

Nina Simone

African American jazz singer, pianist, songwriter, and civil rights activist, was born Eunice Kathleen Waymon in Tryon, North Carolina, the sixth of eight children of John Divine Waymon, a barber and owner of a dry-cleaning business, and Mary Kate Irvin, a housekeeper and minister.

In 1941 Mary Kate was working as a housekeeper for a widow who offered to fund a year of piano lessons for Eunice after hearing her play. She showed great promise under the instruction of Muriel Mazzanovich, who established the Eunice Waymon Fund to offer support for her music studies.

Following graduation, Eunice Waymon accepted a one-year scholarship from the Juilliard School of Music. Intent on pursuing a career as a concert pianist, Waymon used the year of study at Juilliard to prepare for the entrance exam at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, but she was denied entrance. Waymon believed her rejection was solely because she was African American. This event informed the musician's views on race relations and would influence her activism later in life.

A few years later, in the summer of 1954, she began singing and playing piano at the Midtown Bar and Grill in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Concerned that her mother would disapprove, Waymon took the stage name Nina Simone: "Nina," was a nickname given by a former boyfriend, and "Simone" after the French actress Simone Signoret.

Her debut album consisted of fourteen tracks, including "My Baby Just Cares for Me" and "Plain Gold Ring," as well as the instrumental "You'll Never Walk Alone" and Simone's own compositions "Central Park Blues" and "African Mailman." The album showcased Simone's piano and vocal virtuosity and fluidity between musical styles.

During the early 1960s, Simone appeared regularly in Greenwich Village. Performing and socializing in this center of music and politics, Simone became acquainted with many artists and intellectuals, including the writers James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, and LeRoi Jones (later known as Amiri Baraka); the folk musician Odetta; and the South African singer Miriam Makeba. Simone's interests in African and African-American history and politics greatly increased as she continued to perform in Greenwich Village.

Following her introduction to politics and race relations within Greenwich Village, Simone became increasingly committed to the civil rights movement. In 1961 she traveled to Lagos, Nigeria, with the drummer Babatunde Olatunji, the jazz pianist Randy Weston, Hughes, Odetta, and other artists to take part in a two-day conference sponsored by the American Society of African Culture. During this time Simone performed benefit concerts for organizations including the Congress of Racial Equality, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Simone's engagement in civil rights activism increased following the composition of her protest song "Mississippi Goddam." This song was featured on the live album *Nina Simone in Concert*, released by Philips Records in 1964. The protest anthem was written as a musical response to the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in September 1963, which killed four children, and the assassination of the Mississippi activist Medgar Evers that same year. A critique of the slow progress of nonviolent protest, Simone's "Mississippi Goddam" became an anthem for the civil rights movement.

As Simone's involvement in black freedom struggles increased throughout the 1960s, her political associations with black nationalism and black power became more apparent. Through her performances and interviews, Simone spoke out about the racial inequities in the United States and promoted social change. "Pirate Jenny," "Backlash Blues," "Four Women," "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free," and a tribute to Lorraine Hansberry, "To Be Young, Gifted and Black," are just a few protest songs Simone recorded and performed in the mid- to late 1960s. In 1967 Simone signed with RCA Victor Records at the height of her popularity, releasing five albums with the label over the next three years. Simone's political songs and her interpretations of popular songs like the Bee Gees' "To Love Somebody" flourished simultaneously on the *Billboard* charts.

Simone separated from her husband and manager Andy Stroud in 1970; their divorce was finalized a year later. As Simone's management was in transition, and her political activism became her central focus, tour dates and record releases declined. Deciding to leave the United States, Simone moved to Barbados in 1970 and later lived in Liberia, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and France. She returned to the United States briefly in 1995 to reclaim the licensing rights to a number of recordings that were released without the artist's permission and finally settled in Carry-le-Rouet, France, in 2000. Simone performed regularly until 2002, though her concert and recording schedule had significantly declined from the 1970s onward. On 19 April 2003 the Curtis Institute of Music named Simone an honorary doctor in music and humanities. Two days later she lost her battle to cancer at her home in Carry-le-Rouet.

Nina Simone's performances and compositions challenged genre boundaries. Because her music often defied categorization, critics and scholars have consistently overlooked her work. As an activist-musician, Simone was central to the cultural and intellectual production of the civil rights movement.

Martin Luther King

Any number of historic moments in the civil rights struggle have been used to identify Martin Luther King, Jr. — prime mover of the Montgomery bus boycott, keynote speaker at the March on Washington, youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate. But in retrospect, single events are less important than the fact that King, and his policy of nonviolent protest, was the dominant force in the civil rights movement during its decade of greatest achievement, from 1957 to 1968.

King was born Michael Luther King in Atlanta on Jan. 15, 1929 — one of the three children of Martin Luther King Sr., pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, and Alberta (Williams) King, a former schoolteacher. (He was renamed "Martin" when he was about 6 years old.)

After going to local grammar and high schools, King enrolled in Morehouse College in Atlanta in 1944. He wasn't planning to enter the ministry, but then he met Dr. Benjamin Mays, a scholar whose manner and bearing convinced him that a religious career could be intellectually satisfying as well. After receiving his bachelor's degree in 1948, King attended Crozer Theological Seminary in Chester, Pa., winning the Plafker Award as the outstanding student of the graduating class, and the J. Lewis Crozer Fellowship as well. King completed the coursework for his doctorate in 1953, and was granted the degree two years later upon completion of his dissertation.

Married by then, King returned South to become pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala. Here, he made his first mark on the civil-rights movement, by mobilizing the black community during a 382-day boycott of the city's bus lines. King overcame arrest and other violent harassment, including the bombing of his home. Ultimately, the U.S. Supreme Court declared bus segregation unconstitutional.

A national hero and a civil-rights figure of growing importance, King summoned together a number of black leaders in 1957 and laid the groundwork for the organization now known as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). King was elected its president, and he soon began helping other communities organize their own protests against discrimination.

After finishing his first book and making a trip to India, King returned to the United States in 1960 to become co-pastor, with his father, of Ebenezer Baptist Church.

Three years later, King's nonviolent tactics were put to their most severe test in Birmingham, during a mass protest for fair hiring practices and the desegregation of department-store facilities. Police brutality used against the marchers dramatized the plight of blacks to the nation at large, with enormous impact. King was arrested, but his voice was not silenced: He wrote "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" to refute his critics.

Later that year King was a principal speaker at the historic March on Washington, where he delivered one of the most passionate addresses of his career. Time magazine designated him as its Person of the Year for 1963. A few months later he was named recipient of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize. When he returned from Norway, where he had gone to accept the award, King took on new challenges. In Selma, Ala., he led a voter-registration campaign that ended in the Selma-to-Montgomery Freedom March. King next brought his crusade to Chicago, where he launched programs to rehabilitate the slums and provide housing.

In the North, however, King soon discovered that young and angry blacks cared little for his preaching and even less for his pleas for peaceful protest. Their disenchantment was one of the reasons he rallied behind a new cause: the war in Vietnam.

Although he was trying to create a new coalition based on equal support for peace and civil rights, it caused an immediate rift. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) saw King's shift of emphasis as "a serious tactical mistake" the Urban League warned that the "limited resources" of the civil-rights movement would be spread too thin.

But from the vantage point of history, King's timing was superb. Students, professors, intellectuals, clergymen and reformers rushed into the movement. Then, King turned his attention to the domestic issue that he felt was directly related to the Vietnam struggle: poverty. He called for a guaranteed family income, he threatened national boycotts, and he spoke of disrupting entire cities by nonviolent "camp-ins." With this in mind, he began to plan a massive march of the poor on Washington, D.C., envisioning a demonstration of such intensity and size that Congress would have to recognize and deal with the huge number of desperate and downtrodden Americans.

King interrupted these plans to lend his support to the Memphis sanitation men's strike. He wanted to discourage violence, and he wanted to focus national attention on the plight of the poor, unorganized workers of the city. The men were bargaining for basic union representation and long-overdue raises.

But he never got back to his poverty plans. Death came for King on April 4, 1968, on the balcony of the black-owned Lorraine Hotel just off Beale Street. While standing outside with Jesse Jackson and Ralph Abernathy, King was shot in the neck by a rifle bullet. His death caused a wave of violence in major cities across the country.

However, King's legacy has lived on. In 1969, his widow, Coretta Scott King, organized the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Non-Violent Social Change. Today it stands next to his beloved Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. His birthday, Jan. 15, is a national holiday, celebrated each year with educational programs, artistic displays, and concerts throughout the United States. The Lorraine Hotel where he was shot is now the National Civil Rights Museum.

Rosa Parks

Rosa Parks or Rosa McCauley in Tuskegee, Alabama, the daughter of James McCauley, a carpenter and stonemason, and Leona Edwards, a schoolteacher. Leona McCauley was a widely respected woman in her community. James McCauley was a native of Abbeville, Alabama. From her mother, Rosa learned the value of self-respect, self-love, and honorable behavior toward others. Religion was also at the center of Rosa's world. Soon after her baptism at age two, Rosa became a lifelong member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. She found much comfort and perspective in biblical study and prayer.

Young Rosa received her early education in a rural schoolhouse in Pine Level. At the end of 1932 nineteen-year-old Rosa married the self-educated Raymond Parks. With his encouragement, Rosa finally earned her high school diploma. An avid reader, Raymond Parks exposed Rosa to civil rights activism as early as 1931, when he began organizing a legal defense fund for the Scottsboro boys, nine young African American males accused of raping two white women on a freight train. Rosa Parks attended some of these meetings with her husband.

Parks worked a number of jobs. She was a nurse's assistant, a secretary on a military base, and a private seamstress for whites. Her experience on the military base stood out in her memory. Racial segregation was forbidden on federal property and within federal institutions. Parks noted the contrast each day as she rode home on the segregated city bus. Like other black riders, she often experienced humiliation and disgust at Jim Crow segregation in transportation and in other areas of southern life.

In December 1943, at the urging of an old friend, Parks joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She became secretary of the chapter at her first meeting and soon began work on a voter registration drive and plans to desegregate transportation. One important duty involved traveling around Alabama and interviewing citizens about their experiences with racial discrimination. Also significant to her early activism was her work on behalf of Recy Taylor, a 24-year-old black woman kidnapped and raped by 6 white men in Abbeville. Parks was instrumental in organizing the Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor. Parks's reputation around the state grew in direct proportion to her concentrated efforts. By 1947 she was a well-known civil rights figure throughout Alabama.

In the late 1940s Parks joined in organized discussions about segregated transportation. By 1955 the time was ripe for an organized challenge to Jim Crow in Montgomery. Parks and other activists were inspired in part by the successful 1953 Baton Rouge boycott and by *Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas*, the landmark case that ruled segregation in education to be unconstitutional.

On 1 December 1955, after a long day's work, Parks boarded the Cleveland Avenue bus for a trip home. She paid her ten-cent fare and sat down in an empty section often referred to as "no-man's land." The first ten rows of the bus were reserved for whites, and the last ten rows

were designated for "colored" passengers. Parks took a seat in the middle section open to blacks as long as whites had available seats in their section. When Parks sat down, she noticed several empty spaces in the whites-only section. However, the white section filled quickly after the next two stops. After a third stop, a white man was standing without a seat. Custom and law required that Parks and three other black passengers seated in no-man's land move to the rear of the bus. The driver James F. Blake stopped the bus, approached the four black passengers, and asked that they move. Parks refused. Blake called the police, who came and arrested Parks.

Black Montgomery responded in two ways: the best legal minds prepared to challenge the constitutionality of segregation, and the grassroots activists, clergy, educators, and everyday folk planned for a boycott of the buses. Both succeeded. Blacks organized alternative transportation pools and an elaborate communication system to replace public transportation. Many blacks simply walked. At the center of this effort was Parks as both a symbol and an important strategist. Indeed she had a hands-on role in keeping the boycott going. She worked as a dispatcher for the alternative transportation system and distributed food and clothing to boycott participants who lost their jobs. Blacks stayed off the buses for 381 days, as the boycott became the most celebrated event of the era.

In June 1956 activists won a victory in federal district court when a three-judge panel ruled that intrastate bus segregation was unconstitutional. In November and December 1956 the U.S. Supreme Court responded to appeals by affirming the district court's original ruling. Parks and her community were victorious.

Parks and her husband endured many reprisals in response to their involvement, not the least of which was losing their jobs. Neither was employable after the boycott. By August 1957 Parks had left Montgomery for Detroit.

On settling in her new city, Parks continued her activism, including participation in the 1963 march on Washington and the 1965 Selma to Montgomery march, events closely identified with the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. Parks focused on local politics as well. Her husband died in 1977. In 1987 she cofounded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self Development to inspire and guide youth to lead socially responsible lives.

Throughout the 1990s Parks gave numerous lectures and made countless public appearances. The nation responded by honoring the woman that history would remember as the "mother of the civil rights movement." In 1996 she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and in 1999 she was honored with the Congressional Gold Medal. Parks died in her Detroit home. For nearly a week the nation paid glowing tribute to Parks. She became the first woman and only the second African American to lie in honor in the Capitol Rotunda in Washington, D.C.

Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela was born on July 18, 1918, into a royal family of the Xhosa-speaking Thembu tribe in the South African village of Mvezo, where his father, Gadla Henry Mphakanyiswa (c. 1880-1928), served as chief. His mother, Nosekeni Fanny, was the third of Mphakanyiswa's four wives, who together bore him nine daughters and four sons. After the death of his father in 1927, 9-year-old Mandela—then known by his birth name, Rolihlahla—was adopted by Jongintaba Dalindyebo, a high-ranking Thembu regent who began grooming his young ward for a role within the tribal leadership.

The first in his family to receive a formal education, Mandela completed his primary studies at a local missionary school. There, a teacher dubbed him Nelson as part of a common practice of giving African students English names. He went on to attend the Clarkebury Boarding Institute and Healdtown, a Methodist secondary school, where he excelled in boxing and track as well as academics.

After learning that his guardian had arranged a marriage for him, Mandela fled to Johannesburg and worked first as a night watchman and then as a law clerk while completing his bachelor's degree by correspondence. He studied law at the University of Witwatersrand, where he became involved in the movement against racial discrimination and forged key relationships with black and white activists. In 1944, Mandela joined the African National Congress (ANC) and worked with fellow party members, including Oliver Tambo, to establish its youth league, the ANCYL. That same year, he met and married his first wife, Evelyn Ntoko Mase (1922-2004), with whom he had four children before their divorce in 1957.

Nelson Mandela's commitment to politics and the ANC grew stronger after the 1948 election victory of the Afrikaner-dominated National Party, which introduced a formal system of racial classification and segregation—apartheid—that restricted nonwhites' basic rights and barred them from government while maintaining white minority rule. The following year, the ANC adopted the ANCYL's plan to achieve full citizenship for all South Africans through boycotts, strikes, civil disobedience and other nonviolent methods. Also in 1952, Mandela and Tambo opened South Africa's first black law firm, which offered free or low-cost legal counsel to those affected by apartheid legislation.

On December 5, 1956, Mandela and 155 other activists were arrested and went on trial for treason. All of the defendants were acquitted in 1961, but in the meantime tensions within the ANC escalated, with a militant faction splitting off in 1959 to form the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). The next year, police opened fire on peaceful black protesters in the township of Sharpeville, killing 69 people; as panic, anger and riots swept the country in the massacre's aftermath, the apartheid government banned both the ANC

and the PAC. Forced to go underground and wear disguises to evade detection, Mandela decided that the time had come for a more radical approach than passive resistance.

In 1961, Nelson Mandela co-founded and became the first leader of Umkhonto we Sizwe (“Spear of the Nation”), also known as MK, a new armed wing of the ANC. Several years later, during the trial that would put him behind bars for nearly three decades, he described the reasoning for this radical departure from his party’s original tenets: “[I]t would be wrong and unrealistic for African leaders to continue preaching peace and nonviolence at a time when the government met our peaceful demands with force. It was only when all else had failed, when all channels of peaceful protest had been barred to us, that the decision was made to embark on violent forms of political struggle.”

Under Mandela’s leadership, MK launched a sabotage campaign against the government, which had recently declared South Africa a republic and withdrawn from the British Commonwealth. In January 1962, Mandela traveled abroad illegally to attend a conference of African nationalist leaders in Ethiopia. On August 5, shortly after his return, he was arrested and subsequently sentenced to five years in prison for leaving the country and inciting a 1961 workers’ strike.

Mandela admitted to some of the charges against him while defending the ANC’s actions and denouncing the injustices of apartheid.

Nelson Mandela spent the first 18 of his 27 years in jail at the brutal Robben Island Prison, a former leper colony off the coast of Cape Town, where he was confined to a small cell without a bed or plumbing and compelled to do hard labor in a lime quarry. As a black political prisoner, he received scantier rations and fewer privileges than other inmates. He was only allowed to see his wife, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela (1936-), who he had married in 1958 and was the mother of his two young daughters, once every six months. There were reports of guards burying inmates in the ground up to their necks and urinating on them.

These restrictions and conditions notwithstanding, while in confinement Mandela earned a bachelor of law degree from the University of London and served as a mentor to his fellow prisoners, encouraging them to seek better treatment through nonviolent resistance. He also smuggled out political statements and a draft of his autobiography, “Long Walk to Freedom,” published five years after his release.

Despite his forced retreat from the spotlight, Mandela remained the symbolic leader of the antiapartheid movement. In 1980 Oliver Tambo introduced a “Free Nelson Mandela” campaign that made the jailed leader a household name and fueled the growing international outcry against South Africa’s racist regime. As pressure mounted, the government offered Mandela his freedom in exchange for various political compromises,

including the renouncement of violence and recognition of the “independent” Transkei Bantustan, but he categorically rejected these deals.

In 1982 Mandela was moved to Pollsmoor Prison on the mainland, and in 1988 he was placed under house arrest on the grounds of a minimum-security correctional facility. The following year, newly elected president F. W. de Klerk (1936-) lifted the ban on the ANC and called for a nonracist South Africa, breaking with the conservatives in his party. On February 11, 1990, he ordered Mandela’s release.

After attaining his freedom, Nelson Mandela led the ANC in its negotiations with the governing National Party and various other South African political organizations for an end to apartheid and the establishment of a multiracial government. An overwhelming majority chose the ANC to lead the country, and on May 10 Mandela was sworn in as the first black president of South Africa, with de Klerk serving as his first deputy.

As president, Mandela established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate human rights and political violations committed by both supporters and opponents of apartheid between 1960 and 1994. He also introduced numerous social and economic programs designed to improve the living standards of South Africa’s black population. In 1996 Mandela presided over the enactment of a new South African constitution, which established a strong central government based on majority rule and prohibited discrimination against minorities, including whites.

Improving race relations, discouraging blacks from retaliating against the white minority and building a new international image of a united South Africa were central to President Mandela’s agenda. To these ends, he formed a multiracial “Government of National Unity” and proclaimed the country a “rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.” In a gesture seen as a major step toward reconciliation, he encouraged blacks and whites alike to rally around the predominantly Afrikaner national rugby team when South Africa hosted the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Treated for prostate cancer in 2001 and weakened by other health issues, Mandela grew increasingly frail in his later years and scaled back his schedule of public appearances. In 2009, the United Nations declared July 18 “Nelson Mandela International Day” in recognition of the South African leader’s contributions to democracy, freedom, peace and human rights around the world. Nelson Mandela died on December 5, 2013 from a recurring lung infection.