

Remember: Some of America's Greatest Christians Were African Americans

In our hypersecularized culture, Americans have been conditioned to ignore the role of faith in society. That even happens in February when we celebrate the contributions of African Americans. We focus on champions of civil rights, but we rarely talk about the Black believers in Christ whose spiritual passion made our country what it is today.

Here are a few of the great African American Christians from the past who deserve special honor:

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– **Lott Carey (1780-1828)**: Born a slave in Virginia, Carey joined a mixed-race Baptist church in Richmond that had been swept up in the revivalist fervor of the Second Great Awakening. He learned to read the Bible and was able to save enough money to buy his freedom. He eventually joined a movement of free Blacks who desired to return to Africa and live without racism. Carey became the first Black foreign missionary sent from America. He planted a church in Liberia and eventually became its governor.

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– **John Stewart (1786-1823)**: Born to free Black parents in Virginia, Stewart experienced a powerful conversion after a battle with alcoholism. He launched the first Methodist mission to the Indians of the United States, focusing his efforts on the Wyandotte tribe of northern Ohio. His message to his hearers was: "Flee the wrath to come." His singing and preaching resulted in the conversions of several tribal chiefs

before he died at age 37.

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– **Jerena Lee (1783-1864)**: After her conversion, this outspoken daughter of slaves felt God calling her to preach. Some African Methodist Episcopal clergy told her women could not speak for God. Her reply: “If the man may preach, because the Savior died for him, why not the woman, seeing He died for her also?” Lee was eventually authorized to preach by Richard Allen, the founder of the AME church. She traveled thousands of miles on foot to spread the gospel and was the first Black woman in this country to publish an autobiography.

– **Sojourner Truth (1797-1883)**: Belle Baumfree was born a slave. After she married and had five children, she escaped from slavery and later fought a court battle to win her oldest son’s freedom. She became one of the first Black women in our nation’s history to win a court case against a white man.

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