

PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP

FROM THE 20TH & 21ST
CENTURIES

AVIATION HEROES



INTRODUCTION

Many of these aviation pioneers had childhood dreams of flying or fell in love with flying when their first rides inspired them. They had the courage, determination, bravery, and intelligence to be role models for others. Some of these pioneers grew up economically disadvantaged; others grew up in a household where academic success was encouraged. Some were college graduates.

They worked to dismantle racial discrimination, eliminate prejudice, break industry color barriers, and lead efforts to integrate hostile environments to provide opportunities for other black pilots. They established schools for flight instruction and brought various groups together to advance the cause of aviation.

Despite the odds stacked against them throughout history, black aviators contributed significantly to flight exploration. Whether male or female, these brave and unique individuals achieved many firsts in aviation and continue to be a source of inspiration for us.





EMORY MALICK

1881-1959

Emory was an aviator, airplane mechanic and carpenter from Pennsylvania.

He built his own glider and flew it in 1910.

By 1911, he built his own airplane.

In 1912, he received his international pilot license and was an early graduate of Curtiss Flying School.

He also was the first black pilot to earn a Federal Airline Transport license.



BESSIE COLEMAN

1892-1926

Bessie was born to a family of sharecroppers in Texas in 1892.

She had an early interest in flying and a keen ability for mathematics.

Bessie Coleman became the first black woman to earn a pilot's license in 1921, but she had to do it in France, because flight schools in U.S. would not admit her because of her race and gender.

She became interested in “barnstorming” and performing dangerous tricks for audiences.

Her dream was to start an aviation school.

In 1926, she was a passenger in a plane that flipped, and Bessie fell to her death.

The U.S. Postal service honored Bessie with this Black Heritage stamp in 1995.



BLACK HERITAGE



EUGENE BULLARD

1895-1961

Eugene was born in Georgia; the son of a former slave. He sought to escape Georgia's racism and Jim Crow laws in the South.

He stowed away on a freighter to Europe and fell in love with France where his social prospects were not restricted by skin color.

When WWI broke out, he joined the French Foreign Legion and was wounded twice at Verdun. After his recovery, he was accepted to the Lafayette Flying Corp in 1916.

In 1917, he received his pilot's license, an impossibility in America. His plane insignia was, "All Blood Runs Red."

Bullard served the French again in WWII and was a spy who was fluent in German. He is considered the **"Father of Black Aviators."**



A black and white portrait of a young man, James Banning, wearing a dark jacket with a fur collar, a striped tie, and aviator goggles on his head. The photo is mounted on a dark album page with a yellow border.

JAMES BANNING

1900-1933

James graduated high school in 1918; studied electrical engineering at Iowa State College.

He took his first airplane ride in 1920, and later took flying lessons from a WWI aviator.

He received his mechanics certificate and pilots license in 1926; Banning took a job as flight instructor in 1929 at Bessie Coleman Aero Club.

He and Thomas Allen were the first blacks to fly coast to coast.





CORNELIUS COFFEY

1903-1994

Coffey was a skilled mechanic and pilot.

He was the first black to start an aviation school, the Coffey School of Aeronautics, that became part of the Civilian Pilot Training Program.

Willa Brown, Coffey's wife, formed the National Airmen's Association of America.

They helped organize the Challengers Air Pilots' Association to expand flying opportunities for blacks.





WILLA BROWN

1906-1992

She graduated from Indiana State teachers College in 1927.

She earned her Master Mechanic Certificate in 1935.

Willa Brown earned her pilot license in 1938 and her commercial license in 1939.

She was the first black woman to become an officer in the Illinois Civil Air Patrol.

Willa and Coffey's successes led to the admission of blacks into the Army Air Forces and provided instructors and trainees at the Tuskegee Army Airfield.





JESSIE L. BROWN

1926-1950

Jessie was the son of a sharecropper who excelled in math.

He was a graduate of Ohio State University.

At the age of 22, he was the first black to complete the U.S. Navy's basic flight training program.

He was the first black naval officer to be killed in the Korean War.

The USS Jessie L. Brown (DE-1089), a frigate, was commissioned in his honor.





THE TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PILOTS OF WORLD WAR II WERE HELPED BY THE
PIONEERS WHO WENT BEFORE THEM.





MARLON DEWITT GREEN 1929-2009

Marlon went to Xavier Preparator High School and graduated co-valedictorian in 1947.

He joined the Air Force in 1948.

Marlon was accepted into basic pilot training school in Texas, 1950.

He was commissioned a second lieutenant and flew a variety of planes, resigned in 1957.

He wanted to fly commercial but was denied due to his race. In 1963, the U.S. Supreme court ruled in his favor.

He flew for fourteen years with Continental Airlines.





GUY BLUFORD

1942-

Guy has a PhD in aerospace engineering.

He was a pilot in Vietnam and flew 144 missions; he joined NASA in the late 1970s.

He was the first black to travel into space, and as a mission specialist, he made a total of four trips into space.



MAE JEMISON

1956-

Mae became interested in the sciences in high school with particular emphasis on biomedical engineering.

She entered Stanford University at 16 years old and later graduated from the School of Medicine at Cornell University in 1981.

She applied to NASA in 1986 and completed her training in 1988.

She was the first black woman to become an astronaut. Her first flight into space was in 1992.



OTHER PIONEER BLACK ASTRONAUTS

- **Ronald McNair** (1950-1986), Physicist and mission specialist; died on the Challenger disaster.
- **Frederick D. Gregory**, the first black to pilot and command a Space Shuttle mission; former NASA Deputy Administrator.
- **Charles Bolden**, flew on four space missions; NASA Administrator from 2009-2017.
- **Bernard A. Harris**, was the first black to walk in Space in 1995.
- **Winston E. Scott**, a veteran of three space walks.
- **Robert Curbeam**, a veteran of seven space walks.
- **Michael P. Anderson** (1959-2003), died on the space shuttle Columbia when it disintegrated as it reentered the atmosphere.
- **Stephanie Wilson**, the second black woman into space; flew into space on three space missions.
- **Joan Higginbotham**, an electrical engineer aboard the Space Shuttle Discovery as a mission specialist; the third black woman in space.
- **Alvin Drew** is the veteran of two space walks.
- **Leland Devon Melvin**, an engineer on board the space shuttle Atlantis.
- **Robert Satcher**, is a physician and chemical engineer; participated in two space shuttle walks; the first orthopedic surgeon in space.
- **Victor Glover**, a pilot on the first operational flight of Space X Crew Dragon to the international Space Station.



SUMMARY

“I HAVE LEARNED THAT
SUCCESS IS TO BE
MEASURED NOT SO MUCH
BY THE POSITION THAT
ONE HAS REACHED IN
LIFE AS BY THE
OBSTACLES WHICH HE
HAS HAD TO OVERCOME
WHILE TRYING TO
SUCCEED.”

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

