

Black History Essay Contest Heroes

Standing on their Shoulders: A Black History Standout

(select one to write about)

Robert Russa Moton (1867 – 1940)

- An American educator and author who served as an administrator at [Hampton Institute](#) and principal of Tuskegee Institute for over 20 years.

Gordon Parks (1912-2006)

- Photographer, filmmaker who documented poverty and civil rights

Benjamin Banneker (1731–1806) Mathematician, astronomer, and inventor

- Helped survey the land for Washington, D.C. and published widely respected almanacs.

Thurgood Marshall (1908–1993)

- First African American **U.S. Supreme Court Justice**.
- As a lawyer argued *Brown v. Board of Education*, ending legal school segregation.

Jackie Robinson (1919–1972)

- First African American to play Major League Baseball in the modern era (Brooklyn Dodgers, 1947).
- Broke barriers in sports and became a symbol of courage and equality.

Mark Dean:

- Co-created the IBM PC, invented the color PC monitor, and developed the first gigahertz chip.

Roy Clay Sr.:

- "Godfather of Silicon Valley," developed software for HP's first computer, paving the way for African Americans in tech.

Marian Croak:

- VP at Google, – Inventor behind VoIP technology (Zoom, Skype, etc. made possible)

Nat Turner (1800–1831)

- Enslaved preacher who led the **1831 Southampton County rebellion**, one of the most significant uprisings against slavery in U.S. history.

Mary Smith Kelsey Peake (1823–1862)

- Free Black woman from Norfolk who defied Virginia law by teaching African Americans. She founded the **first Black school in Hampton** in 1861.

Henrietta Lacks (1920–1951)

- From Roanoke, VA. Her cells (known as **HeLa cells**) became the foundation for countless medical breakthroughs, including vaccines and cancer research.

Booker T. Washington (1856–1915)

- Born in Franklin County, VA. Became one of the most influential African American educators and leaders, founding Tuskegee Institute and advising U.S. presidents.