R O B E R T A B B O T T

Because he gave voice to the voiceless

The story of the pioneer of the black press involves slaves, Nazis and 25 cents.

Born just five years after the end of the Civil War, Robert Sengstacke Abbott founded a weekly newspaper, The Chicago Defender, one of the most important black newspapers in history, in 1905. Without Abbott, there would be no Essence, no Jet, no Black Enterprise, no The Source.

The success of The Chicago Defender made Abbott one of the nation’s most prominent postslavery black millionaires and paved the way for prominent black publishers such as Earl G. Graves, John H. Johnson and Edward Lewis.

The son of slaves, Abbott grew up with a half-German stepfather whose relatives eventually joined the Third Reich during the 1930s. Ironically enough, young Robert was taught to hate [racial injustice](https://theundefeated.com/features/a-question-of-racism/), despite encountering it at every turn in his life, from his early foray into the printing business to his time in law school in Chicago, all the way to religious institutions.

An alum of [Hampton University](http://theundefeated.com/features/the-real-hu-vs-the-first-hu-hampton-howard-university-hbcu-football/), Abbott was a catalyst for the Great Migration at the turn of the 20th century, when 6 million African-Americans from the rural South moved to [urban cities](http://theundefeated.com/features/dnc-host-philadelphia-has-high-poverty-rate/) in the West, Northeast and Midwest, with 100,000 settling in [Chicago](https://theundefeated.com/features/still-optimistic-obama-bids-farewell-in-chicago/). Like a politician promising tax breaks to out-of-state companies to inspire relocation, Abbott took it upon himself to lay out the welcome mat for the millions of blacks abandoning the Jim Crow South to head to the [Windy City](http://www.espn.com/video/clip/_/id/17405118), where manufacturing jobs were awaiting as World War I approached.

What started off as 25 cents in capital and a four-page pamphlet distributed strictly in black neighborhoods quickly grew into a readership that eclipsed half a million a week at its peak, numbers that mirror the Miami Herald and Orlando Sentinel today. The paper’s rise in stature and circulation was due in large part to Abbott being a natural hustler. The Defender was initially banned in the South due to its encouragement of African-Americans to abandon the area and head North, but the Georgia native used a network of black railroad porters (who would eventually become the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters) to distribute the paper in Southern states.

After the influx of blacks in the Midwest following the Great Migration, Abbott and The Defender turned their attention to other issues afflicting blacks in the early 20th century, including Jim Crow segregation, the presidency of Woodrow Wilson and the deadly 1919 Chicago riots that mirrored recent-day demonstrations seen in [Baltimore](http://theundefeated.com/features/do-not-treat-criminals-like-citizens/) and [Ferguson, Missouri](https://theundefeated.com/features/michael-brown-and-ferguson/). – Martenzie Johnson

A L V I N A I L E Y

Because he brought dance & the beauty of black bodies to the fight for justice

Sometimes I play a little what-if game with deceased artists whom I admire. What if so-and-so were still alive? What kind of righteous, glorious, angry, transcendent art would he/she bring forth in our age of [Barack Obama](https://theundefeated.com/features/how-obama-changed-the-conversation-around-first-blacks/) and [Donald Trump](https://theundefeated.com/features/donald-trumps-inauguration-cheers-protests-and-mostly-white-faces/), Aleppo, Syria, and Standing Rock Indian Reservation, [Trayvon Martin](https://theundefeated.com/features/joe-mcknight-and-the-fear-of-the-black-man/) and gay marriage, social media and gun violence?

Fortunately for us, Alvin Ailey, the legendary [modern dance](http://theundefeated.com/features/dance-little-sister/) pioneer, choreographer and civil rights artist-as-activist, left us his answers. Although Ailey died nearly 30 years ago, many of his best-known pieces have become as emblematic of vibrant, relevant American art as tap dance, jazz, the literature of Toni Morrison and hip-hop. Ailey explored issues of social justice, racism and spirituality in the African-American experience. This was during the height of the civil rights movement, when the notion of black classically trained dancers moving to the music of Duke Ellington, gospel, blues, Latin and African pop was truly revolutionary, if not unfathomable.

Born into poverty in [Texas](https://theundefeated.com/features/the-waco-horror/) in 1931, Ailey drew from his emotional well of close-knit black churches, rural juke joints, fiery protest songs and a lonely childhood as a closeted gay man to fuel his [passion for dance](https://theundefeated.com/features/the-waco-horror/). He befriended many of his fellow mid-century American masters (Maya Angelou, Carmen De Lavallade, Merce Cunningham and Katherine Dunham, to name a few) while living in New York. After Ailey’s death from an [AIDS-related illness](http://theundefeated.com/features/from-music-promoter-to-aids-survivor-and-crusader-maria-davis-is-a-living-testimony/) in 1989, the company and school grew into the premier repository for emerging black choreographers, and is still the most popular dance touring company on the international circuit.

Ailey created “a human dance company and school that didn’t fit any model,” said author and arts and dance patron, Susan Fales-Hill. “His dancers were and are multicultural, and his company was an amalgam of the African and European diaspora. He always addressed the pain of the African-American journey, but he also celebrated the triumph and redemption of the human spirit” in pieces such as Revelations (1960), Ailey’s most celebrated work. The up-from-slavery dance suite finds beauty in the midst of tragedy and pain, celebrates black folks’ resilience and humanity, and allows hope to overcome tribulation. “Ailey understood that the arts are a litmus test for who’s civilized and who isn’t civilized,” Fales-Hill said. “The fact that he raised people of color to the level of great, universally recognized artists was an enormous triumph.” – Jill Hudson

R I C H A R D A L L E N

Because God doesn’t segregate, but humans do

A Feb. 20, 1898, sermon by the Rev. John Palmer on Richard Allen’s place in African-American history reads:

“If true greatness consists in that self-sacrificing heroism and devotion which makes a man insensible and indifferent to his own personal welfare, interest, comfort and advantages; and to deny himself of all for the sake of others, and for the elevation and advancement of others, without a single promise of reward — we say, if these constitute greatness, then Richard Allen, the first bishop of the AME church, was great.”

Allen is considered the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in America. That church, now with a membership of more than 2.5 million people and 6,000 churches, was the country’s first independent black denomination.

Former slave. Born into servitude in 1760 in Philadelphia, “Negro Richard” earned $2,000 to buy his [freedom](https://theundefeated.com/features/a-freedom-rider-recalls-martin-luther-king-jr-and-the-complex-ride-to-civil-rights/) and that of his brother in 1780. Richard Allen, the name he chose as a freedman, came of age during the American Revolution, just as the antislavery movement and denominational Christianity were gaining prominence.

Allen discovered religion after hearing a Methodist preacher at a secret gathering of slaves in Delaware. In his biography, [The Life Experiences and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen](http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/allen/allen.html), he wrote, “I was awakened and brought to see myself, poor, wretched and undone, and without the mercy of God must be lost.”

Preacher. Allen, his wife Sarah and others opened the doors of Bethel AME Church on July 29, 1794, on the site of a converted blacksmith shop on Sixth Street in Philadelphia. Allen was ordained the church’s pastor. Driven to establish “Mother Bethel” by white Methodists’ segregation of blacks, Allen brought other black Methodist congregations in Philadelphia together in 1816. They elected Allen bishop, a position he held until his death in 1831.

Abolitionist. Allen focused his sermons on the freedom of slaves, cessation of colonization, education of youths and temperance. He created denominational groups to care for and educate the poor. His home and Bethel AME were stops on the [Underground Railroad.](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/underground-railroad)

Educator. Recognizing that former slaves and freedmen needed education, he opened a day school for black children and a night school for adults. Allen published articles in Freedom’s Journal attacking slavery, colonialism and organizations that advocated the migration of blacks back to Africa. He authored three pamphlets about escaping the bonds of slavery, including An Address to Those Who Keep Slaves and Approve the Practice.

Allen’s legacy lives on today in the AME church’s work, whose motto is “God Our Father, Christ Our Redeemer, the Holy Spirit Our Comforter, Humankind Our Family.” – John X. Miller

M U H A M M A D A L I

Because he was the greatest, just like he said he was

[Muhammad Ali](http://www.espn.com/espn/feature/story/_/id/15926173/remembering-muhammad-ali) is the undisputed president of athletes, taking office on June 4, 1967.

Just over a month earlier, the heavyweight boxing champion refused to be drafted into the Vietnam War. As Ali awaited conviction for draft evasion and the revocation of his title, [several African-American athletes, led by the NFL’s Jim Brown, convened a meeting with him in Cleveland.](http://www.cleveland.com/sports/index.ssf/2012/06/gathering_of_stars.html)

Brown, fiercely independent himself, told [The Cleveland Plain Dealer](https://theundefeated.com/features/believeland-is-real/) in 2012, “I felt with Ali taking the position he was taking, and with him losing the crown, and with the government coming at him with everything they had, that we as a body of prominent athletes could get the truth and stand behind Ali and give him the necessary support.”

There is a now iconic photograph of Ali and his newly formed “cabinet.” Flanked by eventual Hall of Famer Brown and eventual Hall of Famers [Bill Russell](http://www.nba.com/history/players/russell_bio.html) and [Kareem Abdul-Jabbar](https://theundefeated.com/features/what-is-kareem-abdul-jabbar-doing-now/) (then Lew Alcindor) the champ also had eventual Hall of Famers [Willie Davis](http://www.profootballhof.com/players/willie-davis/) and [Bobby Mitchell](http://www.profootballhof.com/players/bobby-mitchell/) as well as attorney [Carl Stokes](http://www.nytimes.com/1996/04/04/us/carl-stokes-68-dies-precedent-setting-mayor.html) (who would become Cleveland’s mayor and the first African-American mayor of a major city) behind him.

The united front in Cleveland also proved an inspiration for Martin Luther King Jr.

King praised [Ali for his courage](https://theundefeated.com/features/muhammad-ali-fought-for-america-to-understand-islam-not-fear-it/) in one of his own most courageous statements about Vietnam: “Every young man in this country who believes that this war is abominable and unjust should file as a conscientious objector.”

[As a boxer](http://theundefeated.com/features/a-great-day-for-the-greatest/), Ali is considered the [greatest of all time](https://theundefeated.com/features/how-muhammad-alis-boxing-was-creative-black-art/). His style, power, ring savvy and winning of an Olympic gold medal and the [world heavyweight title](http://theundefeated.com/features/ali-hero-to-a-young-black-boy/) three times was unprecedented.

[He lost the heavyweight crown in 1971](https://espn.go.com/classic/s/silver_ali_frazier.html). His religious conversion to Islam only made him more resolute.

Ali’s professional record was 56–5 — but the fight that epitomizes his genius was the “[Rumble in the Jungle](http://www.espn.com/video/clip/_/id/15939976),” the bout against heavyweight champion George Foreman in Kinshasa, Zaire. Ali, at age 32, was the underdog. But Ali’s “rope-a-dope” technique baited Foreman into throwing wild punches and exhausting himself. In an eighth-round knockout, Ali reclaimed the heavyweight title that had been taken from him 10 years earlier.

At the [memorial service](https://theundefeated.com/galleries/the-memorial-for-the-greatest/) held after his death on June 3, 2016, his widow, Lonnie Ali, said this: “Muhammad indicated that when the end came for him, he wanted us to use his life and his death as a teaching moment for young people, for his country and for the world.”

Born in 1942 in Louisville, Kentucky, as Cassius Clay, he will be forever known simply as “The Greatest.” – Derrick Z. Jackson

M A Y A A N G E L O U

Because she rose to greatness despite facing some of life’s cruelest hardships

[Maya Angelou](http://theundefeated.com/videos/a-late-thank-you-for-dr-angelou/) lived a life just as remarkable as the poetry and prose she crafted in her 86 years on this earth.

And it was the documentation of [Angelou’s](http://theundefeated.com/videos/i-know-why-the-caged-bird-stings/) life that resonated with her audience and earned her a myriad of accolades, including three Grammy awards, the [Presidential Medal of Freedom](https://theundefeated.com/features/these-black-legends-to-receive-the-presidential-medal-of-freedom-from-president-obama/), and a host of honorary degrees.

Despite horrific periods in her life, [Angelou rose](https://theundefeated.com/features/serena-williams-recites-maya-angelou-poem-before-wimbledon-finals/). At 8 years old, she was raped by her mother’s boyfriend. After being convicted, Angelou’s abuser was found beaten to death. The once garrulous girl from Stamps, Arkansas, silenced herself for nearly five years, believing that her voice had killed the man because she identified him to her family. Instead, she memorized poetry during her silence, rearranging cadences and reciting Shakespearean sonnets in her head.

With the help of a teacher, Angelou was able to speak again. She used [literature](https://theundefeated.com/features/new-beginnings-the-freshest-books-of-2016/) to recover from trauma, but got pregnant at 16. She found work as [San Francisco’s first African-American female cable car conductor](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/local/wp/2014/03/12/maya-angelou-honored-for-her-first-job-as-a-street-car-conductor-in-san-francisco/?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.cb7566aaba7b) and later worked in the sex trade and as a calypso singer to support her family. Angelou spoke honestly of her experiences, unashamed to walk in the truths of her past.

Later, she joined the Harlem Writers Guild and with help from friend and fellow author James Baldwin, went on to write I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings in 1969 — the first in what would become a [seven-volume, best-selling autobiographical series](https://www.librarything.com/series/Maya%2BAngelou%27s%2BAutobiographies). Nearly a decade later, Angelou struck poetic gold with [And Still I Rise](http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/3912/and-still-i-rise-by-maya-angelou/9780394502526/), a collection that remains one of her most important works.

Angelou was also a fearless and determined civil rights activist, serving as the northern coordinator for Martin Luther King Jr.’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and working with Malcolm X to establish the Organization of Afro-American Unity.

Life tried hard to break Angelou, but in the face of it all, still she rose. – Maya A. Jones

M A R Y M C L E O D

B E T H U N E

Because the ‘First Lady of the Struggle’ left us an indelible legacy of love, hope, and dignity

Though she was able-bodied, Mary McLeod Bethune carried a cane because she said it gave her “swank.”

An educator, civil rights leader and adviser to five U.S. presidents, the “First Lady of the Struggle” has been synonymous with black uplift since the early 20th century. She turned her faith, her passion for racial progress, and her organizational and fundraising savvy into the enduring legacies of [Bethune-Cookman University](https://theundefeated.com/features/bethune-cookman-takes-meac-baseball-title-on-eve-of-teams-new-logos/) and the National Council of Negro Women. She understood the intersections of education, optics and politics and was fierce and canny in using them to advance the cause of her people.

Bethune, the 15th of 17 children, grew up in rural South Carolina and started working in the fields as a young girl. She hoped to become a missionary in Africa after attending Scotia Seminary in North Carolina and Chicago’s Moody Bible Institute, but was told black missionaries were unwelcome. So, she turned to educating her people at home, founding the Daytona Literary and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls in 1904 with $1.50 and six students, including her young son.

Twenty years later, the school was merged with Cookman Institute of Jacksonville, Florida. In 1924, Bethune, one of the few female college presidents in the nation, became president of the National Association of Colored Women. A decade later, in a move to centralize dozens of organizations working on behalf of black women, Bethune founded the influential National Council of Negro Women.

Bethune helped organize black advisers to serve on the Federal Council of Negro Affairs, the storied “Black Cabinet,” under President Franklin D. Roosevelt. First lady Eleanor Roosevelt considered Bethune one of her closest friends. Photos featuring her with the president or first lady ran prominently in [black publications](https://theundefeated.com/features/ebony-and-jet-are-our-black-family-photo-albums/), helping to normalize the notion of black faces in high places.

Bethune worked to end poll taxes and lynching. She organized protests against businesses that refused to hire African-Americans and demonstrated in support of the Scottsboro Boys. She lobbied for women to join the [military](http://theundefeated.com/features/military-service-members-show-support-with-veteransforkaepernick/). She organized, she wrote, she lectured, and she inspired.

Perhaps her most enduring written work was her last will and testament:

I LEAVE YOU LOVE … I LEAVE YOU HOPE … I LEAVE YOU THE CHALLENGE OF DEVELOPING CONFIDENCE IN ONE ANOTHER … I LEAVE YOU A THIRST FOR EDUCATION … I LEAVE YOU RESPECT FOR THE USES OF POWER … I LEAVE YOU FAITH … I LEAVE YOU RACIAL DIGNITY … I LEAVE YOU A DESIRE TO LIVE HARMONIOUSLY WITH YOUR FELLOW MEN … I LEAVE YOU FINALLY A RESPONSIBILITY TO OUR YOUNG PEOPLE. – Lonnae O’Neal

S H I R L E Y C H I S H O L M

Because before ‘Yes We Can’ there was ‘Unbought and Unbossed’

When thinking about how contentious things are in [Congress](https://theundefeated.com/features/congress-passes-emmett-till-unsolved-civil-rights-crimes-reauthorization-act/) today, imagine being the sole black female congresswoman nearly 50 years ago, at the height of the civil rights movement. Shirley Chisholm was relentless in breaking political barriers with respect to both race and gender. She was a pioneer.

In 1968, Chisholm became the first black woman elected to the U.S. Congress, representing New York’s 12th District for seven terms from 1969 to 1983. As both a New York state legislator and a congresswoman, Chisholm championed the rights of the least of us, fighting for improved education; health and social services, including unemployment benefits for domestic workers; providing disadvantaged students the chance to enter college while receiving intensive remedial education; the food stamp program; and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children program.

Chisholm noted that she faced more discrimination because of gender than race during her New York legislative career, while acknowledging the additional struggle that black women encounter specifically because of their race. All those Chisholm hired for her congressional office were women; half of them were black. “Tremendous amounts of talent are lost to our society just because that talent wears a skirt,” she said.

Before President [Barack Obama’s](https://theundefeated.com/features/president-obama-told-us-what-it-means-to-be-undefeated/) “Yes We Can” slogan and [Hillary’s](https://theundefeated.com/whhw/clinton-and-trump-twitter-beef/) “Stronger Together,” there was Chisholm’s “Unbought and Unbossed.” In 1972, Chisholm became the first black candidate for a major party’s nomination for president of the United States, and the first woman to run for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination.

Chisholm remarked in words that still resonate today that “in the end, anti-black, anti-female, and all forms of discrimination are equivalent to the same thing: anti-humanism.” The next time you queue up Solange Knowles’ album, [A Seat at the Table](https://theundefeated.com/features/solange-knowles-new-album-seat-at-the-table-master-p-lil-wayne/), be reminded of Chisholm’s words: “If they don’t give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.” – April Reign

B E N J A M I N O. D A V I S

Because he led the fight against enemies both foreign & domestic

Benjamin Oliver Davis Sr., the first African-American general for the U.S. Army, battled segregation by developing and implementing plans for the limited desegregation of [U.S. combat forces](http://theundefeated.com/features/first-woman-to-lead-black-aeronautics-organization-is-now-at-the-forefront/) in Europe during World War II.

Davis, who was born in Chicago in 1877 and Howard University-educated, began his military career in the trenches of the Spanish-American War as a volunteer grunt. He liked the [military’s discipline and order](http://theundefeated.com/features/meet-stayce-harris-the-first-black-woman-to-become-an-air-force-lieutenant-general/), so when he was discharged as a volunteer, he enlisted after deciding he [wanted a military career](http://theundefeated.com/features/pots-pans-dorie-millers-heroism-should-be-remembered-on-pearl-harbor-day/).

In the throes of segregation for four decades, he commanded troops in Liberia and the Philippines, where his unit was the famed [Buffalo Soldiers](https://www.nps.gov/prsf/learn/historyculture/buffalo-soldiers-and-the-spanish-american-war.htm). He was three times assigned as a professor of military science and tactics at Wilberforce University in Ohio and Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

His duty assignments were designed to avoid him being put in command of white troops or officers. He rose slowly through the ranks, becoming the first black colonel in the army in 1930. All of his appointments were considered temporary, a move designed to limit his exposure to white troops.

During [World War II](https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II), he headed a special unit charged with safeguarding the status and morale of black soldiers in the army, and he served in the European theater as a special adviser on race relations. In 1940, he was promoted to [brigadier general](https://www.britannica.com/topic/brigadier-general) by President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Franklin-D-Roosevelt), a move some thought was only because Roosevelt needed black votes in the presidential election. Davis retired in 1948 after 50 years of service.

Following many years of service, he became an adviser for the military on racial discrimination, pushing for [full integration of the armed forces](https://theundefeated.com/features/grambling-wins-the-air-force-reserve-celebration-bowl-with-second-half-comeback/). He earned a Bronze Star and Distinguished Service Medal.

Davis’ determined and disciplined rise in the Army paved the way for black men and women — including his son, [Benjamin O. Davis Jr.](http://www.af.mil/AboutUs/Biographies/Display/tabid/225/Article/107298/general-benjamin-oliver-davis-jr.aspx), a West Point graduate who in 1954 became the second African-American general in the U.S. military and the first in the Air Force.

Davis Jr. led the [Tuskegee Airmen](http://tuskegeeairmen.org/) and continued the fight against the establishment and tradition to advance the cause of blacks in the military.

In 1948, President Harry S. Truman ordered the end of discriminatory practices in the armed forces, relying on the foundation built by Davis. After his death in 1970, he was buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

In January 1997, the U.S. Postal Service issued a [Black Heritage Stamp](https://arago.si.edu/category_2044318.html) to honor his service and contributions. – John X. Miller

Z O R A N E A L E

H U R S T O N

Because she inspired generations of proud Black Southern artistry

Recently, Salvage the Bones author and [Fire This Time](https://theundefeated.com/features/the-fire-this-time-a-new-generation-of-voices-on-race/) editor Jesmyn Ward [published](https://www.buzzfeed.com/jesmynward/this-was-the-year-america-finally-saw-the-south?utm_term=.xr1Dnr535#.xiv2mANZN) an essay rejoicing in the visibility and celebration of Southern blackness and the fact that it had made its way to television in the form of [Atlanta](https://theundefeated.com/features/welcome-to-atlanta-donald-glover/) and [Queen Sugar](https://theundefeated.com/features/the-sweetest-spots-of-queen-sugar/). Ward is a Mississippian who drank in the words of Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker because they spoke to her existence, and she, like so many other black Southern artists and writers, owes a debt of gratitude to Hurston.

Long before Andre 3000 took to the stage at the 1995 Source Awards to famously proclaim “the South got somethin’ to say,” Hurston was laying the intellectual groundwork for such a case. The author of four novels, including the now beloved and celebrated Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) and the autobiography Dust Tracks on a Road (1942), was [dismissed](http://www.nytimes.com/1985/04/21/books/a-negro-way-of-saying.html?pagewanted=all) as a southern bumpkin by her male contemporaries, including Richard Wright, Sterling A. Brown, Ralph Ellison and Alain Locke. Even Langston Hughes, who co-founded Fire magazine with her and Wallace Thurman in 1926, [called](http://www.howard.edu/library/reference/guides/hurston/) her an “outrageous woman.”

Wright in particular [derided](http://people.virginia.edu/~sfr/enam358/wrightrev.html) her style and voice as “minstrel technique.” Hurston had the pesky habit of writing the way black people in the South — and in particular the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida, where she was raised — actually spoke. Furthermore, she had the nerve not to think anything was wrong with it, not even after spending six years studying at Howard University, from 1918 to 1924, which Hurston [regarded](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3134393?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents) as a clearinghouse of “Negro money, beauty and prestige.” While she was a student there, Hurston founded The Hilltop, Howard’s student-run newspaper.

As a folklorist, Hurston is part of a literary tradition that shares its ethos with the blues and with contemporary musical acts such as Alabama Shakes, the Carolina Chocolate Drops and OutKast. You can draw lines from Hurston’s earnest interest in hoodoo to Beyoncé’s embrace of all things Southern gothic in Lemonade. The longstanding divide between Northern and Southern black people, metropolitan vs. agrarian, is one that repeatedly informs our history and culture, [even](https://theundefeated.com/features/the-trials-of-muhammad-ali-gives-context-and-color-to-alis-early-radicalism/) the civil rights movement. It was Walker, who in 1975, brought Hurston out of the American literary hinterlands with Looking for Zora, her [essay](https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=c3R1ZGVudC5iY3Nkbnkub3JnfG1yLWFsYmFuby1ob21lcGFnZXxneDo2MmNhNTJhNGM4OWI0YTY3) published in Ms. Magazine.

But Hurston retained a self-assured elegance and wit that didn’t bother worrying itself with outside acceptance. And it’s that sort of thinking that allowed her to gift us with this gem of quotation, and a philosophy we could all stand to internalize, Southern or not: “Sometimes, I feel discriminated against, but it does not make me angry. It merely astonishes me,” Hurston once said. “How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It’s beyond me.” – Soraya Nadia McDonald