

in the trenches of France than to be born a baby in the United States.”

Baker’s autobiography, *Fighting for Life* (1939), furnishes essential information about her professional and intellectual development. She never married but had a close, presumably romantic, relationship with Australian writer Ida Alexa Ross Wylie later in life. At the age of 71, she died of cancer, in New York City, and was buried at the Rural Cemetery of Poughkeepsie.

SIGNIFICANCE

By 1923, when Baker officially retired, the United States Department of Labor included a Children’s Bureau, and there were similar agencies throughout the nation and in some countries overseas. Deaths of infants in New York City had decreased to approximately 65 from over 100 in 1,000 successful births, a lower rate than in any large American or European city to that date. Her “baby health stations” had ministered to half the infants in New York City. Baker set an example as a woman pioneering in public service.

—*The H. W. Wilson Company*

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James Baldwin

American writer

James Baldwin is widely considered one of the very best writers of the 20th century, both in the United States and abroad, to have dealt so evocatively and honestly with homosexuality, in such iconic books as Giovanni’s Room and Go Tell It on the Mountain. Baldwin himself, as a Black man who was also gay, suffered doubly from discrimination,

and he spent much of his adult life in Europe, feeling that it was a less racially and sexually prejudiced area than was the United States during that era.

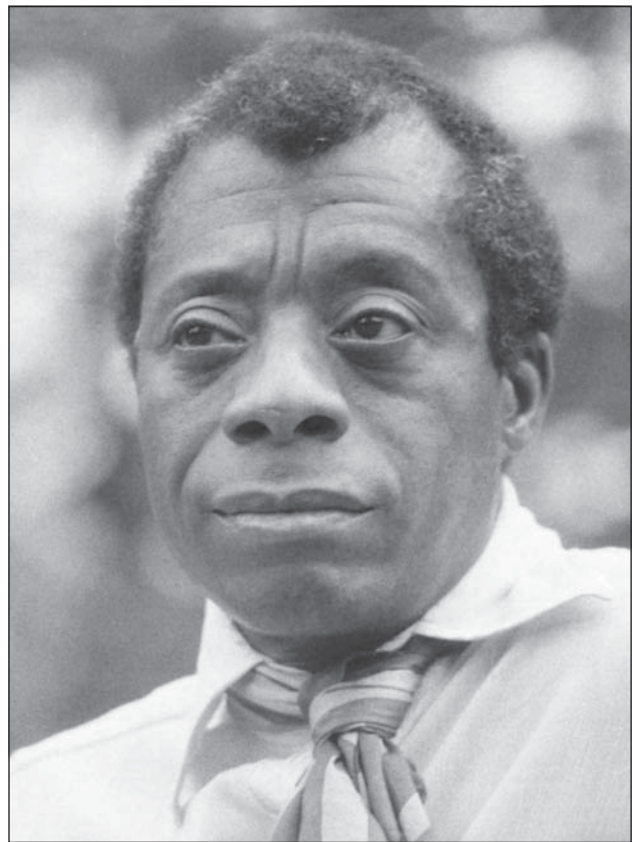
Born: August 2, 1924; New York, New York

Died: December 1, 1987; Saint-Paul, France

Areas of achievement: Literature; poetry; drama

EARLY LIFE

James Arthur Baldwin, born in the predominately Black New York City neighborhood of Harlem, on August 2, 1924, once dismissed his childhood as “the usual bleak fantasy.” Nevertheless, the major concerns of his fiction consistently reflect the social context of his family life during the Depression. The dominant figure of Baldwin’s childhood was clearly that of his stepfather, David Baldwin, who worked as



James Baldwin, 1969. Photo by Allan Warren, via Wikimedia Commons.

a manual laborer and preached in a storefront church. Clearly the model for Gabriel Grimes in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, David Baldwin had moved from New Orleans to New York City, where he married Baldwin's mother, Emma Berdis. The oldest of what was to be a group of nine children in the household, James assumed a great deal of the responsibility for the care of his half-brothers and half-sisters. Insulated somewhat from the brutality of Harlem street life by his domestic duties, Baldwin, as he describes in *The Fire Next Time*, sought refuge in the church. Undergoing a conversion experience, similar to that of John in *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, at age 14 in 1938, Baldwin preached as a youth minister for the next several years. At the same time, he began to read, immersing himself in works such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and the novels of Charles Dickens. Both at his Harlem junior high school, where the African American poet Countée Cullen was one of his teachers, and at his

predominantly white Bronx high school, Baldwin contributed to student literary publications. The combination of family tension, economic hardship, and religious vocation provides the focus of much of Baldwin's greatest writing, most notably *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, *The Fire Next Time*, and *Just Above My Head*.

If Baldwin's experience during the 1930s provided his material, his life from 1942 to 1948 shaped his characteristic approach to that material. After he graduated from high school in 1942, Baldwin worked for a year as a manual laborer in New Jersey, an experience that increased both his understanding of his stepfather and his insight into American economic and racial systems.

LIFE'S WORK

Moving to Greenwich Village in 1943, Baldwin worked during the day and wrote at night for the next five years; his first national reviews and essays appeared in 1946. The major event of the Village years, however, was Baldwin's meeting with Richard Wright in the winter of 1944–1945. Wright's interest helped Baldwin secure first a Eugene F. Saxton Memorial Award and then a Rosenwald Fellowship, enabling him to move to Paris in 1948.

After his arrival in France, Baldwin experienced more of the poverty that had shaped his childhood. Simultaneously, he developed a larger perspective on the psychocultural context conditioning his experience, feeling at once a greater sense of freedom and a larger sense of the global structure of racism, particularly as reflected in the French treatment of North Africans. In addition, he formed many of the personal and literary friendships that

THE FIRE NEXT TIME

First published in book form in 1963, *The Fire Next Time* comprises two essays that had previously appeared in *The New Yorker* and *The Progressive* under the titles "Letter from a Region of My Mind" and "My Dungeon Shook." The short book details James Baldwin's early life in Harlem, focusing on his religious experiences and his eventual disillusionment and departure from the Christian church, and his tentative search for a spiritual force to replace the lost religion of his youth. That exploration led him to Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam, which was advocating black nationalism and separatism. Muhammad saw the meeting as an opportunity to court Baldwin, already an established writer and spokesman on racial issues in the United States. Baldwin, however, after hearing Muhammad speak, rejected the Black Muslim message, asserting that the glorification of any race and the concurrent debasement of other races were a recipe for murder. *The Fire Next Time*, written in the tone of a sermon, concludes with the hope that the races will come together in America and help the nation achieve its ambitious destiny. Baldwin's final words, taken from a Negro spiritual, prophesy the punishment that God will inflict upon the nation if Americans do not end racism and inequality: "God gave Noah the rainbow sign,/ No more water, the fire next time!"

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Leonard Bernstein

American composer and conductor

One of the most important musicians of the latter half of the 20th century, Leonard Bernstein enjoyed unparalleled success in and influence on the cultural life of the United States during his heyday.

Born: August 25, 1918; Lawrence, Massachusetts

Died: October 14, 1990; New York, New York

Areas of achievement: Music

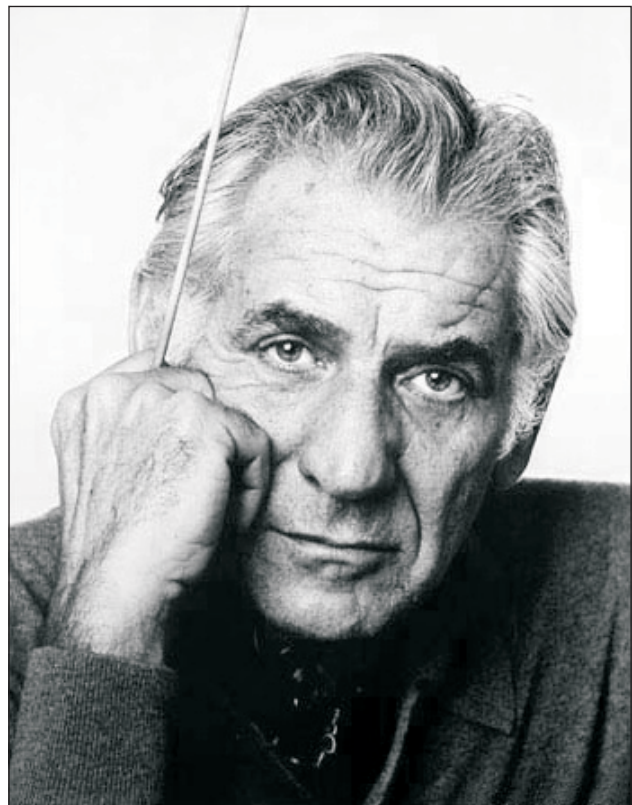
EARLY LIFE

Leonard Bernstein started playing piano as a child and studied music at Harvard and the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

LIFE'S WORK

In 1943, Bernstein became assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic. During the 1940s and 1950s, he worked as a composer, pianist, and conductor. His 1957 musical, *West Side Story*, was acclaimed as a classic. In 1959, he became musical director of the New York Philharmonic, a post he would hold through 1969.

During the '60s, Bernstein greatly influenced cultural life in the United States. In September, 1962, he inaugurated the country's premier performing arts center, New York's Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, and in November, 1963, he conducted the New York Philharmonic in a televised concert commemorating slain President John F. Kennedy. Capitalizing on the renown that came with national television exposure, by the mid-1960's Bernstein was the most popular classical musician in the United States, a media star. His name was mentioned in Hollywood films such as *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and popular magazines such as *Look* and *Time* published profiles of him and his family. He wrote several popular books: *The Joy of Music* (1963), *The Infinite Variety of Music* (1966), and *Leonard Bernstein's Young People's Concerts for Reading and Listening* (1961).



Leonard Bernstein in 1977. Photo by Jack Mitchell, via Wikimedia Commons.

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Derricia Castillo-Salazar

Belizean military officer, aircraft technician, LGBTQ+ and HIV/AIDS activist

Derricia (Jael) Castillo-Salazar is the cofounder of Our Circle, a voluntary organization devoted to the active inclusion of the LGBT+ community in Belize. For more than twenty years, Castillo-Salazar has worked towards the creation of a safe and equitable environment for those within the LGBTQ+ community and its needs and basic human rights.

Born: 1988; Punta Gorda, Belize

Areas of achievement: Military service; LGBTQ+ and HIV/AIDS activism

EARLY LIFE

Castillo-Salazar was born in 1988 in Punta Gorda, Belize, to Patricia Sebastian and Derrick Castillo Sr. She became interested in the issues surrounding human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) at around the age of fourteen; by 2000 Belize had the highest prevalence of HIV in Central America, but it was taboo to discuss it in her religious high school, sparking her longtime advocacy.

LIFE'S WORK

Castillo-Salazar served in the Belizean military as a captain of the Defense Force, with a specialization in helicopter maintenance, and she seized the opportunity to help create an official HIV response policy for the armed forces. (Statisticians had found that military personnel were at significant risk of transmitting the virus.)

She later expanded the scope of her advocacy and in 2013 cofounded Our Circle, a group that made a profound impact on hundreds of members of the Belizean LGBTQ+ community within the space of a few years. Castillo-Salazar had noted that the LGBTQ+ community was being unjustly portrayed as a shadowy, scandal-ridden group of people who engaged in heavy drinking and other reckless behaviors. Our Circle, she explained, was not merely an LGBTQ+ group, but rather a group of LGBTQ+ people who wanted to make a difference.

Castillo-Salazar and Our Circle held social events, planned trips, and focused on dismantling sexualized stereotypes. Eventually, they began exercising some political muscle, winning status as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) and enabling them to legitimately influence policymakers.

One of the causes most important to Castillo-Salazar was the right of LGBTQ+ people to have families; she described this as a mission to reclaim the term “family” as a whole, noting that Belizean laws defined parents as couples made up of a man and woman, and that the domestic violence act did not take the needs of the LGBTQ+ community into account.

Castillo-Salazar was a strong proponent of the Equal Opportunities Bill, which was ultimately abandoned due to the disapproval of churches and far-right religious groups, who falsely asserted that the bill discriminated against straight people.

In late 2021, Castillo-Salazar was accused of stabbing another woman at a San Pedro Pride event and forced to take a leave of absence from Our Circle.

SIGNIFICANCE

Through Derricia Castillo-Salazar’s work and advocacy, she has set Belize on a path towards acceptance and representation for the LGBTQ+ community.

—Wyatt Shakespeare

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Willa Cather**American novelist and journalist**

At a time when such careers were nearly unheard of for women, Willa Cather was a celebrated theater and music critic, crusading magazine editor, and accomplished novelist and poet in the tradition of American naturalism.

Born: December 7, 1873; Back Creek Valley, Virginia

Died: April 24, 1947; New York, New York

Areas of achievement: Literature; journalism

EARLY LIFE

The life of Willa Cather is filled with small surprises. Though she became identified in the minds of her readers with Nebraska, the setting for much of her fiction, she actually lived the first nine years of her life at Willowshade, her family’s home in rural western Virginia. Then too, although many biographies report the year of her birth as 1874 and her tombstone reads 1876, her actual year of birth was 1873. S. S. McClure, founder of *McClure’s* magazine, suggested the first alteration when he hired Cather as

one of his editors in 1906, while she herself chose 1876 on publication of *Youth and the Bright Medusa* in 1920. Though almost every picture ever taken of Cather shows a round-faced, kindly looking Midwestern farm woman in middy-blouse and tie, she actually lived half of her life in New York, first in Greenwich Village and later on Park Avenue. Her plain, almost masculine appearance served her well, both in the male world of journalism and later as adjunct to her distinctively American fiction. In later life, she would wear bright, sometimes almost garish colors and prints.

Cather liked to say that she had been named for both her grandfathers, William Cather and William Lee Boak, and for her mother’s brother Willie Sibert Boak, who fell fighting for the Confederacy. The family Bible, however, lists her name at birth as “Wilella,” the same name as that of her father’s deceased sister.



Willa Cather in 1936. Photo via Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain.]

SIGNIFICANCE

Kato is remembered as a founder of Uganda's LGBTQ+ rights movement. Although Uganda remains one of the most homophobic countries in the world, Kato's advocacy has had some successes. The gay rights movement he helped to initiate has flourished and is actively working to resist homophobia and secure rights for LGBTQ+ individuals in Uganda. Members of the LGBTQ+ community now speak more openly, unlike the secret environment of the 1990s that existed when Kato gave his first press conference. In 2012 *Call Me Kuchu*, a documentary film about Kato and his activism, was released to critical praise and went on to win several international awards. (*Kuchu*, which means "same," is a reclaimed derogatory term, like *queer*, that refers to LGBTQ+ people in Uganda.) Kato, who was murdered about a year into filming, never saw the film.

—Barb Lightner

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Billie Jean King**American tennis player**

Billie Jean King is one of the most highly respected female tennis players of all time. She holds 20 Wimbledon titles and used her success on the court to highlight women's and human rights.

Born: November 22, 1943; Long Beach, California

Areas of achievement: Sports; activism

EARLY LIFE

Billie Jean Moffitt was born on November 22, 1943, in Long Beach, California. She is the first child of Willard J. Moffitt and his wife and has a younger brother, Randy. As a child, she played softball, and at



Billie Jean King in 2011. Photo by Jonathan Exley, via Wikimedia Commons.



Billie Jean King being carried onto the court ahead of The Battle of the Sexes, 1973. Photo via Wikimedia Commons. [Public domain.]

her father's fire department picnics, the men often asked her to play on their teams. She soon realized that there was no future for her in that sport, so her parents suggested she take up tennis. She was enrolled in the city's tennis program at the age of 11, surprising her parents with her enthusiasm and her drive to excel.

She fell in love with the sport, using money earned at odd jobs to buy her racket, and spending hours hitting balls to improve her performance. She entered her first tournament at the age of 11, defeating a University of Southern California (USC) junior, though she was so inexperienced she did not even realize that a match consisted of winning two sets. She continued to work on her own performance until a friend introduced her to tennis great Alice Marble, who agreed to coach her for six months in 1958.

King's skills improved remarkably under Marble's coaching, and she garnered her first title in 1958, winning the Southern California championship for girls fifteen and under. Her performance was still erratic, and though King hated to lose, she knew that it was through losing that she would learn to win.

In 1960, King's national ranking jumped from 19th to fourth, and she captured the attention of Frank Brennan, who then became her coach. In 1961, she and Karen Hantze Susman became the youngest team ever to win the women's doubles title at Wimbledon. The following year at Wimbledon she won a sensational singles victory over Margaret Smith (later Margaret Court), the top-seeded women's tennis player, though she did not win the title. She repeated her doubles victory, however, again with Hantze Susman.