

Famous Black Men and Women

Mary Seacole was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1805. She is famous for defying social expectations of the early 19th century by travelling the world, running businesses and caring for injured soldiers during the Crimean War.

Mary's mother was a Jamaican nurse and her father was a Scottish soldier. When she was 12 years old, Mary began helping her mother look after the sick and injured. In 1854, Mary decided that she wanted to care for soldiers fighting in the Crimean War. She travelled from Jamaica to the War Office in London to offer her help and to support fellow nurse, Florence Nightingale.

Mary's offer of help was turned down. During the 1800s, racial prejudice was common and people were treated differently depending on the colour of their skin.

Undeterred, Mary travelled to the Crimean Peninsula in the Black Sea, north of Turkey, herself. She opened the so-called, 'British Hotel' in Balaclava, just two miles from the fighting. It wasn't a hotel as such, but a simple place of refuge from the fighting. She provided the soldiers with food and treated them with herbal remedies. Her bravery, courage and determination to help the injured earned her the nickname, 'Mother Seacole'.

The Crimean War ended in 1856. Mary returned to Britain with little money and in poor health. However, her efforts did not go unrecognised by the British public. A charity gala was organised and some 80,000 people attended. The money raised ensured that she lived in comfort for the rest of her life, spending time between Jamaica and London. She wrote an autobiography, entitled, 'Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands'. She died in 1881, in Kensal Green, London, aged 76.

Mary's achievements as a mixed-race woman in the 1800s were quite extraordinary. She defied expectations of the time with her many achievements and her courage and determination ensure she is remembered forever as an inspirational role model.



MARY SEACOLE

1805 – 1881

Famous Black Men and Women

Rosa Parks was born in 1913 in Alabama, USA. She became an outspoken member of the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and is famous for her actions which sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

As a child, Rosa became aware that people were treated differently because of the colour of their skin. She noticed that the government rules meant that black people were kept apart from white people and often not treated fairly. For example, in many buildings, African Americans had to use a different entrance from white people. Sometimes, there were toilets for only African Americans and toilets for only white people. Schools were also segregated; there were all-white schools for white children and separate schools for African Americans. The latter were often lacking in basic school equipment, such as desks.

When travelling by bus, African Americans had to sit on the seats at the back of the bus. At the front of the bus, there were seats for white people. If these seats were full, those sitting at the back were expected to give up their seat to let a white person sit down instead.

Rosa could not understand why people should be treated differently.

On 1st December, 1955, Rosa was taking a bus home. She was told to give up her seat so that a white person could sit down. Rosa stayed in her seat and refused to stand. The driver called the police and she was arrested and fined for breaking the rules. She was reported to have explained, 'I don't think I should have to stand'.

When her story of protest had spread, many thousands of people agreed with her. They made it clear to the US government by boycotting (refusing to use) the buses.

The bus companies' profits dived. It was one of the largest and most successful protest against racial segregation in history.

As a result, the rule was changed and the policy of segregation on US buses was ended. This was an important step in the civil rights movement and an act of bravery and defiance which earned Rosa Parks the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996. She died in 2005, aged 92, but will be forever remembered as 'the first lady of civil rights'.



ROSA PARKS

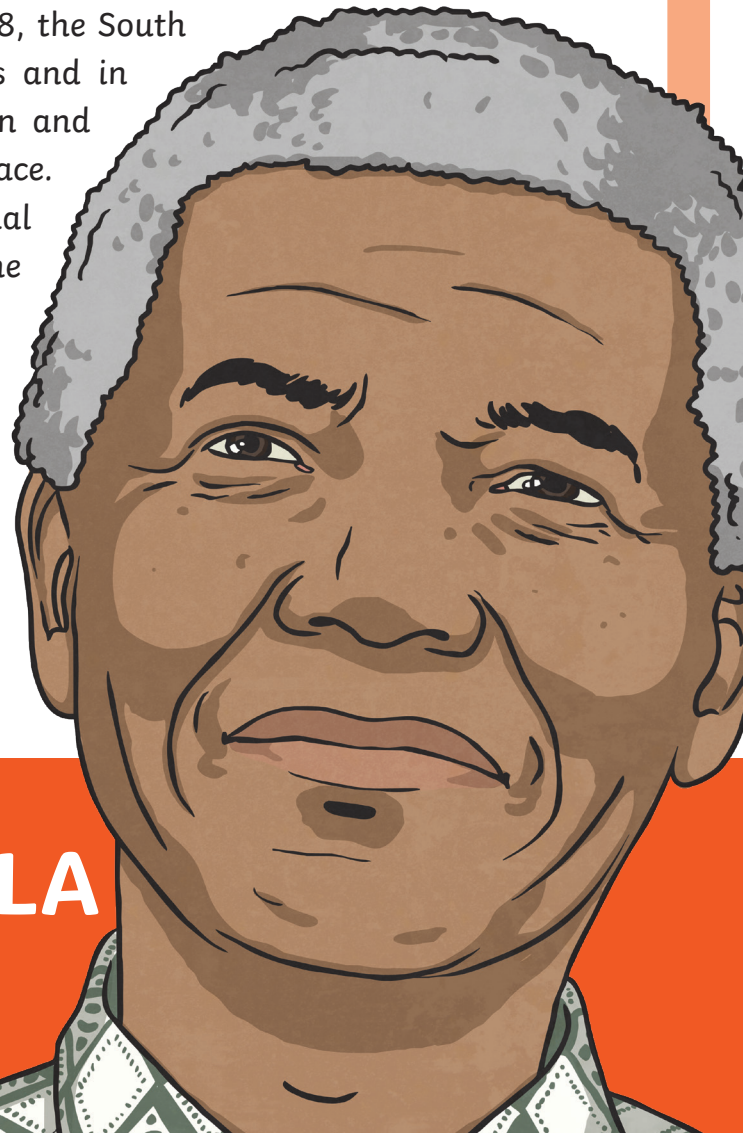
1913 – 2005

Famous Black Men and Women

Nelson Mandela was born on 18th July 1918 in South Africa. His name was Rolihlahla and the name Nelson was a nickname given to him by his school teacher. He attended a Christian school and later went to college, then on to studying law at university. He became a lawyer in 1942.

When Mandela was growing up, black people were not allowed very much say about how South Africa was run. Most black people worked as servants and on farms, in factories or coal mines.

In 1948, the South African government made new laws to keep black people away from white people because they thought that the colour of their skin made black people different from white people and that they did not deserve to be treated as well. This was known as apartheid, literally meaning 'apartness'. A white person and a black person could not marry, share a table in a restaurant or even sit together on a bus; black children went to separate schools to white children. A group called The African National Congress (The ANC) thought this was wrong: they wanted black South Africans to have the same rights as white South Africans. Nelson Mandela became a part of this group. He spent many years being chased by the South African police because of his actions to end apartheid. He was arrested and spent 27 years in prison. Finally in 1988, the South African government began to change things and in 1990 Nelson Mandela was freed from prison and called for all South Africans to live in peace. He became the leader of the African National Congress Party and in 1994 his party won the elections. Nelson Mandela became the first black South African President. Many people around the world thought he was a hero and respected him for his courage and wisdom in bringing people together and living in peace.



NELSON MANDELA

1918 – 2013

Martin Luther King was the leader of the African American civil rights movement. He spoke out against laws which kept black and white people separate, and led marches demanding fair laws for all people.

He was born on January 15th 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. His father was a pastor and his mother had been a teacher. At this time, there was a growing campaign for black people to be treated the same as white people. Martin loved to play with his friends but as he and his friends got older, two of them stopped playing with him because he had black skin and they had white skin. He was very upset: he couldn't understand why the colour of his skin should make a difference.

Martin studied hard and when he was only fifteen years old he went to Morehouse College in Atlanta. He decided to become a minister and began his first job in 1954. One year later, Rosa Parks was arrested for not giving up her seat on a bus and Martin Luther King led a march through the city to show that he and many other people thought that it was not fair that people were being treated differently because of the colour of their skin.

One night, when Martin Luther King and his family were out, a bomb was thrown through the window of his house by people who disagreed with his ideas. Other people were cross and wanted to retaliate with violence, but Martin said things needed to be solved peacefully, that it was important for white and black people to get along. He continued to lead peaceful marches and in 1963, in Washington, America he made a speech at one of them which has become very famous. He said, "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character."

Rules in America began to change and slowly things for black people started to become fairer, with them having some of the same opportunities as the white people. Sadly, some people still felt anger about this and did not want to change, and on 4th April 1968, one of them shot and killed Martin Luther King outside his motel room. In 1983, the US President, Ronald Reagan, declared that the third Monday in January each year would be a holiday to remember all of the many things that Martin Luther King had achieved and the ideas of living in a world which was fair to everyone no matter what the colour of their skin.



MARTIN LUTHER KING

1929 – 1968

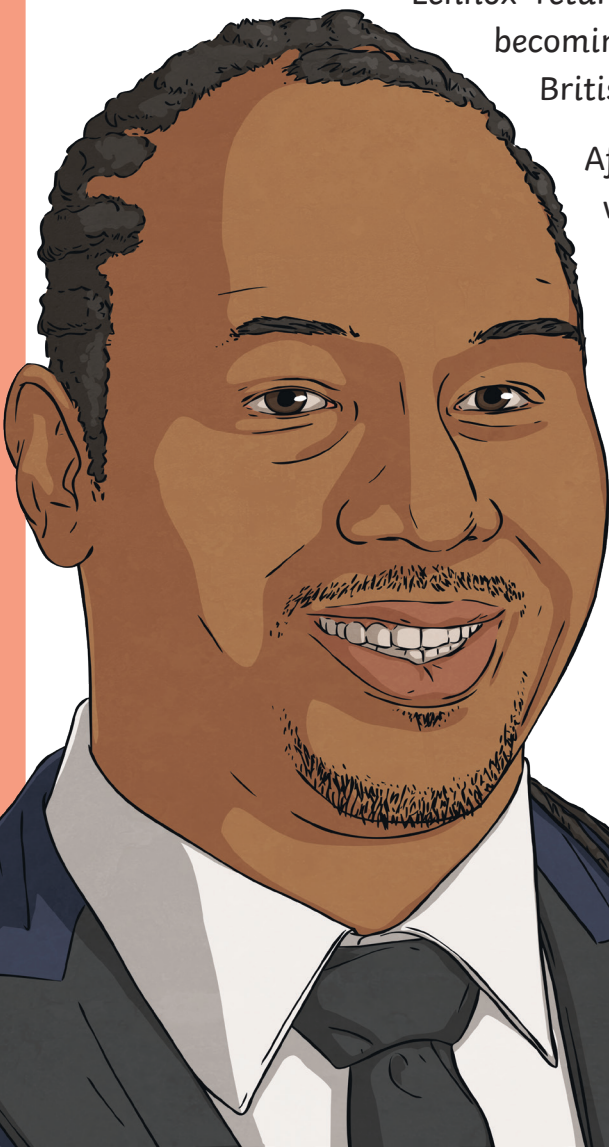
Famous Black Men and Women

Lennox Lewis was born to Jamaican parents in 1965 in London but moved to Canada with his mum when he was 9 years old. He returned to the UK shortly after to live with his aunt but began getting into trouble by fighting and causing problems. After a short time, his mum made him return to Canada but he was still getting into trouble there. He would often be caught fighting at school with children who were making fun of his accent. One of his teachers suggested he took his anger out through sport and soon he got into boxing and became a huge fan of Muhammad Ali. He was also part of the school football and basketball team but it was boxing that he seemed to excel at, even fighting boys much older than him due to his bigger than average size.

In the early 1980s, Lennox had become an impressive boxer and won gold medals at the Canada Winter Games and World Junior Championships. He was named Athlete of the Year in 1983. He went on to win many more gold medals and was the Canadian Super Heavyweight Champion for four years running, winning many fights through KO (knock outs). It became clear that Lennox was a very talented boxer, winning all of the 109 fights he fought in.

Lennox returned to the UK in 1989 as a professional boxer, becoming European Heavyweight Champion in 1990 and British Heavyweight Champion in 1991.

After retiring from boxing, Lennox moved to Miami with his wife and funded an afterschool chess club for disadvantaged youths.



LENNOX LEWIS

1965

Famous Black Men and Women

Diane Abbott was born in Paddington, London, in 1953. Her parents were Jamaican. In 1987, she became Britain's first black woman Member of Parliament (MP). She is now the longest serving black MP in the House of Commons.

Diane studied history at Cambridge University. She founded the London Schools and the Black Child initiative with the aim of raising educational achievement for black children.

She also founded the organisation Black Women Mean Business (BWMB), which champions and supports black businesswomen. This was the first organisation like this in Britain.

In 1987, Diane became the first black woman to ever be elected into the British Parliament. She has worked for her constituency of Hackney North and South Newington for many years and has been re-elected as an MP for this area many times.

In Parliament, she has been a shadow minister for many areas, including being the first black female Shadow Home Secretary. She has led a variety of parliamentary committees and working groups.

In 2008, Diane was awarded a Human Rights Award for a speech she made to the House of Commons.



DIANE ABBOTT

1953

Lenny, born Lenworth George Henry, was born in 1958 in Worcestershire to Jamaican parents. His first television appearance was in 1975 on a talent show which he won for his impressions. He then appeared on a comedy series with mainly black performers. He became an influential part in creating comedy by black comedians and went on to become a household name in comedy and TV.

In 1985, Lenny and a comedy scriptwriter founded Comic Relief, a British charity aimed at raising money for vulnerable people and communities all over the world through its Red Nose Day appeal.

Lenny was awarded the BBC Personality of the Year in 1993 and the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Black Entertainment Comedy Awards in 2003.

Lenny Henry was knighted in the 2015 Queen's Birthday Honours for his services to drama and charity.



SIR LENNY HENRY
1958