Martin Luther King, Jr., Center for Nonviolent Social Change.



## CONSTANCE BAKER MOTLEY

1921-2005

**As the first black and first woman,  
I am proving in everything I do that blacks  
and women are as capable as anyone.**

Columbia School of Law

After winning nearly every landmark civil rights case of the 1950s and 1960s, Constance Baker Motley became a high-ranking judge. Motley was a key attorney in groundbreaking school desegregation cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education*.



## BETTY SHABAZZ

1936-1997

**Nothing is insurmountable;  
there is always a will and a way.**

© Najlah Feanny/CORBIS SABA

After witnessing her husband's assassination in 1965, Betty Shabazz raised six children alone, earned a Ph.D., and built a career in health services and education. She continued to work for the vision of human dignity and social justice she had shared with her husband, Nation of Islam leader Malcolm X.

## ROSA LOUISE McCAULEY PARKS

1913-2005

**I would like to be known as a person  
who was concerned about freedom, equality,  
justice, and prosperity for all people.**



Highlander Research and Education  
Center Archives

Rosa Parks broke a law in 1955 when she refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger—a courageous act that changed the law and brought international attention to the black struggle for equal rights in America. She became known as the mother of the modern civil rights movement.

## MARY CHURCH TERRELL

1863-1954

**Keep on moving, keep on insisting,  
keep on fighting injustice.**



Library of Congress

Mary Church Terrell marched for women's rights and forced Washington, D.C., restaurants to open their doors to black people. This gifted orator and first president of the National Association of Colored Women was, in 1884, among the first black women to earn a college degree.



## SONIA SANCHEZ

born 1934

**It is that love of language that has propelled me,  
that . . . came from listening to my grandmother  
speak black English . . . I'm keeping this great  
tradition of American poetry alive.**

Courtesy Sonia Sanchez

As a child, Sonia Sanchez was shy and spoke with a stutter, but she found her voice in poetry and influenced a generation of writers. She became a powerful voice of the 1960s' Black Power movement and continues to give passionate expression to African American culture.



## HARRIET ROSS GREENE TUBMAN

ca. 1820-1913

**I had reasoned this out in my mind;  
there was one of two things I had a  
right to—liberty or death.**

Library of Congress

Born into slavery, Harriet Tubman escaped in 1849—and immediately vowed to lead her family and other enslaved black people to freedom. During the Civil War, she became the first woman to command a military raid. She also worked for the Union Army as a nurse and a spy.



Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Pennsylvania State Archives

## C. DELORES TUCKER

1927-2005

**Never again will black women be disregarded. We will have our share and parity in American politics.**

**C** Delores Tucker became Pennsylvania's secretary of state in 1971—the first female and first African American in the nation to hold that position. After co-founding the National Congress of Black Women, the longtime civil rights advocate led a campaign against offensive lyrics in hip-hop music.

## IDA B. WELLS-BARNETT

1862-1931

**We must educate the white people out of their 250 years of slave history.**



Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

**I**da B. Wells-Barnett risked her life to expose the evils of lynching. The fearless investigative journalist co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909, and spoke worldwide about lynching and other social injustices.

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COVER: Mary McLeod Bethune, one of 20 women featured in *Freedom's Sisters*, with students from her Daytona (Fla.) Literary and Industrial School for Training Negro Girls/Photo courtesy State Archives of Florida

*Freedom's Sisters* was created by Cincinnati Museum Center ([www.cincymuseum.org](http://www.cincymuseum.org)) and organized for travel by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service ([www.sites.si.edu](http://www.sites.si.edu)).

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