



photography. During the 1940s he made photographs for the Farm Security Administration and the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, projects that documented American life during that time. He joined the staff of *Life* magazine in 1949 as its first African-American photographer, working in France, the United States, and Brazil. He retired from *Life* in the early 1970s to make films, write, paint, and compose music, in addition to his photography.

**Langston Hughes** Born in Joplin, Missouri, Langston Hughes (1902-1967) grew up in Lawrence, living with his grandmother from 1903 to 1915. He attended Columbia University, studying engineering, but left the program, eventually earning a B.A. from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. In 1930 his first novel, *Not Without Laughter*, a bittersweet account of a fictional African-American boy growing up in a small Kansas town, won the Harmon gold medal for literature. Throughout his life, Hughes wrote poetry, novels, short stories and plays, portraying black life in America from the twenties to the sixties. He was a key figure in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and counted jazz among his many influences.

**Gwendolyn Brooks**, Poet Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000) was born in Topeka, Kansas and moved with her family to Chicago when she was still a baby. She published her first poem at the age of 13 and became a regular contributor to the poetry column of the African-American newspaper the *Chicago Defender*. Her poems addressed both race and gender issues and she was the first African-American to win a Pulitzer Prize for her book *Annie Allen*. Brooks once told *Contemporary Literature* "I want to write poems that will be non-compromising. I don't want to stop a concern with words doing good jobs, which has always been a concern of mine, but I want to write poems that will be meaningful."

**Oscar Micheaux**, Born to former slaves in Metropolis Illinois, Oscar Micheaux (1884-1951) was the first African-American to produce a feature length film. Micheaux's uncles lived in Great Bend, Kansas and his parents moved to Great Bend when he was a young man. Though he didn't live in Great Bend for an extended period, he visited regularly and is buried in the cemetery there. As a young man, Micheaux moved to South Dakota to homestead and take up farming. He wrote an autobiographical novel called *The Homesteader*. He then turned to filmmaking, producing his first movie, based on *The Homesteader*, in 1919. Because film studios of the time would not hire a black producer, Micheaux formed his own studio, writing, producing and directing at least 43 films in his lifetime. He was also the first African-American to produce a "talkie."

**Hattie McDaniel**, Hattie McDaniel (1895-1952) was born in Wichita, Kansas. As a young woman, she toured with a minstrel troupe and did occasional radio shows until the stock market crash

of 1929. Unable to find work performing, McDaniel took a job as a restroom attendant at a night club in Milwaukee. Her singing voice eventually earned her a spot on stage. In 1931, she moved to Los Angeles and again found work on the radio. Her screen debut came in 1932 in the film *The Golden West* and her first major role was alongside Will Rodgers in *Judge Priest* (1934). McDaniel became the first African American to win an Academy Award in 1940 for her role as Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

**Coleman Hawkins**, Coleman Hawkins (1904-1969) grew up playing music, from piano lessons starting at age five, to playing at school dances by the age of 12. He finished high school in Topeka, Kansas and studied harmony and composition at Washburn University for two years. His first regular job was with the orchestra at the Twelfth Street Theater in Kansas City. There he was “discovered” by Mamie Smith and began touring the US and later, Europe. Hawkins was an influential tenor saxophonist. His uninhibited improvisational style changed the face of jazz and brought the tenor saxophone to the forefront. Hawkins' 1939 version of "Body and Soul" is considered a true American masterpiece.

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