



100 Greatest African Americans: A Biographical Encyclopedia

By Molefi Kete Asante

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100 Greatest African Americans: A Biographical Encyclopedia By Molefi Kete Asante

Since 1619, when Africans first came ashore in the swampy Chesapeake region of Virginia, there have been many individuals whose achievements or strength of character in the face of monumental hardships have called attention to the genius of the African American people. This book attempts to distill from many wonderful possibilities the 100 most outstanding examples of greatness. Pioneering scholar of African American Studies Molefi Kete Asante has used four criteria in his selection: the individual's significance in the general progress of African Americans toward full equality in the American social and political system; self-sacrifice and the demonstration of risk for the collective good; unusual will and determination in the face of the greatest danger or against the most stubborn odds; and personal achievement that reveals the best qualities of the African American people. In adopting these criteria Professor Asante has sought to steer away from the usual standards of popular culture, which often elevates the most popular, the wealthiest, or the most photogenic to the cult of celebrity. The individuals in this book - examples of lasting greatness as opposed to the ephemeral glare of celebrity fame - come from four centuries of African American history.

Each entry includes brief biographical information, relevant dates, an assessment of the individual's place in African American history with particular reference to a historical timeline, and a discussion of his or her unique impact on American society. Numerous pictures and illustrations will accompany the articles. This superb reference work will complement any library and be of special interest to students and scholars of American and African American history.

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Editorial Review

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Asante, professor in the African American Studies program at Temple University, has written a volume in which he attempts to distill his work on the history of African Americans into a list of the 100 greatest people in that history--a difficult task to be sure, and one that can lead to arguments over the choices. Whether one feels Barbara Jordan would make a better choice than Shirley Chisholm, or that Matthew Gaines was a stronger educator than John Russwurm, it is hard to disagree with the people who Asante chose to highlight. He explains his choices in the introduction and makes it very clear that he left out numerous current popular people because he feels the hype around the pop persona is not what makes an individual important. He makes no attempt to rank the people he selected because he viewed that as an impossible task, so arrangement is alphabetical. A short bibliography lists material for further research.

The 100 people who are included range from former slaves such as Crispus Attucks and Phillis Wheatley to more contemporary individuals such as Amiri Baraka and Toni Morrison. Among others are sports figures Jesse Owens and Tiger Woods, performers Marian Anderson and Bill Cosby, and political activists Marcus Garvey and Jesse Jackson. Each portrait covers two to four pages that summarize the person's life, work, and importance and is accompanied by a black-and-white photograph or illustration. There is enough variety so that students with assignments will have no trouble focusing on someone in their area of interest.

Most of the 100 are covered in other reference sources, but this volume offers a reasonably priced, easy-to-digest collection of articles. Recommended for school and public library collections. *RBB*

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Review

"...serves as a reference for scholars and an inspiration to the general reader." -- *Reference and Research Book News, February, 2003*

About the Author

Molefi Kete Asante (Philadelphia, PA), the creator of the first doctoral program in African American Studies, is professor of African American Studies at Temple University and the author of more than 50 books, including *Erasing Racism: The Survival of the American Nation* and *Race, Rhetoric, and Identity: The Architecton of Soul*.

Users Review

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