



# African American Heroes, 1865–1940

## Matthew Henson, Arctic Explorer

“I think I’m the first man to sit on top of the world,” Matthew Henson told Robert Peary, his longtime companion and the leader of a series of expeditions to reach the exact geographic location of the North Pole. Their explorations together had spanned nearly twenty years. Peary was a United States naval officer who was able to get financial support from wealthy and important people anxious to be involved in the first expedition to the North Pole.

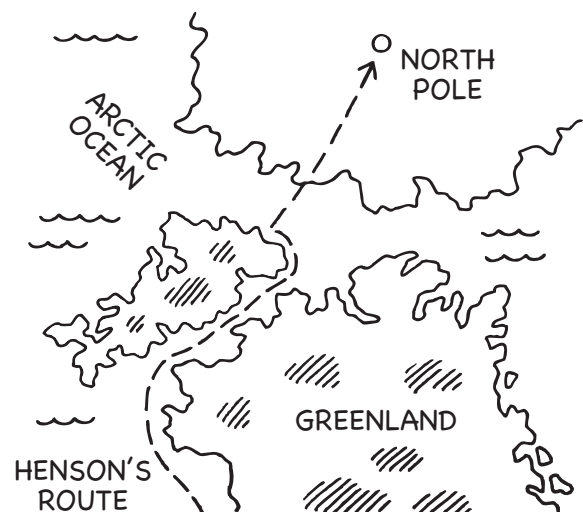


In 1887, Matthew Henson, who had sailed as a cabin boy to many lands in Europe, Africa, and Asia, was hired as a personal servant to Robert Peary, who was then trying to map a canal route through Nicaragua. Henson impressed Peary with his hard work and seafaring skills. In 1891, Peary hired Henson again to accompany him on an expedition to Greenland. His goal was to map the unknown areas of that island and to reach the North Pole.

Together, they would spend eighteen years on eight expeditions before they reached their goal.

Commander Peary raised the money and possessed the influence and navigational skills needed for the mission. Matthew Henson was just as essential to the ultimate success of the mission. He quickly learned from their Inuit (American Indian) companions how to survive and travel in the freezing Arctic weather. He became an expert dog-sled driver in blinding blizzards, over moving ice packs, and around dangerous rivers of freezing ice and water. He learned to hunt the native musk oxen and other animals needed to feed the members of the expedition. He learned to speak the native languages of the Inuit and became a respected friend and colleague of these proud Arctic residents.

On April 6, 1909, after several expeditions combining dangerous sea travel and long sled trips through bitter Arctic storms, Peary, Henson, and four Inuit men reached the top of the world.





# African American Heroes, 1865–1940 *(cont.)*

## Recognition at Last

There were several years of controversy with the conflicting claims of another explorer before geographers and scientists were convinced of the group's achievement. Peary received numerous awards from the United States government and private scientific societies. Henson (and their four Inuit companions) was largely ignored until the 1940s when Henson's achievements and the extraordinary value of his work was recognized. In 1988, thirty-three years after his death, Matthew Henson was reburied next to Robert Peary in Arlington National Cemetery.

## Bill Pickett, Rodeo Cowboy

Cowboys are usually portrayed as white in books and movies, but at least one-third of the cowboys in Texas were African American. African American cowboys were also common in other western states. One of the most famous of these men was Bill Pickett, a son of former slaves who was fascinated as a child by the cowboy life. Pickett worked for local ranchers in Texas as a young boy and became an expert horseman, skilled in training wild horses from the Texas plains. Pickett soon became known for a new way of controlling wild cattle. He would grab a wild steer by the horns and wrestle it to the ground. Often, he would bite the steer's lip to control the animal. This soon developed into a rodeo contest called *bulldogging*.

With his brothers, Bill Pickett started his own business called Pickett Brothers Bronco Busters and Rough Riders. They worked for local ranchers.

Bill later joined local rodeos, and in 1907, he performed in a famous wild west show where he rode horses and wrestled steers. He worked in many shows in the United States and even performed in England before the king and queen. Bill later worked with his friend, Will Rogers, a famous rodeo and radio entertainer of the time. In 1921, Bill Pickett became the first African American cowboy to perform in his own movie called *The Bull-Dogger*. He acted in several other movies, as well.

Bill was hurt in several rodeo accidents, especially one in Mexico City. World War I also interrupted his rodeo and acting career. He died in April 1932 after getting kicked in the head by a horse. In 1971, he became the first African American cowboy accepted in the National Rodeo Cowboy Hall of Fame.





# African American Heroes, 1865–1940 *(cont.)*

## Charles Drew, Blood Expert

Charles Richard Drew was born on June 3, 1904, in an area of Washington, D.C., called Foggy Bottom. His father was a carpet layer, and his mother was a schoolteacher who had attended Howard University, an African American college in Washington, D.C. His grandparents' heritage included African, American Indian, and British roots. In his youth, Charles sold newspapers, worked on construction projects, and did factory work. In church, he was strongly influenced to serve his community. Drew attended the only high school that offered college preparatory classes for African American students.

Charles was accepted at Amherst College on a partial scholarship. He was a strong athlete and was an excellent student. While he was hospitalized for a severe football injury, he observed a blood transfusion and became very interested in medicine. Charles graduated with honors from Amherst in 1926, taught at Morgan State College in Maryland for two years, and saved enough money to enter medical school at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. In 1933, he graduated at the top of his class as a doctor of medicine and a master of surgery.

Drew became very interested in the problems involved in blood transfusions, a process for providing blood to critically ill or wounded patients. In transfusions, patients must have the same type of blood.



Drew worked for two more years in the hospital at McGill University. Drew went home to Washington, D.C., after his father's death and worked for three years at Howard University as a teacher and as a doctor at Freedmen's Hospital, a hospital founded for freed African Americans after the Civil War. In 1938, Drew received a fellowship to do advanced research in blood chemistry and transfusions at Columbia University. He became director of the hospital blood bank in 1939. In 1940, Drew became the first African American to earn a doctor of science in medicine degree. His specialty was blood preservation and blood banking.



# African American Heroes, 1865–1940 *(cont.)*

## Charles Drew, Blood Expert *(cont.)*

Whole blood contains four elements. Red blood cells determine the different types of blood (A, B, AB, and O), but they are the part of blood that breaks down within twenty-four hours. The other three elements are white blood cells, platelets, and plasma. Drew decided to experiment with plasma, which can be given to any person regardless of blood type. It can be stored for a month, dried, and even frozen for a year. Drew made it possible to store blood safely, which became essential to the nation and the world because World War II created a need for countless blood transfusions due to the massive war casualties. Charles Drew developed the first blood banks in New York City by using hospitals and refrigerated trucks for mobile blood banks. He soon helped the Red Cross open blood banks all over the country.

Drew tried to resist the decision of the Red Cross to segregate the blood of African Americans and whites, despite the fact that no differences exist between races in blood composition. He argued against the bigotry of the American Medical Association, which would not accept African American doctors who were therefore prevented from working in white hospitals.

On April 1, 1950, Dr. Drew died in an automobile accident in North Carolina, while on his way to a medical conference in Tuskegee, Alabama. He was given transfusions, but he was too badly injured to survive. The discoveries made by Charles Drew and the doctors he taught will extend his influence for generations.



## Many Heroes and Heroines

There were many more African American heroes and heroines of the period. Singer Marian Anderson combated prejudice with her voice and character. Biologist George Washington Carver (see page 67) invented many products and reformed Southern farming techniques. Sarah B. Walker became a successful business woman who provided jobs for many women and donated large amounts of money for campaigns against lynching and for other African American needs. There were many more heroes and heroines of this predominantly painful period of history.

# African American Heroes, 1865–1940 Quiz

**Directions:** Read pages 25–28 about African American heroes between 1865 and 1940. Answer these questions based on the information in the selection. Circle the correct answer to each question below. Underline the sentence in the selection where the answer is found.

- How many years did Commander Peary and Matthew Henson work together to reach the North Pole?
  - nine
  - twenty-two
  - eighteen
  - two
- What is the word used to describe biting a steer on the lip while wrestling it to the ground?
  - Inuit
  - rodeo
  - surgery
  - bulldogging
- Who is buried in Arlington National Cemetery?
  - Charles Drew
  - Robert Peary
  - Matthew Henson
  - both b and c
- Which of these are the four main blood types?
  - types A, B, C, D
  - types A, B, C, O
  - types O, A, B, AB
  - types E, O, AB, B
- What did the Red Cross insist on doing with blood during World War II?
  - refuse African American donors
  - segregate blood by race
  - refuse to store blood
  - all of the above
- Who accompanied Commander Peary when he reached the North Pole?
  - Matthew Henson
  - four Inuit men
  - Charles Drew
  - both a and b
- Which college did Dr. Charles Drew attend?
  - McGill University
  - Amherst College
  - Columbia University
  - all of the above
- Who was the first African American to earn a doctor of science in medicine degree?
  - Robert Peary
  - Charles Drew
  - George W. Carver
  - Bill Pickett
- Who was a bronco buster and rough rider?
  - Bill Pickett
  - Charles Drew
  - Matthew Henson
  - all of the above
- What dangers did Matthew Henson have to overcome on his Arctic trips?
  - snakes
  - freezing rivers
  - moving ice packs
  - both b and c

# Answer Key

## Page 36

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. c | 6. b  |
| 2. c | 7. b  |
| 3. b | 8. d  |
| 4. d | 9. b  |
| 5. a | 10. d |

## Page 37

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. d | 6. c  |
| 2. c | 7. a  |
| 3. b | 8. b  |
| 4. a | 9. c  |
| 5. c | 10. c |

## Page 38

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. b | 6. d  |
| 2. a | 7. b  |
| 3. b | 8. d  |
| 4. b | 9. a  |
| 5. a | 10. c |

## Page 39

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. a | 6. a  |
| 2. a | 7. d  |
| 3. a | 8. d  |
| 4. c | 9. d  |
| 5. c | 10. a |

## Page 40

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. c | 6. d  |
| 2. d | 7. d  |
| 3. d | 8. b  |
| 4. c | 9. a  |
| 5. b | 10. d |

## Page 41

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. b | 6. d  |
| 2. b | 7. c  |
| 3. d | 8. c  |
| 4. b | 9. d  |
| 5. c | 10. d |

## Page 42

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. d | 6. c  |
| 2. a | 7. c  |
| 3. c | 8. a  |
| 4. d | 9. c  |
| 5. c | 10. d |

## Page 63

### Discussion Starters

1. His brother is in the sixth grade, and he may get picked on or bothered by Byron and other sixth-grade boys who don't like him "showing them up."
2. The boys are very poor, have few clothes to wear, and do not have much to eat. They come from Arkansas, and their "country" speech patterns are different.
3. Kenny's mom sends extra food to share with the boys, and she helps them become friends again after Kenny hurts Rufus's feelings.
4. Answers will vary.
5. He defends Kenny against other bullies, recovers his stolen gloves, and comforts him after the bombing when they return home.
6. He's worried that his sister has been killed and later retreats into himself in reaction to what he sees in the bombed church.
7. She seems less strict and less "proper" to Mrs. Watson.
8. They took food because they couldn't stop easily at restaurants or find places that served African Americans. They also prepared for sleeping in the car and stopping for restroom needs in parks where they were allowed.

## Page 64

### Discussion Starters

1. Answers will vary.
2. They know that he is probably an orphan and surely homeless and want to make sure he has some food.
3. Bud and the other Hooverville residents are usually chased away or hassled by police because the nearby towns had so little money to support or feed the poor.
4. Three examples of kindness: the family who pretends Bud is their child in the breakfast line, the families who share with him at the Hooverville, and Lefty Lewis who helps him find his grandfather.
5. Answers will vary.
6. Most students will be opposed to the destruction of the Hooverville because the poor had no place to go, and they did not appear to cause any trouble. However, they were seen as an embarrassment to the town by some townspeople.
7. Answers will vary.
8. He probably doesn't want to be reminded of the long-ago conflict with Bud's mother or her death.
9. Answers will vary.
10. He quickly learns to play the recorder and the sax.
11. Herman is Bud's grandfather.
12. They argue, and Bud's mother leaves home.