
Notable African Americans - WV Tourism (@2012)



Vernell “Bimbo” Coles (1968-) - was traded to the Atlanta Hawks of the NBA in June 1999. He had played 5 ½ years with the Miami Heat and 3 ½ with the Golden State Warriors. Coles was a member of the 1988 U.S. Olympic Men's Basketball team. He is the all-time leading scorer at Virginia Tech and holds over 50 Virginia Tech and Metro Conference records; he and one other Virginia Tech basketball player (Dale Curry) have had their numbers retired. He also was drafted twice by Major League Baseball teams, Philadelphia Phillies (26th round/1986) and California Angels (53rd round/1990). Coles was an athlete at Greenbrier East High School in Lewisburg where his football number (8) and basketball number (24) have been retired.



John Robert (J.R.) Clifford (1848-1933), West Virginia’s first African American lawyer, was born near Moorefield, Virginia, in the Eastern Panhandle of present-day West Virginia. At age 15, J.R. enlisted in the United States Colored Troops and fought for the Union in the Civil War. After the War, Clifford attended Storer College in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, and became a schoolteacher and principal in Martinsburg. From 1882 to 1917, he published a national African American newspaper, the Pioneer Press. Clifford was admitted to practice law in 1887 by the West Virginia Supreme Court. In 1898, Clifford won a landmark civil rights and education case before the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals, *Williams v. Board of Education* on behalf of the Tucker County African American school teacher, Mrs. Carrie Williams.

J.R. Clifford was a founder of the Niagra Movement, the cornerstone of the 20th Century Civil Rights movement. In 1906, Clifford helped organize the first American Niagara meeting at Storer College in Harpers Ferry – where his daughter Mary recited W.E.B. Dubois’ “Credo” to the assembled delegates. Source: the J.R. Clifford Project,



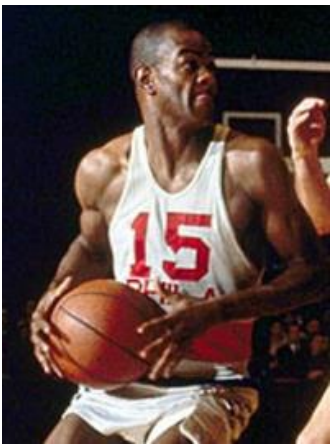
Robinson Delany (1812-1885) - abolitionist, author, and physician, born in Charles Town, WV (then Virginia). From 1847 to 1849 he edited the North Star newspaper with abolitionist Frederick Douglass. He then entered Harvard Medical School. In 1852 he set up practice in Pittsburgh and wrote *The Condition, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People in the United States*, said to be the first presentation of American Black Nationalism. In 1854 he helped organize the National Emigration Convention to discuss his proposal for the resettlement of blacks in Africa. At the start of the Civil War he was assigned by President Abraham Lincoln to recruit blacks for the Union Army and became the first black major in the US Army.



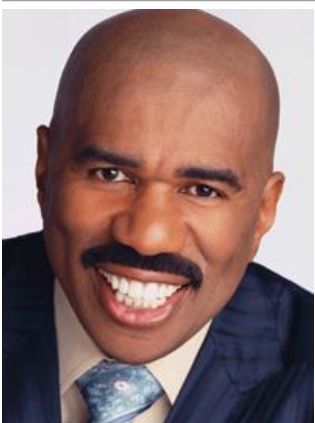
Henry Louis Gates (1950-) - is chairman of Afro-American studies and an English professor at Harvard University and recently listed among the 25 most influential Americans by *Time* magazine. Before joining Harvard in 1991, he taught English and Literature at Duke from 1990 to 1991 and taught on the faculty at Yale (1976-1984) and Cornell (1985-1990). Gates is a prolific essay writer on many diverse issues, from the First Amendment, anti-Semitism, ethnic identity and rap music to what he considers to be a crisis in black leadership. Among his books is his 1994 memoir *Colored People*, which describes what it was like to be black in the US between 1950 and 1970. Gates born in Keyser and grow up in Piedmont, WV, where his father was a paper loader in the day and a janitor at night. After graduating first in his high school class in 1968, Gates enrolled at Potomac State College in Keyser. He transferred to Yale in 1969, graduating summa cum laude in history in June 1973. From there he went on to earn a master's and doctoral degrees in English from Clare College at Cambridge University.



Tracy Gravelly (1968-) plays professional football for the Montreal Alouettes in the Canadian Football League. He was a member of the 1990 New York Giants, which won Super Bowl XXV. He is also one of very few individuals who has both a NFL Super Bowl Ring and a CFL Super Bowl Ring. He was born in Welch, and is a graduate of Mount View High School in Welch and Concord College in Athens.



Hal Greer (1936-) - Played for the Philadelphia 76ers from 1963 to 1973 and was named the MVP in 1968. He was born in Huntington and attended Douglas High School (Black High School) and Marshall University. Hal Greer Boulevard in Huntington is named for him.



Steve Harvey (1957-) is a recognized comedian, author, producer, and radio and television show host. Among his noteworthy television contributions was *The Steve Harvey Show*, which ran from 1997-2002. Steve has appeared on the big screen in *Racing Stripes*, *Johnson Family Vacation*, *The Original Kings of Comedy* and *Love Don't Cost a Thing*. Currently he is the host of *Family Feud*. His most recent movie, *Think Like a Man*, was produced in 2012 and was based on his book *Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Man*, written in 2011. He is from Welch.



Bishop T.D. Jakes is the pastor of Potter's House Church in Dallas and is seen nationally on BET and TBN. He is the author of *Woman, Thou Art Loosed!* and *The Lady, Her Lover, and Her Lord*. Jakes quit working at the Union Carbide chemical plant in 1982 and stepped into the pulpit, becoming pastor of Temple of Faith in Charleston, before moving to Dallas. "The Bishop" was born in Charleston.



James Jett (1970-)- wide receiver for the Oakland Raiders, is the State of WV record holder in track and field sprinting events and won a gold medal in the Barcelona Olympics in the 4x100 meter relay event. He was born in Charles Town and played for Jefferson High School and West Virginia University.



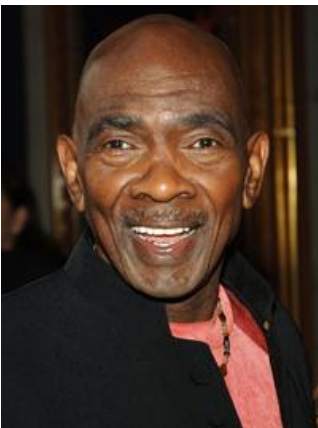
Carl Lee the head football coach at West Virginia State College, earlier played defensive back for the Minnesota Vikings and the New Orleans Saints. He graduated from South Charleston High School in 1979, and then played for Marshall University.



Maj. Gen. James W. Monroe is the commander of the Army Industrial Operations Command. His assignments have included a key logistics role in preparation for Desert Shield/Desert Storm as Deputy Chief of Staff, US Army Central Command. Monroe is a graduate of West Virginia State College.



Randy Moss (1977-) is a receiver for the New England Patriots, was selected as one of the NFC's two starting wide receivers and was the only rookie to be selected for the 1998 Pro Bowl. He was also selected to the 1998 Associated Press All-Pro team. Moss played two years at Marshall University. He is a graduate of DuPont High School in Belle, where he was the WV. High School Football Player of the Year and was twice the WV player of the year in basketball.



Lou Myers (1935-2013) was a distinguished actor who appeared on the TV shows *ER* in 2001, *NYPD Blue* from 2004 to 2005, *The Cosby Show* in 1987, and *A Different World* from 1987 to 1993. He also starred in films such as *The Wedding Planner*, *A Different World*, *It's Kind of a Funny Story*, *Tin Cup*, *Volcano*, and *Bulworth*. In 1990 he appeared on Broadway in August Wilson's *Piano Lesson*. From 2005 on, he appeared in Oprah Winfrey's Broadway play *The Color Purple*. He is from Chesapeake.



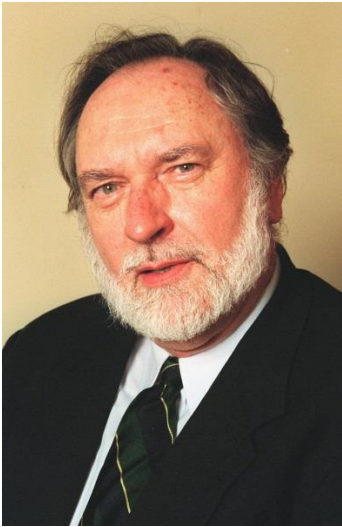
Christopher Harrison Payne (1848-1925) was a pioneer in black journalism, establishing three newspapers, the *West Virginia Enterprise*, *The Pioneer*, and the *Mountain Eagle*. In 1896 he was elected to the state legislature as a Republican delegate from Fayette County, the first black to serve in the West Virginia legislature. In 1903 President Theodore Roosevelt named him Consul General to the Danish West Indies. He was born a slave in Monroe County. As a boy, Payne worked as a farmhand near Hinton and as a servant in the Confederate Army.



Col. George "Spanky" Roberts was a noted black pilot in World War II. He was from Marion County. He was the first commander of the 99th Pursuit Squadron. He served in both World War II and the Korean War as a fighter pilot and commander. He retired from McClellan AFB in February 1968 after 27 years of active duty.



Rev. Leon Howard Sullivan (1922-) a clergyman and civil rights activist. He was Pastor of Zion Baptist Church in Philadelphia from 1950 to 1988 and the author of the *Sullivan Principles* (1977), a code of conduct for US businesses operating in South Africa. Sullivan was the first black appointed to the General Motors board of directors. He was born in Charleston.



Robert Tabscott (1937-) was an author, lecturer, Presbyterian minister, and a recognized authority on African-American studies. He has been a commentator on National Public Radio, and has produced numerous radio and television documentaries on black history and press freedom in America. Tabscott has written a book on Elijah P. Lovejoy, an abolitionist newspaperman who was killed defending his press from an armed mob. In 1997 he talked about Lovejoy with Charles Osgood on *Sunday Morning* on CBS. Tabscott was born in Mullens and graduated from Mullens high school, where he was all-state basketball player in 1955.



Curt Warner is a former running back for the Seattle Seahawks. He played college football at Penn State. Warner is from Pineville.



Booker T. Washington (1856- 1915) was an educator, author, and a civil rights leader who grew up in Malden. Washington was taught to read as a young boy by William H. Davis, a prominent African-American teacher in the Kanawha Valley. After graduating from college, Washington returned to Malden to teach not only children,

but adults as well. Washington was instrumental in Charleston becoming the capital of West Virginia, touring the state and using his superb orating skills to help convince African-Americans that they should choose Charleston. Washington spoke at many public events, one of which was in Atlanta, Ga. His famous quote from that particular speech in 1893 was, "In all things that are purely social we can be separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress." His views on compromise were not appreciated by many of the civil rights activists who felt that a more radical approach would be preferable. Meetings with W.E.B. Dubois, J.R. Clifford and other members of the Niagara Movement at Harpers Ferry led to what is now known as the NAACP. Later in life he was the President of Tuskegee Institute until he died in 1915.



Bill Withers (1938-) a singer and songwriter whose first hit, *Ain't No Sunshine*, went to number three in 1971 and won a Grammy for best R&B song. His biggest hit was *Lean On Me*, which went to number one in 1972. He also recorded *Use Me*, which peaked at number two in 1972. The Gap is using his song *Lovely Day* in its current advertising campaign. He was born in Slab Fork near Beckley. Withers dropped out of high school after the ninth grade and spent nine years in the Navy, where he underwent speech therapy to overcome a stuttering problem. After his discharge, he delivered milk and worked for Ford Motor Co., IBM, and Lockheed.
