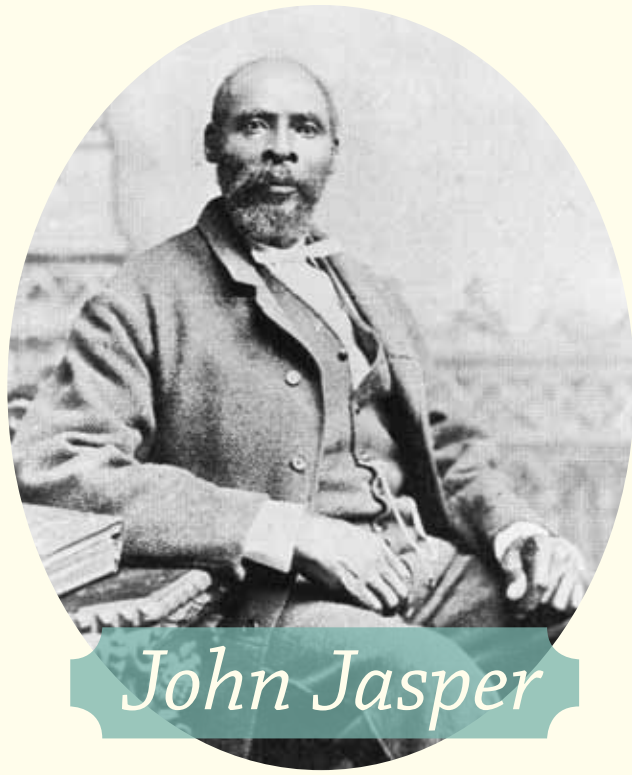


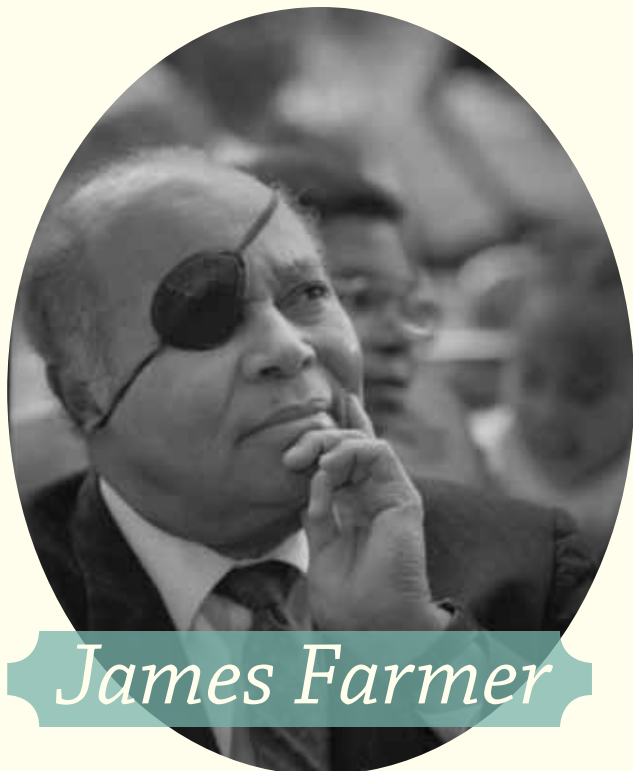
Noah Davis



John Jasper



Oscar Micheaux



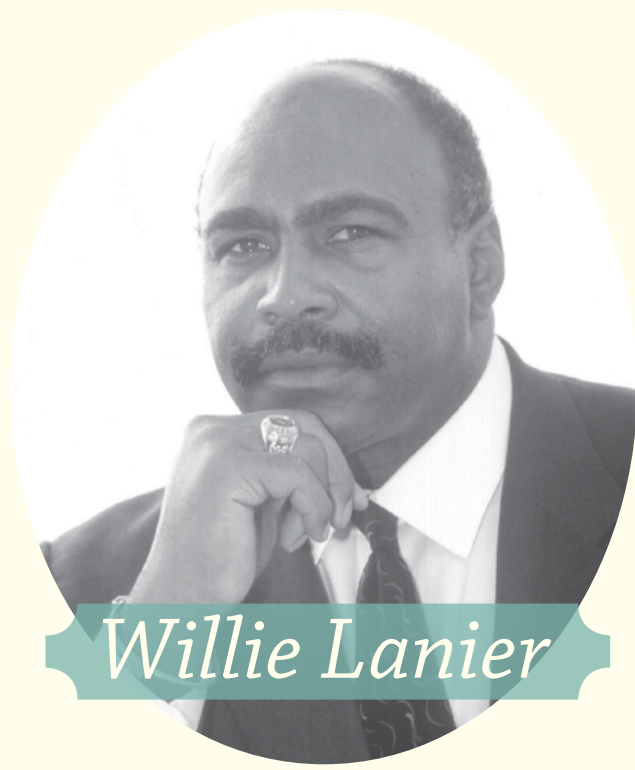
James Farmer



Irene Morgan



Yvonne B. Miller



Willie Lanier



Michael L. Blakey

Noah Davis (1804–1867), Fredericksburg
AUTHOR OF AN EMANCIPATION NARRATIVE
Born into slavery, Noah Davis raised more than \$4,000 to free himself and his family members during the 1840s and 1850s.

John Jasper (1812–1901), Richmond
BAPTIST MINISTER
An extraordinary orator who preached throughout the eastern United States, John Jasper in 1867 established Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, in Richmond.
Nominated by Benjamin Ross, church historian, Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, Richmond

Oscar Micheaux (1884–1951), Roanoke
FILMMAKER
Often recognized as the country's first African American filmmaker, Oscar Micheaux established a film office in Roanoke, where he produced at least six silent movies.
Nominated by Peggy DeHart on behalf of the 2010–2011 first-graders at Belview Elementary School, Radford

Irene Morgan (1917–2007), Gloucester County
PRINCIPAL IN A CIVIL RIGHTS CASE
Irene Morgan's challenge to the Virginia law requiring segregated seating on interstate buses resulted in a landmark ruling by the Supreme Court of the United States.
Nominated by Alyssa Murray's and Kerri Black's fourth-grade students (2010–2011), John B. Cary Elementary School, Richmond

James Farmer (1920–1999), Spotsylvania County
CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER
As director of the Congress of Racial Equality and as initiator of the Freedom Rides, James Farmer played a critical role in the national civil rights movement.
Nominated by Janet M. Stephens's sixth-grade honors U.S. history class (2010–2011), Albert H. Hill Middle School, Richmond

Yvonne B. Miller, Norfolk
POLITICAL LEADER
The first African American woman elected to the House of Delegates and to the Senate of Virginia, Yvonne B. Miller works tirelessly as a politician, educator, and advocate for underrepresented Virginians.

Willie Lanier, Richmond
ATHLETE AND ENTREPRENEUR
Willie Lanier broke through racial barriers in professional football by becoming the first African American to play middle linebacker, the position that directs the defense on the field.

Michael L. Blakey, Williamsburg
ANTHROPOLOGIST
Physical anthropologist Michael L. Blakey helped analyze and interpret the important evidence uncovered at the African Burial Ground in Manhattan.
Nominated by Gwendolyn Harvey, Petersburg

2012 African American TRAILBLAZERS

in Virginia History



People of African descent have been a part of Virginia's—and America's—story since European colonization of the North American continent began. Yet the contributions of African Americans have often been ignored, obscured, or underappreciated by those who recorded history. In observance of African American History Month, the Library of Virginia honors eight distinguished Virginians, past and present, as African American Trailblazers for their important contributions to the state, the nation, or their professions.

The men and women recognized as Trailblazers offer powerful examples of individuals who refused to be defined by their circumstances. Their biographies are a testament to the determination and perseverance displayed by extraordinary people during challenging times. These individuals demonstrate how African Americans have actively campaigned through education and advocacy for better lives for themselves and their people. It is these many contributions that the African American Trailblazers program seeks to recognize and share.

To learn more about these extraordinary men and women, all of whom have used their talents and creativity to push for equality and inclusion in American society, visit our Web site at:

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Noah Davis

1804–1867 | Fredericksburg

AUTHOR OF AN EMANCIPATION NARRATIVE

Noah Davis (March 1804–April 7, 1867) was born into slavery in Madison County. He learned the boot- and shoemaker's trade in Fredericksburg, where he joined the Baptist Church in 1831 and was licensed to preach by white church officials. In 1845 Davis's owner agreed to free him for \$500. After a fund-raising trip through northern states, Davis opened a cobbler's shop to earn the rest. In 1847 white Baptists in Baltimore offered him a job there as a missionary and to provide the balance of the \$500. Leaving his family in Virginia, Davis secured his freedom and established what later became Saratoga Street African Baptist Church.

Davis purchased freedom for his wife and their two youngest children in 1851 and several years later for another daughter and son who were in danger of being sold. When their other three enslaved children faced the auction block in 1858, Davis again toured the North to raise money and succeeded in freeing his daughter. Hoping to earn enough money to free his two sons and to

provide funds for his struggling church, he published his memoirs, *A Narrative of the Life of Rev. Noah Davis, a Colored Man* (1859). In the eighty-six-page *Narrative*, Davis described his life in slavery, his religious conversion, his efforts to secure his family's freedom, and his work as a minister. Davis's health soon began to fail, possibly as a consequence of having worked tirelessly for almost fifteen years to raise more than \$4,000 to rescue most of his family from slavery.

A
NARRATIVE

OF
THE LIFE
OF

REV. NOAH DAVIS.

A COLORED MAN.

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF, AT THE AGE OF FIFTY-FOUR.

PRINTED SOLELY FOR THE AUTHOR'S BENEFIT.

Published by:
JOHN F. WELSHAMPEL, JR.,
No. 484 West Baltimore St.

John Jasper

1812–1901 | Richmond

BAPTIST MINISTER

The year 2012 marks the bicentennial of **John Jasper** (July 4, 1812–March 30, 1901), who was born into slavery in Fluvanna County. After being sent to Richmond to work in a tobacco factory, in 1839 he experienced a religious conversion in Capitol Square. A fellow slave helped him learn to read and write, and Jasper began studying the Bible. He soon became a well-known preacher and traveled around Virginia for twenty years, most often preaching funeral sermons for other slaves. He regularly traveled to Petersburg to lead services at Third Baptist Church.



After the Civil War and emancipation, Jasper established Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, in Richmond. His dynamic leadership had attracted about 2,500 members by 1887, and the church served as a center of religious life in the Jackson Ward neighborhood. He established a Sunday school, and the church also provided social services to help the indigent, young, old, and infirm.

In 1878 Jasper first delivered the sermon for which he became most famous, "The Sun Do Move," in which he expounded on his belief in the fundamental truth of the Bible and the power of God. His dramatic speaking style and vivid imagery attracted national attention, and he gave his sermon in cities throughout the eastern United States for many years. Jasper continued to preach at his church until a few days before his death at age eighty-eight.

Nominated by Benjamin Ross, church historian
Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church, Richmond

Oscar Micheaux

1884–1951 | Roanoke

FILMMAKER

Born in Illinois to former slaves, Oscar Devereaux Micheaux (January 2, 1884–March 25, 1951) is often recognized as the country's first African American filmmaker and as a pioneer in the use of all-black casts. His first feature-length film was *The Homesteaders* (1919), which he wrote, directed, and produced. With more than forty films to his credit during his career, Micheaux also wrote and self-published novels, including *The Conquest: The Story of a Negro Pioneer* (1913) and *The Case of Mrs. Wingate* (1945). In his books and films, such as *Within Our Gates* (1920), Micheaux sought to counter negative and demeaning portrayals of African Americans present in such films as D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915).

Seeking investors, Micheaux contacted several African American businessmen in Roanoke who expressed interest in financing his films. In 1922 he established a corporate office in the Gainsboro neighborhood's Strand Theatre, where he made at least six films over the next three years. Micheaux often filmed scenes in Roanoke, and one movie, *The House Behind the Cedars* (1927), of which no print survives, included a brief appearance by Oliver W. Hill, who later became an important civil rights attorney. Micheaux left for New York City in 1925, where he achieved further fame as part of the Harlem Renaissance. In 2008 the city of Roanoke erected a state historical marker highlighting his work, and in 2010 the United States Post Office issued a commemorative stamp honoring Micheaux as part of its Black Heritage series.



Nominated by Peggy DeHart on behalf of the 2010–2011
first-graders at Belview Elementary School, Radford

Irene Morgan

1917–2007 | Gloucester County

PRINCIPAL IN A CIVIL RIGHTS CASE

Irene Walker Morgan (April 9, 1917–August 10, 2007) left her mother's house in Gloucester County on July 16, 1944, to ride the bus to Baltimore to see her doctor. When more white passengers got on in Middlesex County, the driver asked her to stand to allow the white people to sit. She refused, and the bus driver had her arrested. A court convicted Morgan of violating a 1930 Virginia law requiring separation of white and black passengers. The Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals upheld Morgan's conviction. With assistance from attorneys of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Morgan appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States. On June 3, 1946, the Court ruled in the case of *Irene Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia* that the Virginia law placed an unconstitutional burden on interstate commerce. Thurgood Marshall, who later served on the Court, declared that Morgan's victory was "a decisive blow to the evil of segregation and all that it stands for."



Irene Morgan's first husband died in 1948, and she later married Stanley Kirkaldy and lived in New York, where she ran a child-care center. She graduated from Saint John's University in 1985 and received a master's degree from Queens College in 1990. In 2000 the county of Gloucester honored her during its 350th anniversary celebration, and in January 2001 the president of the United States awarded her the Presidential Citizens Medal in recognition of her courage and the importance of her actions.

Nominated by Alyssa Murray's and Kerri Black's fourth-
grade students (2010–2011)

John B. Cary Elementary School, Richmond

James Farmer

1920–1999 | Spotsylvania County

CIVIL RIGHTS LEADER

The grandson of a slave, Texas native **James Leonard Farmer** (January 12, 1920–July 9, 1999) first encountered segregation as a child, when he could not purchase a soda in a Mississippi drugstore because of his skin color. Although he trained in the ministry, segregation in churches pushed him toward a career in activism. In 1942 Farmer became the chief organizer of the Chicago-based Congress of Racial Equality. CORE, as it became known, developed into a national civil rights organization that used nonviolent techniques such as sit-ins and peaceful demonstrations to fight segregation. Farmer became CORE's national director in 1961 and organized the Freedom Rides through the South to desegregate interstate bus travel.

After resigning as CORE's director in 1966, Farmer labored during the next two decades to expand African American employment opportunities; served as an assistant secretary in the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; and devoted himself to educating future generations. Early in the 1980s he moved to Spotsylvania County and taught at Mary Washington College for more than a decade. Farmer's book *Freedom—When?* (1965) examined civil rights issues. He also wrote a memoir, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement* (1985). Along with Martin Luther King Jr., Whitney Young, and Roy Wilkins, Farmer was regarded as one of the "Big Four" in the civil rights movement. Farmer received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, in 1998.

Nominated by Janet M. Stephens's sixth-grade honors
U.S. history class (2010–2011)

Albert H. Hill Middle School, Richmond

Yvonne B. Miller

Norfolk

POLITICAL LEADER

In her career in the Virginia General Assembly, **Yvonne Bond Miller** (July 4, 1934–) has been a role model for women. The first African American woman to sit in the House of Delegates, she continued her political aspirations as the first African American woman elected to the Senate of Virginia and to chair a General Assembly committee. She now chairs five committees and is the longest-serving woman in the Senate. On the Senate floor Miller fights for the underrepresented of Virginia, championing programs and services for senior citizens, funding for education, and restoration of rights for felons who have completed their sentencing requirements.



Miller grew up poor with twelve siblings in segregated North Carolina and overcame many obstacles. Always striving to learn, she received a Ph.D. and taught education at Norfolk State University. As a professor and head of the department of early childhood and elementary education, Miller touched the lives of countless students and perpetuated her love of teaching and learning. She retired in 1999 and is now professor emerita.

Miller believes that women have special talents as problem-solvers and negotiators that make them good leaders. She encourages all women to exercise their political rights by running for office or supporting female candidates. Miller demonstrates those skills she admires in other women in her relationships with her colleagues at the Capitol, who have described her as having "a great kindness about her." That kindness and a belief in the rights of all Virginians to education and political voice have fueled Miller's lifelong dedication to others.

Willie Lanier

Richmond

ATHLETE AND ENTREPRENEUR

Born in the Halifax County town of Clover, **Willie Edward Lanier** (August 21, 1945–) graduated in 1963 from Richmond's Maggie Walker High School as a star football player. He attended Morgan State University, in Baltimore, where he became a two-time Small College All-American. A second-round pick of the American Football League's Kansas City Chiefs in the 1967 draft, Lanier became the first African American to play middle linebacker, the position often described as "the quarterback of the defense." As the leader of the defense on the field, in 1970 he helped spur the Chiefs to an upset win in Super Bowl IV. Nicknamed "Contact" because of his aggressive tackling, Lanier was named to league all-star teams each year between 1968 and 1975 and missed only one game during his last ten seasons. He received the NFL's Man of the Year Award in 1972 for his community volunteer work.

Lanier retired in 1977. One of football's greatest linebackers, he was elected to the National Football League Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1986 and named by the NFL in 1994 as one of the top seventy-five players ever to play the game. The *Richmond Times-Dispatch*/Touchdown Club of Richmond's award for the best small-college football player in Virginia is named for him. Since retiring from the game and returning to Richmond, Lanier has become a successful business executive. Active in many charitable causes, he lives in Midlothian and directs the Lanier Group LLC investment firm.



Michael L. Blakey

Williamsburg

ANTHROPOLOGIST

Michael Louis Blakey (February 23, 1953–) was the anthropologist in charge of the scientific research on the African Burial Ground discovered in 1991 in downtown New York City. The excavation of the site before the construction of a new federal office building provided valuable information about African Americans in New York during the colonial period. Containing the remains of more than 400 men, women, and children, it is the largest burial site of Africans and African Americans ever analyzed in North America. Blakey was featured in a 1996 PBS documentary, *Slavery's Buried Past*, about the burial ground and the community of free and enslaved people of African origin or descent who lived and died in New York. The analysis of the human remains that he directed revealed the extremely hard working and living conditions that most of the people who were buried there endured while they were alive.



Blakey is a native of Washington, D.C. After graduating from Howard University, he received a doctorate in anthropology from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Frequently honored for his work, Blakey served as president of the Association of Black Anthropologists from 1987 to 1989 and worked as a physical anthropologist at the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian Institution for nine years. He has published numerous scientific articles and books and has lectured around the world. Blakey taught at Howard University before becoming in 2001 professor of anthropology at the College of William and Mary, where he directs the Institute for Historical Biology.

Nominated by Gwendolyn Harvey, Petersburg

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Dictionary of Virginia Biography (Richmond: The Library of
Virginia, 1998–) and on the Library's Virginia Memory
Web site at www.virginiamemory.com. Instructional
materials and nomination forms for the 2013 project are
available at www.lva.virginia.gov/trailblazers.



Research and text by John G. Deal, Marianne E. Julienne,
Maria Kimberly, and Brent Tarter, Library of Virginia.

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